The Wall on the Savanna

By Carolyn Frances Krysiak

When the rains came, the tent shivered like a frightened animal. It had been stitched together from good intentions: soft words, late-night concessions, promises made to stop the crying. For years the family had lived under that tent on the wide, golden savanna, where the grass whispered of distant paws and the horizon held the slow, patient shapes of lions.



The children learned the tent's rules quickly. It was easy to lift a flap and slip out into the open. It was easy to push and pull at the seams until a hole appeared. They learned to be nimble and loud and quick, because the tent offered no real shelter—only the illusion of protection. When the wind came hard or a lion's shadow passed, they scattered, each trying to fend for themselves with the small, sharp tools of childhood: bargaining, tantrums, pleading, and the occasional daring escape.

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The Wall on the Savanna... cont.

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One evening, after a night when the tent had nearly collapsed under a storm, the parents sat with their palms pressed to the thin canvas and felt the tremor of fear run through it. They had been kind, and they had been afraid of being unkind. They had wanted to be loved, to be the safe harbor that never said no. But kindness without structure had left their children exposed.

So they planted themselves.



They chose a place on a low rise where the ground was firm. They dug trenches and set stones. They worked through the heat and the dust, hauling clay and mortar, arguing sometimes and laughing sometimes, until a wall rose—solid and straight and stubborn. It was not a fortress of iron;

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The Wall on the Savanna... cont.

it was a wall of earth and care, built to keep out the real dangers and to hold in the things that mattered: meals at the table, bedtime stories, the small rituals that stitch a life together.

When the children saw the wall, they did not understand. They had never known a boundary that would not bend. At first they treated it like a new game. They ran their hands along its top, looking for loose stones. They kicked at it to see if it would fall. They shouted at it, trying to make it answer. When that failed, they tried to climb it, then to dig beneath it, then to find the smallest seam where they could slip through.



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The Wall on the Savanna... cont.

The parents expected this. They had not built the wall to be admired; they had built it to be tested. So when the oldest child threw a rock and the youngest screamed because they were not allowed to stay up late, the parents did not crumble. They moved with the steadiness of people who had chosen a course and would not be swayed by every gust. They repaired the places that needed repair and held firm where firmness mattered.



The tests were loud and long. There were nights of banging and mornings of sulks. There were neighbors who said the parents were too strict, and relatives who whispered that the children would never forgive them. The parents felt the sting of those words, but they remembered the nights under the tent and the way the lions' eyes had glinted at the seams. They kept building rituals: a promise kept at breakfast, a consquence that matched the misstep, a hug that came after the consequence had been served. They explained the reasons simply and without apology.

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The Wall on the Savanna... cont.

Slowly, the children's energy shifted. The first time a storm rolled across the plain and the family sat together inside the wall, the youngest child pressed their forehead to the cool stone and felt the difference. The wind howled outside, but inside there was a steady warmth. The oldest child, who had once prided themselves on slipping through every opening, watched the lions pace beyond the wall and felt something unfamiliar: relief.

Trust does not arrive all at once. It arrives in small, repeated proofs. The children tested the wall because they had to know whether it would hold. Each time it did, their tests grew quieter. Each time the parents answered with the same calm, the children's fear of the world softened. They learned to ask for help instead of running. They learned that a firm no could be followed by a loving yes. They learned that safety was not the absence of rules but the presence of reliable protection.



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The Wall on the Savanna... cont.

Years later, when the tent was only a memory and the wall had vines climbing its face, the family would walk along the top of it together. The children, now taller and steadier, would point to the far grass where the lions still roamed and say, with the casual certainty of those who have been sheltered well, that the wall kept them safe. The parents would look at one another and feel the quiet pride of people who had chosen to be builders instead of appeasers.



Be prepared for their tests and weather it out. The first storms will be the hardest. The first nights of banging and pleading will make you doubt. But a wall that stands through the tests becomes a place where fear loosens its grip and calm grows roots. In that steadiness, children learn to rest, to trust, and to grow into people who can keep themselves safe—not because they were left to fend for themselves, but because they were given something immovable to come home to.

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Parent Boundary Support

Stay Calm. Hold the Boundary. Keep Connection.

When big feelings lead to aggressive behavior, your calm, steady presence helps your child feel safe, even while you hold the limit.



WHAT TO DO IN THE MOMENT

1 REGULATE YOURSELF FIRST

- Take a slow breath.
- Drop your shoulders.
- Lower your voice.
- Move slowly.
- You set the tone for safety.

2 STATE THE BOUNDARY CLEARLY

- Keep it short, simple, and calm.
- No debates or explanations.

Examples:

"I won't let you hit."

"My job is to keep us safe."

"You're upset. The answer is still no."

3 STAY CLOSE & IN THEIR SPACE SAFELY

- Stay within arm's reach.
- Angle your body sideways.
- Keep hands visible and relaxed.
- Say, "I'm right here. You're safe."
- Proximity = security.

4 CO-REGULATE WITH YOUR BODY

- Use a calm, steady voice.
- Match their intensity slightly, then slowly lower yours.
- Try gentle rhythm: rocking, swaying, or tapping your own leg.
- Your regulated body helps their body settle.

5 ALLOW EXPRESSION NOT HARM

- Big feelings are okay.
- Unsafe actions are not.

Redirect to:

- ✓ Pillows
- ✓ Stuffed animals
- ✓ Stomping feet
- ✓ Pushing against your hands (if safe & okay)

6 NAME WHAT'S HAPPENING

- Use brief, neutral language.
- Focus on what you see, not blame.

Examples:

"Your body is having a hard time with this no."

"You really wanted that. It's so frustrating."

"You're angry and your body is moving fast."

7 HOLD THE BOUNDARY STEADILY

- Stay consistent.
- Don't escalate.
- Be the shoreline—steady and unmoved.

Examples:

"I hear you. The answer is still no."

"You're safe. I'm staying with you."

"I won't change the rule, and I won't leave you alone with this feeling."

8 REPAIR & RECONNECT AFTER THE STORM

Once your child is calm:

- ✓ Offer closeness if they want it.
- ✓ Reflect the experience.
- ✓ Reinforce safety and connection.
- ✓ Plan for next time together.

Examples:

"That was really hard. I'm glad we got through it together."

"Your feelings were big, and I stayed with you."

"Next time you feel that angry, we'll practice using the pillow again."

X WHAT NOT TO DO (THESE ESCALATE)

- ✗ Long explanations
- ✗ Threats
- ✗ Yelling
- ✗ Physical restraint unless absolutely necessary for safety
- ✗ Walking away in anger
- ✗ Taking it personally
- ✗ Over-accommodating to avoid the meltdown

REMEMBER:

- Your calm is their cue.
- Feelings are allowed.
- Hitting, kicking, and hurting are not.
- Connection and boundaries can exist together.
- You don't have to be perfect. You just have to stay present and keep trying.

You are not alone. You are doing important work.

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Free educational resource accompanying *The Wall on the Savannah*