



Role of Boundaries in Healthy Relationships

Healthy relationships happen when we actively and consistently respect each other's rights and preferences. They are based on equality and mutual respect. They are based on healthy boundaries.

All relationships have boundaries and when they are respected, the need for continual reminders about those boundaries is rarely necessary. But when problems arise (including the behaviors that might result from our child's use of substances), it becomes necessary to make the boundaries clear. It becomes necessary to let the other person know that their behavior is disrespectful or harmful and that you don't want it to continue.

Some examples of behaviors from your child you might consider unacceptable are as follows:

Borrowing money that is not paid back

Expecting financial support while spending money on substances

Lying to cover up the truth about activities

Putting lives at risk by being under the influence and driving

My Boundaries Cannot Make You Do Anything:

As much as we want our child to stop the behaviors related to substance use, it's important to understand that the purpose of the boundaries is not to punish or manipulate them into changing.

The truth is that one person's boundary cannot make another person change. It may give them a good reason to choose to change, but they retain their own "power of choice". We may not like it if they choose not to change, but we would do well to accept that they have a right to choose for themselves.

Our power of choice includes our ability to let others know how their behaviors are impacting us and to offer them a chance to stop the damage to our relationship before it's too late- before things get to a point where we have to build a WALL instead of a boundary. We do this by taking responsibility for **calmly, clearly, and consistently communicating** our boundaries.

WALLS are for keeping people out. Hopefully with **effective, healthy** boundaries you won't find yourself needing walls to keep a loved one out of your life.

Reminder: Protecting your boundaries is not a way to punish or manipulate your child into complying with your wishes. It is not a sign of disrespect for your child's needs. It is a sign of respect for yourself and for the relationship.

Disable the Enabling:

If the communication in our relationship with our child has deteriorated to the point where we are frequently nagging, pleading, and arguing, we may want to choose a different method of communicating, especially since these methods have been shown to contribute to an environment that compounds the dysfunction. It's not easy to change communication styles, but it can be done. We can learn to communicate in a different way.

Positive communication, assertive communication, and boundaries are effective tools we can use to interact honestly and clearly. They are tools we can use instead of nagging, pleading, and arguing to let others in our lives know which behaviors are acceptable and which are not acceptable to us.

We can use these tools to show our child **clearly, calmly, and consistently** that the behavior is not acceptable. Then we LEAVE IT TO OUR CHILD to decide what, if anything, is to be done about it. In other words, by communicating our boundaries we meet our responsibility for "disabling the enabling" and allow our child to become fully responsible for the problem.

Hurt vs. Harm:

Enabling behaviors and problematic substance use have something in common. Both are "quick-fix, short-term solutions". They have the desired effect (minimizing pain or discomfort) but only in the short-term and they have negative long-term consequences. Yes, there is often some discomfort (hurt) involved in protecting boundaries that your child is ignoring. Whatever action you choose to take in order to protect your boundary (usually disengaging in some way) can be painful for your child. It may also be painful for you. However, the action you take to protect your boundaries, as uncomfortable as it feels in the moment, is minor compared to the lasting harm that not protecting your boundaries and your child's continued substance use can create. Like someone who struggles with substances, you have a choice: continue on the path of short-term gratification or take the more difficult, but more rewarding, path to long-term recovery.