



What are My Boundaries?

When we talk about expectations and limit setting, we need to first understand what is meant by “boundaries”. **Boundaries are guidelines we identify for ourselves about what we desire in the way of reasonable, safe and permissible ways for other people to behave around us.** For example, “Please ask permission to take anything from my room” or, “I expect you will use good judgment and not get into a car with someone who has been drinking” are boundaries. Boundaries also include the decisions we make about how we will respond when someone steps outside those limits we have identified.

Healthy boundaries are not brick walls; they are fences that mark out our personal space, rights and preferences with some degree of flexibility. **They are not about the other person; they are about yourself as a sign of respect for yourself and your desires. (e.g. “Please talk to me without raising your voice.”)**

Why are boundaries so important? When parents face challenging relationship issues, such as those that often accompany our child misusing substances, it’s common to give up or change our own values in order to keep the peace and hold onto the relationship. We often find ourselves lowering our bar when it comes to boundaries as the situation escalates. **Maintaining healthy boundaries is vital for parents to stay true to your own values and goals for the family.**

There are **four (4) ways parents typically handle themselves in terms of boundaries.** You may find that you move between all of these from situation to situation. The point of establishing healthy boundaries is so you can remain consistent and predictable with your child.

-Rigid boundaries occur when parents show no flexibility with respect to rules for their child. For example, a person with rigid boundaries would enforce a curfew regardless of a traffic jam that halted traffic or a flat tire that resulted in a child not getting home on time.

-A parent with **inconsistent boundaries** enforces rules sometimes, but not all the time so the child never knows exactly what to expect. Using the example of a curfew, sometimes a kid will be in trouble for being late whereas other times it will be overlooked.

-A parent with **no boundaries** sets very few rules, typically seeing their child as either not needing rules - or wanting to be friends - instead of parenting. It can also be to keep the peace, meaning that any time the parent tries to enforce a rule, there is an argument and/or aggression, so the parent gives up. In the case of a curfew, the child would be allowed to come and go as he or she pleases with no consequences.

-Healthy boundaries are understood by everyone in the household and are enforced - although there is room for flexibility (when appropriate). However, boundaries can also be non-negotiable (for example, using substances, cursing, taking money, and so forth).

Where do you see yourself in terms of the types of boundaries you either maintain or don't maintain with your child. Do you move between all four or fall mostly in one or two categories?

What do I need to do *to change* to create healthy boundaries?

The foundation for how you interact with your child (and the world) is based on what you value – what's important to you. You may have never put words to what you value and doing this will help you establish healthy boundaries with your child.



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