

Helping Children & Teens Understand and Build Boundaries

Boundaries are the rules and limits that help us navigate the world around us. They define personal space, responsibilities, and acceptable behavior. Teaching your child or teen about boundaries helps them build healthy relationships, self-discipline, and respect for themselves and others.



Why are boundaries so important?

As a parent or caregiver, supporting your child in establishing and respecting boundaries is essential for their overall well-being and personal growth. It can empower them to build strong relationships with confidence, self-respect, emotional well-being, and personal fulfillment.

First, setting boundaries is essential for personal safety. Children who understand the concept of physical and emotional boundaries are better prepared to protect themselves from potential harm and exploitation. They are also more likely to recognize and report situations that make them uncomfortable.

Encouraging your child to set boundaries helps them understand their own worth. When they assert their limits and see that their feelings and needs matter, they develop self-respect and self-esteem. This, in turn, builds a strong sense of self-worth that can protect them from negative influences and peer pressure.

Teaching boundaries also provides a foundation to build healthy interpersonal relationships. Children who understand the importance of boundaries are more likely to form relationships based on respect and mutual understanding.

Boundaries help your child or teen manage their emotions effectively. By expressing their feelings and needs, they learn to communicate their emotions in a healthy manner, reducing the risk of holding onto their feelings or reacting impulsively.

Finally, teaching your child to set boundaries empowers them to make healthy choices that align with their values. Boundaries give them a sense of control over their lives and promote independence and strong problem-solving skills.

How to teach your child about boundary-setting

Foster open communication. Create a safe, non-judgmental space for your child to express their feelings and concerns. Encourage sharing of their experiences and help them identify situations where boundaries should be set.

Teach consent. Start teaching the concept of consent early. Encourage your child or teen to ask for permission before touching someone or allowing others to touch them. This establishes a foundation for understanding personal boundaries.

Encourage “no.” Teach children that it’s okay to say “no” when they are uncomfortable or don’t want to do something. Reinforce that they have the right to decline without feeling guilty.

Use age-appropriate language. Speak with your child about boundaries in an age-appropriate way based on their developmental stage. Use simple language and examples they can relate to.

Respect their boundaries. When your child sets boundaries, respect them. It’s essential to show that their boundaries are valid, even if you don’t fully understand or agree with them.

Teaching children about boundaries is an ongoing process that requires patience and guidance. Spring Health offers personalized support that can help your family thrive.

[Activate your Spring Health account](#) to book a therapy session, explore self-guided exercises, or speak to a Family Care Navigator about how we can support you.



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Children with disabilities perspective

Children with disabilities may need additional practice or support, as they may have challenges with emotional regulation or verbal and non-verbal communication skills. While the approach may need to be tailored to your child’s specific needs and abilities, here are a few additional ways to build good boundary setting skills.

Be a boundary role model. Practice healthy boundaries in your own life. Your child or teen will learn by observing, so modeling appropriate boundaries in your relationships and interactions sets a powerful example.

Help with problem-solving. Help your child develop problem-solving skills to address boundary violations. Encourage them to assertively communicate their feelings and needs, and teach them on how to handle different situations. Role-play these situations to help the child practice setting and respecting boundaries.

Simplify and visualize. Use visual aids, social stories, videos or simplified language to explain the concept of boundaries. Visual cues can be especially helpful for children with cognitive or communication challenges.

Promote self-advocacy. Teach your child how to advocate for themselves. Help them develop simple phrases or communication methods to express their needs or discomfort when someone crosses their boundaries.

Ensure consistency. Be consistent in your approach to boundaries. Children with disabilities often benefit from routine and predictability, so maintaining a consistent environment helps them understand and apply boundaries more effectively.

Check in regularly. Continuously assess your child’s progress and adapt your approach as needed.