

Setting Boundaries with Your Teen

What to Know

Boundaries help you and your teen know what behaviours are acceptable – and which ones are not. Boundary setting is important for helping your teen gain independence, remain safe, and make good decisions. By setting and agreeing to boundaries together, you communicate your expectations and hopefully avoid conflict. Here are some issues to consider.

- set a tone of friendly cooperation throughout the conversation
- listen and respond to your teen’s concerns
- be very clear and precise to reduce the risk of miscommunication
- have clear boundaries in your own life to model appropriate boundaries to your teen
- negotiate points you disagree on, but stand firm when a boundary is non-negotiable
- discuss the consequences if boundaries are ignored or rules are broken
- if there is conflict, take a break and follow-up when things have cooled down
- explain that boundaries can change and become more restrictive
- be consistent and respectful
- maintain your teen’s privacy, because having their own identity and appropriate boundaries with space are important
- be proactive and establish technology rules in advance, such as limiting internet time, setting parental controls, or occasionally checking online posts

Testing boundaries is normal, and if this happens, you can:

- restate your previous agreements about rules and boundaries
- ask them to identify how their choices didn’t meet the agreed-upon rules
- express empathy and talk about your mistakes by saying, “I remember feeling that way,” or “I made a similar choice and _____ happened.”
- cooperatively choose consequences
- follow through with the consequence
- provide positive reinforcement when your teen adheres to boundaries

Teenagers push limits and test boundaries, and even though it’s frustrating for you, it allows them to develop their own values, beliefs, and sense of self. This worksheet will help you set boundaries with your teen.

What to Do

1. You answer the following questions.

What are the most important boundaries for your family?

Before you discuss boundaries with your teen, sit down with your partner and/or the authority figures in your teen's life to agree on limits, rules, and boundaries. It's important to give clear and firm boundaries instead of mixed messages. Who will you include in this conversation?

2. Set up time to speak with them (other adults) and answer the following questions.

What are the **most important** boundaries to set with your teen?

What boundaries are negotiable?

Which boundaries are completely non-negotiable?

What consequences are you comfortable with?

At what age do boundaries change?

3. Next, invite your teen to discuss boundaries.

Make sure you have plenty of time and that everyone involved is in a generally good mood. Ideally have the discussion with the whole family present. Who will be there? When will this discussion occur?

What can you say to younger siblings about why there are different boundaries for them and their older sibling?

Have the discussion and write down how it went.

Finally, ask your teen what boundaries they'd like you as a parent to stick to.

Instead of taking things away as punishment, offer incentives. Avoid power struggles and place the responsibility on your teen. Consider this situation:

Lauren wants to use the family car this weekend. Lauren's parents explain that she must fill it up with fuel and complete all homework and household chores before Saturday. She will then have the privilege of using the car. If she can't complete her responsibilities, she can talk to her parents in advance, but she's responsible for upholding her end of the deal to use the car this weekend.

Maybe your teen is motivated by spending time with friends, technology use, or increased freedom. All are opportunities for them to earn what they want in exchange for appropriate behaviour. What motivates your teen?

When rules are broken or limits are tested, natural consequences allow your teen to problemsolve and learn difficult but important lessons about responsibility. You can offer support, guidance, and empathy, but avoid taking on their problems or bailing them out. They will build resilience and feel capable. What can you do to allow for natural consequences?

Did this worksheet help you set boundaries with your teen? Why or why not?
