

10 Ways To Set Appropriate Boundaries With Teens

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Further recommended reading:

Book: [Boundaries With Teens: When to Say Yes, How to Say No](#) by Dr. John Townsend

Article: [Boundaries: The Key to Freedom](#) by Dr. John Townsend from *Focus on The Family*

Article: [Making Rules Teens Will Follow](#) from Center For Parent & Teen Communication

Raising a teenager can be a challenging and exciting time for parents. Adolescence comprises a significant period of growth and identity development unlike any other. Teenagers are known to push limits and boundaries, which can be frustrating at times, but serves the essential function of developing their own values, beliefs, and sense of self. But how do you know when they have gone too far? Here we will explore 10 things to consider when setting appropriate boundaries with your teen.

1. Maintain Empathy for Your Teen

Remember how it was for you to be a teenager. If you were like most teens, it was a very difficult time. In fact, teens today are even more stressed than adults according to the American Psychological Association's 2013 Stress In America Survey. When it is difficult to understand why your teen is acting like the world is coming to an end because they didn't get the 'right shoes' or the 'best grade,' just remember how it was when you were their age. Express your empathy and be open about your struggles and mistakes. Make statements like, "I remember feeling that way," or "I made similar choices and I remember how that was." Teens just want to know that someone understands.

2. Allow for Natural Consequences

Avoid power struggles. Allow your teen to face the natural consequences of their choices. Natural consequences are just that; the natural result of a

choice. For example, your teen gets into a fender bender and the natural consequences are that insurance goes up, there is a cost for the repairs, and steps need to be taken to get the repairs done. Though it may be tough, allowing your teen the opportunity to figure out how to resolve these issues, with support, gives them the chance to learn a difficult but important lesson about responsibility. It is important to offer guidance and empathy but to avoid taking on their problems or bailing them out. You want your teen to know that they are capable of problem solving and to develop a sense of cause and effect relationships. Be there for them and be supportive, but allow them to learn that they are resilient and capable.

3. Be Firm and Consistent

Know that pushing the boundaries is normal. You have to provide security and safety and model that you can set firm limits and boundaries. Your ability to be consistent earns you respect. You must learn how to have clear boundaries in your own life in order to model appropriate boundaries to your teen. Identify your goals for your teen and identify your own personal relationship boundaries in order to be very clear on what is okay and what is not okay. 'Wishy-washy' parenting is more reinforcing for teens to keep trying to push you over. It is better to have a temporarily disappointed teen than a teen that does not respect you.

4. Keep the Bigger Picture in Mind

Teens know how to test you and how to push the limits. Keep in mind the life lessons you want your teen to learn. For example, you may want them to learn how to resolve conflict, how to think ahead, and how to collaborate with others. Remind yourself of the bigger picture when you find that you are getting caught in their roller coaster ride of emotions. It is easy to get stuck in a power struggle, but if you can step back and remember your larger goal it is much easier to avoid silly conflicts. Try to remind them each time of the bigger picture; that hard things happen in life, and it may not feel good at the moment, but everything passes with time, and it is more important to learn something than to have everything 'your way'.

5. Know Where You End and Where Your Teen Begins

Have your own sense of self. Your teen's emotions are not your emotions as much as you love them. You must allow your teen to have their own identity, feelings, experiences, and to have your own separate identity, feelings, and experiences. Do not take it personally when your teen wants to have independence or questions your authority. They are doing what they are supposed to do. Just because they want to spend more and more time with their friends, and they cringe at the idea of having a family day does not mean they don't love you. Work on coping skills to lower your own reactivity. Remember to respond rather than to react.

6. Give Respect to Get Respect

In order for teens to give respect they must see respect in your interactions with others and must feel that they are respected. Though they may seem dramatic, silly, or make poor choices at times, teens are doing their very best to figure out relationships, self-identity, and to become an adult. Use those empathy skills we discussed earlier to remember how important friends, personal style, and breakups are to your teen. Try your best not to laugh, belittle, or dismiss how important these things are to them. If your teen does not feel that you respect them, they will model your behavior right back and it likely will not be pretty. However, if they feel that they are being respected even when you disagree, they are also likely to model the same level of respect in their interactions with you.

7. Remember Your Role

Yes, your teens may be smart, independent, and ready to fly the coop, but they still need you. Your role may have changed slightly, but you are still their parent. If they could already provide for themselves they would. You are still responsible for keeping them safe, meeting their basic needs, and helping to guide and shape the kind of adult they are to become. They need to know you love them unconditionally and that you are on their team no matter what. Even when they are kicking and screaming, teens still want your approval and support so try to always let them know that you support and love them even when you are disappointed or frustrated.

8. Use Privileges To Your Advantage

We all work for something. As adults, we go to work rain or shine for the payoff of money amongst other things. Teens are similar. Instead of taking things away, give them incentives and teach them that you don't always get everything you want handed to you. Try to avoid power struggles and place the responsibility on your teen. They are in charge of their success. For example, "John, if you want to use the family car, no problem. The deal is that you fill it up with gas, clean it once a week, and complete your homework/chores, then you get the privilege of driving the car. If you are struggling with these responsibilities, come talk to us in advance, but you know your end of the deal so it's up to you." Put it on them and remember to deliver on your end. No changing the rules last minute or you will lose their trust. Whatever motivates your teen make it a privilege. Sports, time with friends, technology, increased freedom, these all equal opportunities for them to earn what they want in exchange for appropriate behavior.

9. Don't Take Everything Personally

Remember who the child is. You may be dealing with a sophisticated manipulator, but do not give them the power to control your own emotions and reactions. If you are getting too frustrated, walk away. Journal. Relax. Take a break. This models good emotional regulation and earns you respect. Remember, teens are supposed to challenge the system so that they know the limits. So expect to be challenged. Sometimes you may have to work on yourself if your teen is confronting you on your issues, but don't lose your head and don't sink to their level.

10. Maintain Your Teen's Privacy

Teens need their own space. They need privacy too. Going through their journal or personal belongings is not usually a good idea unless there are imminent safety issues or concerns. Having their own identity and appropriate boundaries with space are very important for your teen to learn. Think about it this way, 'If I were him or her would I want my mom going through my journal entries?' With the increased use of social media, it is hard to find the balance between safety and respecting your teen's privacy. You can always be proactive and establish rules in advance, such as limiting internet time, setting parental controls, and checking your teen's online posts periodically, but just keep in mind that if they are going to break the rules, they can always find a way. It is better to

have a teen that feels safe enough to tell you when they have messed up versus a teen that is so afraid to mess up that they keep potential safety issues a secret.

Raising a teen can be very challenging, but very exciting at the same time. Living with a teen can cause any parent to confront his or her own behaviors and personal boundaries at times. It is important to allow yourself the freedom to make mistakes and to learn along with your teen as you work towards developing a collaborative relationship and raising a healthy, successful adult. Just remember that the healthier you are, the healthier your teen will be.