

Raising kids who are self disciplined, responsible and resilient is no easy task. One way we do this is by setting limits that clearly guide our kids towards acceptable behavior while still allowing them room to grow and make mistakes.

Boundaries are the names given to the outside limits - like a bottom line clearly spelling out behaviors that are acceptable versus those that are not. They are non-negotiable as they should be put in place for a good reason and remain in force throughout the life of the family. They are like the skin of the human body holding things together in a way that lends structure and support. The consequences for ignoring a boundary should be definite, clear and relevant.

Examples of boundaries might be: *In this house we treat everyone with respect and kindness, or The safety of everyone in this family is a first priority.*

From those boundaries come a variety of house rules that often change as your kids do and can sometimes be negotiated. For example from the safety boundary above you might have a rule that kids do not bike on the rode without an adult. Your child might then negotiate a ride on the rode with their 16 year old cousin. On the other hand, should your five year old decide to sneak off for a ride alone he would be reminded of the Safety boundary and perhaps have his bike taken away for a period of time as a consequence.

People need boundaries the same way they need skin. It holds them together and gives them a sense of completeness. Children need a certain amount of structure to feel safe, important and cared for.

So why are so many families unsure of what their boundaries actually are? Often this is because they (the parents) haven't actually chosen their boundaries. They've simply adopted the ones they were raised with - or gone the opposite direction and refused to have any. It's worth it to give this some thought. Have a discussion in your home (with or without the kids) about what kinds of things are truly important to your family and establish your bottom lines.

Setting family boundaries

- Keep them simple, positive and minimal
- Be specific about what they mean and how they might look
- Use consequences that are relevant, educational and enforceable
- Follow through consistently when boundaries are tested
- Be aware of (and communicate) the bottom line
- Communicate your expectations clearly and be prepared to back them up

Important note: Most children won't thank you for boundaries or the rules that come as a result. They will test them, whine about them and try to eliminate them. But they will grow and thrive and one day let you know how much they appreciated your caring. With boundaries everything just seems to take shape.