

# Setting Healthy Boundaries Within Your Family

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Healthy boundaries are essential to living together harmoniously as a family. Good boundaries are like fences defining the edges of what is acceptable and unacceptable. Being sensitive to everyone's boundaries is essential for smooth sailing.

How do you know when you've crossed a boundary? If you are paying attention to the other person's reaction, they'll often let you know. For example, children being tickled may be laughing but then it becomes too much for them and they say "stop". They've gone from feeling comfortable to uncomfortable. When you stop tickling, you honor their boundary.

## Noticing Personal Boundaries

Before you can honor someone's boundaries, you must notice them. Megan realized her son Alex was sensitive to various scents when he started complaining about smells. The smell of the laundry detergent bothered Alex so they switched to unscented laundry detergent and dryer sheets. Megan stopped wearing perfume or using hair spray - all way too smelly! She also changed to using unscented candles.

While the rest of the family was fine with these scents, Alex's boundary for acceptable smells was much narrower. All these little adjustments helped Alex stay in his comfortable zone.

Different people have different boundaries and tolerances for stretching those boundaries. One mom realized their family's schedule felt too crazy when the kids had more than one extracurricular activity at a time. They decided to limit their kids to one activity at a time.

In the spring their son wanted to join both baseball and the school play which overlapped by a couple weeks. They carefully considered the impact this would have and decided that although it crossed the boundary it would be doable. Other families may have decided it would have stretched them too thin.

## Recognizing a Boundary Breach

How does it feel when your boundaries are crossed? Depending on the situation, you may experience feelings like:

- Anger – if you believe someone has intentionally crossed a boundary
- Resentment – if you've tried to say no but reluctantly agreed
- Overwhelm – if you're taking on too much
- Regret – if you wish you would have defended your boundary but instead you caved in

How do you respond once you realize a boundary has been crossed? You might ...

- Ignore that the boundary has been crossed
- Respond reflexively by doing something like yelling in anger
- Respectfully address the boundary issue



**Personal Boundaries**

The last option is the best for fixing the boundary breach while also maintaining loving relationships.

## **Respectfully Responding To Boundary Breaches**

Noticing when a boundary is being stretched gives you the best chance to respond in a calm, respectful way. By speaking up immediately, you take responsibility for your own needs. You'll have a better chance to respond respectfully before the boundary is broken and you've reached the "I can't take it anymore" point.

When you set a boundary, you are declaring a limit. Others may respect your boundary or they may test it. Kids test boundaries by begging, whining or simply doing what they know they are not supposed to do. When that happens how do you respond?

Before acting, you may want to put a hand on your heart and take a few deep breaths. This breath break will help you center yourself. Feeling more grounded will allow you to act from your higher self.

Now you are ready to re-establish your boundary. It might sound like this:

**Situation:** Your child is jumping on the couch even though you've told them not to.

**Establishing boundary:** You lift your child off the couch and put them on the floor. You tell them they can jump as much as they want on the floor.

**Situation:** Your family has been invited over for dinner at your aunt's house. Although you appreciate the offer, your week has been crazy so you politely decline the invitation. Your aunt pleads with you to come arguing that you have to eat dinner anyway so you might as well come over.

**Establishing boundary:** You repeat your boundary saying something like "I appreciate the invitation and it's not going to work for us this weekend."

**Situation:** Your child wants to go over to a friend's house. After asking a few questions you realize the friend's parents are not home and so you tell your child no. Your child begs you to change your mind adding that other kids are going and their parents are letting them.

**Establishing boundary:** You stick with your answer saying "Regardless, I am not comfortable with you going."

**Situation:** You are waiting in line to get into an event at your kids' school. Someone cuts in front of you.

**Establishing boundary:** You say to that person, "Pardon me. We've been waiting for a while in this line and the back of the line is actually over there."

Maintaining your boundaries means having your own back. You respectfully stand up for yourself. By standing up for yourself, you teach people what you will and will not tolerate.

Plan on stating your boundary many times using similar words. Other people will often push back and express their disappointment. Take another deep breath and restate your position.

Setting and maintaining boundaries is a skill your kids will use for the rest of their lives. When you model maintaining healthy boundaries, your kids learn how to do this.

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[parenting presentations](#) and [parent coaching](#). Parents learn to effectively handle misbehavior while building loving relationships.

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