

Boundary Setting Guidelines for Parents

In his book *Making Children Mind Without Losing Yours*, Dr. Kevin Leman writes: “The permissive parent essentially says, ‘Oh, do your own thing. Whatever you want is OK.’ My years of counselling parents and children have shown me that in a permissive environment, kids rebel. They rebel because they feel anger and hatred toward their parents for a lack of guidelines and limit setting.” So true. A very important way to show your children love is to have clear, defined limitations for them. Your kids want guidelines for their lives that are reliably enforced. You are the one who creates a safe environment for them. Setting boundaries is an important piece of parenting. It doesn’t mean they won’t push your boundaries, they will. It is a part of their learning process and they may even be upset when you uphold certain boundaries, but they will also feel safe and secure at the same time. Here are 10 ways to establish clear boundaries for your children.

“When you fail to back up your words with action your words will cease to mean anything.”

1. Be trustworthy

Your child/ren need to know that they can count on you. When you fail to back up your words with action your words will cease to mean anything. Your discipline and boundary setting will become hollow.

2. Less is more

Follow the guideline of a special education teacher we know. “Five rules respected 100% of the time are better than 20 rules with haphazard compliance.”

3. Be precise

Miscommunication is not the way to establish a positive environment. Effective communication is necessary. Ask them to repeat back to you what they heard you say to verify it’s understood. It pays to make sure everyone is on the same page.

4. Involve the kids in boundary setting

Have a family meeting. Family communication gets everyone involved in setting the boundaries. When children share ownership of the rules, they're more invested.

5. Draw up a contract

Once the "Family Ten-Commandments" have been established, write up a document that everyone will sign.

6. Post the rules

Post copies of the contract in the kitchen and in each bedroom. Remember, these are not restrictions so much as rules to live by.

7. Recognize appropriate behaviour

Teachers refer to this as, "Catch them when things are going well." Too many of us come down on violations like a ton of bricks and never pay attention to what's going well. If it's attention they're after, they'll get it one way or the other.

8. Avoid labelling children as "good" and "bad"

Children—and adults—behave in ways that are acceptable and in ways that are unacceptable. Labelling a child as "bad" will do little to improve behaviour and a lot to create a negative self-image.

9. NEVER undermine the other parent

"Good-cop, bad-cop" is not a useful game at home. "Don't tell your mom!" suggests you and your wife are divided. Parents must have each other's backs. It's another way to be consistent.

10. Employ "natural consequences" when possible

When raising teenagers, natural consequences just make more sense. For younger children, this helps associate negative outcomes with specific behaviour.

If a room is not cleaned as instructed, missing a fun activity while cleaning the room is less a punishment and more of a consequence.



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Inappropriate talk? Instead of a spanking try having the child look up ten appropriate words in the dictionary and copy them all down, including definitions, etymology (origin of the word), etc.

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Skills Necessary for Disciplining Children

It's tough to be a man and not enjoy watching Liam Neeson's character on the phone in the movie *Taken*. As his daughter is being taken captive, he utters one of the most famous lines in recent cinema history: "What I do have are a very particular set of skills, skills I have acquired over a very long career." Neeson's character responds in such an intense moment with calm determination and clarity of thought. He has complete confidence in his abilities and methods to achieve his desired outcome. While it lacks realism, it certainly is how we'd all like to react in a crisis.

Unruly children can feel like chaos, causing our stress levels to rise and many times boil over. I'll be the first to admit that I have lost my cool and pulled out the few remaining follicles I have left on many occasions. However, I have had the best results when I respond well by exercising the necessary skills for disciplining children. I have found the following to be the 4 most essential components.

1. Vision

"Disciplining our kids is an opportunity to do some gardening on the soil of their hearts and minds."

It's important to remember that it's not disciplining for the sake of disciplining. There has to be an end goal in mind. It is about nurturing and sharpening the development of our kids so they can grow in maturity and wisdom. Disciplining our kids is an opportunity to do some gardening on the soil of their hearts and minds. Create with your kids and their mother a vision of their future person. Ask them what type of person do they want to be. It will give them an idea of what they are working towards and will get them to buy in.

2. Clear Communication

There are two areas in which you need clear communication skills. First, you need to set easily understandable boundaries. It should be black and white. They need to know exactly where the line is and what will happen if they cross it. The consequences need to be outlined and well-defined. Second, explain and reiterate the things they need to learn and why it is important for them in life. They should come away from being disciplined with a bigger picture of the benefits of making better decisions and the dangers of repeating the same mistakes.

3. Measure

This is the most difficult part of disciplining. It will take a lot of thought and discussion with their mother. Any punishment or act of discipline should match or come close to matching the level of the infraction. They should feel a certain level of pain (not necessarily physical). The measure used will be at it's most effective when both parents are in agreement. Talk it out and plan together as best you can. There should also be a balance of justice with grace and forgiveness. If the beginning of the process involves breaking down, the end should involve a restoration and comforting. Your love for them should come through clearly.

4. Consistent Follow Through

Most CEOs have been fired, not because they didn't have a plan, but because they didn't execute it. They hired friends and then did not hold them accountable when they failed. When boundaries and consequences are set and when the vision is clear and agreed upon, the only thing left to do is follow through. Hold them to the standards. It takes work, but without it, the vision will slowly fade away.

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Creative Consequences

Disciplining our children well takes wisdom, consistency, and empathy. It also helps to have a ready sense of humour, a whole lot of love, and a good supply of patience. Then, on top of all that, there are times you need to mix in a little creativity—creative consequences.

“Disciplining our children well takes wisdom, consistency, and empathy.”

So look over these creative and sometimes unusual discipline ideas. A few might seem a little out there, but let them inspire you to come up with alternatives of your own.

Here are creative consequences ideas:

These creative consequences were created by author Lisa Whelchel. As you're considering your discipline approach, choose the right consequence for your child depending on their age.

1. If time-outs don't work, try a “time-in.” This can be accomplished by sending your child to a designated spot where he must complete a task that has a definite beginning and end. This could be putting together a small puzzle, stringing 50 beads on a piece of yarn, or tracing the alphabet. A time-in diverts his energies and encourages him to focus on something positive.
2. **Timers set definite boundaries.** For example, with a timer, you can say, “I'm setting the timer. I want your room cleaned (or your shoes on, or the dishes unloaded) in 15 minutes. If you haven't finished by then, your correction is...” This method not only spurs on easily distracted children, but it also leaves little room for arguing about a job that isn't finished and whether the correction is warranted.
3. **Make a homemade “Correction” can** and fill it with tickets or slips of paper with various consequences written on them. Instead of giving your child a time-out, send her to the can for a slip. A few ideas might include no TV or computer for a night, early bedtime, or an extra chore. Toss in a blank piece of paper, a “mercy” ticket. This gives you an opportunity to talk about how God gives us mercy even when we deserve punishment. (These ideas from our Clutter Jail printable and Little Clutter Jail printable can work for a “Correction” can too.)
4. **If you repeatedly open the door to your child's room** only to catch him in an act of disobedience, take your child's bedroom door off the hinges. It sounds harder to do than it actually is. And it works wonders!

5. **Adjust bedtimes** according to your children's behaviour that day. For each infraction, they must go to bed five minutes earlier, but if they've been good, they can earn the right to stay up an extra five minutes.
6. **An especially tough but effective correction for teenagers** who forget to wear their seat belts is to add an additional day past their sixteenth birthday before they can take their driver's test. Hey, it's important! (Use this Teen Driving Contract to help your children understand your expectations.)
7. **If you have dawdlers, try this:** Whoever is last to the table at dinnertime becomes the server. But there's a catch. Even if you're first, your hands must be clean, or you'll end up serving the food, pouring the drinks, and fetching the condiments (after washing your hands, of course!).
8. **If your children are constantly turning in sloppy schoolwork**, get a few photocopied pages of printing or cursive exercises. (These can be found at any teachers supply store.) Then ask your haphazard child this: "What takes longer: a report done neatly in 15 minutes or one you've sped through in 10 that must be redone and warrants a page of handwriting practice?"
9. **You've heard the reprimand "Hold your tongue!"** Make your child do it—literally. Have her stick out her tongue and hold it between two fingers. This is an especially effective correction for public outbursts.
10. **Noses on Knees.** If things got too raucous or there was too much fussing between siblings, she would cry, "Noses on knees!" Her children then had to immediately touch their noses to their knees until she determined that they had learned their lesson.
11. **Next time your child "forgets" to put something away**, like video games or sports equipment, put it away for him. When he asks where it is, tell him that he'll just have to look for it. Believe me, he will learn that it's a lot more trouble to find something that Mom has hidden than it is to put it away in the first place.
12. **If you have younger children who are messy, try this:** Put their toys in a "rainy day" box to bring out later. This has the added benefit of making an old toy seem new again. Or set the toy somewhere out of reach but within sight for a predetermined number of days. This increases the impact of the correction by keeping the forbidden toy fresh in their minds. Or put it in jail—your child has to do a chore to get it out. See our Little Clutter Jail printable.
13. **Inappropriate noises or volume.** Make them sit down and listen to the Barney theme song cassette or other for 10 minutes. For adolescent boys, it's torture!
14. **If your little one gets too hyper**, come up with a code word to remind him to stop the action without embarrassing him. Whenever Tucker started getting too rowdy in a group, I would yell, "Hey, Batman." He knew that he needed to calm down before I had to take more drastic measures.
15. **Does your child slam the door when she's angry?** You might tell her, "It's obvious that you don't know how to close a door properly. To learn, you will open and close this door, calmly and completely, 100 times."
16. **If your child likes to stomp off to his room or stomp around in anger**, send him outside to the driveway and tell him to stomp his feet for one minute. He'll be ready to quit after about 15 seconds, but make him stomp even harder.

17. **The same goes for throwing fits.** Tell your child to go to her room to continue her fit. She isn't allowed to come out and she has to keep crying for 10 minutes. Ten minutes is an awfully long time, and it's no fun if your parents tell you to cry.
18. **Another way to handle temper tantrums is to simply say,** "That is too disruptive for this house. You may continue your fit in the backyard. When you're finished, you are welcome to come back inside." When there isn't an audience, the thrill of throwing a temper tantrum is gone.
19. **If a job is not done diligently,** have your child *practice* doing it. She'll learn to be more thorough if she's made to sweep the floor three or four times because her first effort wasn't good enough.
20. **When one of my children is acting disrespectful, disobedient, or defiant,** I will instruct him or her to choose a chore from the Job jar. The jobs include scrubbing the toilet, organizing the pots and pans, moving and vacuuming underneath the furniture, weeding the garden, matching up odd socks, defrosting the refrigerator, and cleaning the closet, garage, or under the bed. And those are just a few possibilities. You could add ironing, vacuuming the refrigerator coils, scrubbing the inside of small wastebaskets, polishing the silver, cleaning the window wells, brushing the animals, cleaning the fireplace, shaking the kitchen rugs, vacuuming the couch, alphabetizing the spices, and using wood cleaner on the dining room chairs. Not only does the Job jar help to get my house clean, but it also keeps my little ones from complaining that they're bored. They know that with the Job jar, Mom will always have an antidote for boredom.
21. **I have a friend whose son's morning chore** was to get the pooper-scooper and clean up the doggie gifts littering the backyard. The boy was not doing this job with much diligence, so his father came up with this creative solution: After the boy had completed the task, he would be required to run through the yard barefoot! From then on, their lawn was perfectly clean.

Taken from Creative Correction by Lisa Whelchel.

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Bad Child Behaviour Issues that you need to break early

I hate going to the dentist. I know it's necessary, but I always put it off. It is the last thing I want to spend money on. After several years of avoiding it, I was forced to make an appointment because of intense tooth pain. The result was exactly what I expected. Small cavities had grown into larger decay which eventually led to infection. Ultimately, smaller and cheaper cavity fixes turned into an expensive double root canal with two crowns. Routine checkups and maintenance would have prevented all of it.

In the same way, kids can develop bad habits early. Engaging those habits with consistent correction and guidance can be tiring. It can take thought and energy that can wear parents out. However, if left unchecked, they can grow into major problems down the line. It is important to engage the problem now in order to save them and us from more intense pain in the future. Here are some bad kids behavioural issues that you need to break early.

1. Lying

This leads to a life of secrecy. Growth and maturity come when we deal honestly with our mistakes and shortcomings. We learn responsibility by owning it. Others see us as dependable, faithful, and authentic. Trust is built leading to healthy relationships. Lying has the opposite effect. Distrust and immaturity take root. On a personal level, in our house, my kids know that this offense receives the steepest consequence because it, more than anything, causes relational separation in the family.

2. Disrespectful to Authority

We are all people under authority in some way or another. Parents, teachers, government officials, elders, bosses, and police officers are some of the authorities in our lives. An attitude of disrespecting authority creates a dangerous habit in a child. It will lead to an attitude of entitlement and a lack of proper humility. They will end up suffering for it as their options are limited. Children need to learn a respectful disposition to those in authority over them. This doesn't mean they can't disagree with that authority or challenge it, particularly when the authority abuses its power. However, it is important to teach children to always submit to or challenge authority with grace and respect.

3. Unkind Words

Words are important. Clearly the words we choose affect those they are directed towards. Unkind words cause deep wounds in people; however, they can also lead our general attitude or our feelings about someone. I once made a decision to go an entire year saying only positive things about someone I had a hard time getting along with. After the year, I felt completely different about that person. There may be time to disagree, argue, or even fight, but there is never a reason to be unkind. The earlier our kids develop a vocabulary of kind words the better.

4. Aggressive Behaviour

Intervene as soon as possible to prevent other children or animals from being hurt. There are many reasons for a child exhibiting aggressive behaviour. It is important to find out the reason by observing and listening. Many times, it is a coping mechanism in dealing with stress or feelings of insecurity. If the behaviour is allowed or reinforced, it will continue. It is best to stop it immediately when it happens, remain calm, listen to the child, and enforce consistent nonphysical consequences.

5. Laziness

“Children need to be taught to take responsibility for themselves early.”

Children need to be taught to take responsibility for themselves early. Otherwise they can come to expect that their parents will do everything for them. Instilling a good work ethic starts by giving them chores to do around the house at a young age. Start by teaching them to make their bed and clean up their toys daily. When they develop a habit of taking care of their things, add a chore pertaining to a common area, encourage and reward their efforts. This will teach them to value and strive for good working ethics. Starting as early as possible will make all the difference.

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