

Parent Guides by Project uP!



Curated for you to have even
better days with your children!

DISCLAIMER:

This parent guide has been curated for a parent to understand the basics of Boundaries, and a few points that could help them setting these.

The prevalence of the suggestions made might differ from case-to-case. Please consider a child psychologist before taking any concrete actions.

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Imagine the following situations:

A stranger randomly pulls your hand towards them to see the time on your watch.

A person asks a bereaved relative to talk about the incident even when they seem distraught.

A friend keeps taking your laptop without asking, even if you may have to use it.

Something's going wrong here, but how do you put it in words?

Read on to know!

This Parent Guide covers the following:

- What are boundaries?
- Importance of boundaries and consent
- Types of boundaries
- How to set boundaries with children
- How to respect children's boundaries
- How to know if you're breaking a boundary
- Resources.
- Frequently Asked Questions.

What are Boundaries?

You may be experiencing a complex set of feelings in the scenarios mentioned above, and may find it difficult to put your finger on what is going wrong, or maybe even the right words to use while addressing it even as an adult. The problem in these examples is violation of personal boundaries.

A boundary is an imaginary line that separates 'me' from 'you'. It separates your physical space, your feelings, needs, and responsibilities from others.

They serve as guidelines, rules or limits that a person creates to identify reasonable, safe and permissible ways for other people to behave towards them and how they will respond when someone passes those limits. Boundaries can be asserted verbally, through physical and behavioural reactions, or in extreme cases, even legal repercussions.

Is it rude to set boundaries?

When done correctly, creating a boundary between you and another person and even reinforcing it through words and actions does not imply meaning to offend them. In fact, it helps express your emotional needs which helps both you and the other person gain some control over how the relationship progresses in the future. Not violating a boundary creates a sense of mutual respect and facilitates easy communication, which can only improve relationships in the long run.

Importance of Boundaries

1

Boundaries create safety

Boundaries provide physical and emotional safety by keeping out what feels uncomfortable or hurtful.

2

Boundaries are a form of self-care

Boundaries allow you to let go of worrying about how others feel and place accountability on that individual. They also keep you from overextending yourself and saying “no” to things that don’t align with your priorities.

3

Boundaries create realistic expectations

All relationships function best when we know what’s expected. When you clearly communicate your boundaries, people know how they’re expected to behave. When expectations aren’t communicated and met, resentment and anger grow.

4

Boundaries allow you to be your true self

Boundaries provide you a sense of ownership over your own feelings and decisions, providing the ground rules for your expectations without you having to compromise on them for others.



While stressing the importance of setting boundaries, we also realise how easy it is to misunderstand the concept.

Boundaries are far from concrete brick walls which are easily identifiable. They vary from person to person based on their lived experiences, beliefs, cultures and the situation. Often they are not explicitly mentioned in relationships. They may also get broken and redefined with time. One way to navigate your way through this is by taking **consent**.

Consent is when one person agrees or gives permission to another person to do something. It means agreeing to an action based on your knowledge of what that action involves; its possible consequences and having the option of saying no.

The consent is most likely given verbally, however, it is also important to look out for any signs of discomfort or any non verbal communication.

Types of Boundaries

Apart from self-maintenance, self-care involves preserving one's resources and promoting behaviours that maintain wellbeing. When looking at self-care from the lens of a family system, with specific identity and roles of every member, it becomes imperative for boundaries to be clearly defined and exerted appropriately.

Physical boundaries

These involve being respectful of one's physical space and their physical needs.

for example: respecting the distance people like to keep with others when they speak, or the privacy guaranteed to them and their physical needs, or their need to rest to maintain their well-being).

Emotional boundaries

Emotional boundaries involve an understanding of one's emotional needs, trigger points, level of emotional understanding and how much emotional energy they can provide at a moment.

for example: respecting people's decisions of saying no or when they ask for space for their mental well-being.

Intellectual boundaries

Our interests and opinions come from our backgrounds, life experiences and values we hold central in our lives.

Respecting one's intellectual boundaries does not mean aligning your thoughts in accordance with theirs, rather, it means building a safe space wherein you both can engage in a mutually respectful dialogue without inhibitions, coercion to change, or even humiliation or outright rejecting one's thoughts.

for example: respecting a person's ideological/religious beliefs if they're different from yours and not belittling them, not forcing someone to indulge in an activity that's against their morals/beliefs.

Sexual boundaries

These include drawing boundaries pertaining to one's privacy and sexual preferences or desires. Asking for one's consent before initiating or indulging in any kind of sexual behaviour communicates respect for their wishes and personhood.

for example: discussing what someone might or might not be okay with before getting sexually involved with them, so that you don't cross their boundaries.

Time boundaries

This involves being able to complete one's family, work and other obligations within a particular time and setting time for pursuing one's own priorities and interests. Like any other type of boundary, this needs to be mutually agreed upon and implemented in order to maintain one's efficiency and optimal functioning.

for example: respecting an employee's time and not making them post their working hours, or not forcing a friend to attend a party that's taking place at their bedtime.

Material boundaries

Certain possessions have a utilitarian purpose or mean something to us. Accordingly, we decide who gets to share the item and also regulate how many times, or to what extent they can use it. Having such limits only prevents resentment over time.

for example: respecting a person's decision of not lending something, or giving something that has been lent to you back within the time mentioned by the lender.

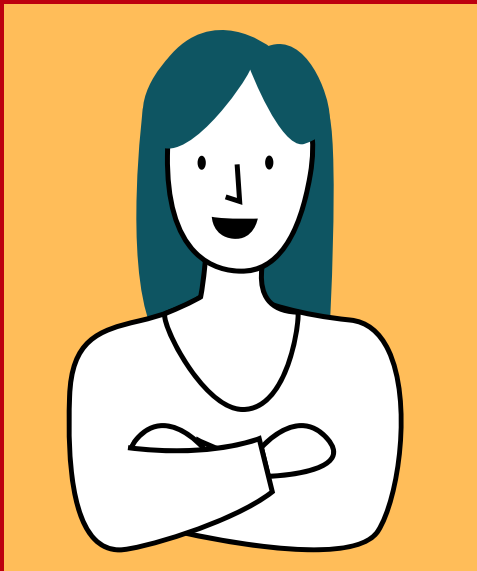
As an example, let us assume a family having four members:



Sanjay
The Father



Sunaina
The Mother



Sanya
The Daughter



Sameer
The Son

Following are 5 very simple examples of HEALTHY boundaries within this family:

When Sameer comes back from work, his family **does not disturb** him for the first 15 minutes as they require the time to unwind from the hectic day.

Sameer has been repeatedly teasing his sister, Sanya, about her choice of friends and partner and she **assertively** tells him that she will not divulge this aspect of her life to him anymore as she **doesn't appreciate** his remarks.

Sunaina can only be involved in household chores for two hours everyday and hence Sanjay, Sanya and Sameer **have divided** a few tasks between them so that the entire burden **doesn't fall** on Sunaina's shoulders.

Sunaina and Sanjay do not disclose any intimate details of their relationship to other members of the family. Whenever they initiate any intimate activity, they ensure the other partner is comfortable and verbally/non verbally gives consent.

Sanjay, Sunaina, Sameer and Sanya differ with respect to their political ideologies. However, during elections, Sanjay and Sunaina allow their kids to vote by their free will. During family discussions, they can agree to disagree, listen to opinions contradictory to their own and yet maintain a non-aggressive/judgemental approach to the person(s) having the opinion.



How to set boundaries with children...

Children may at times, not be aware that they are violating a boundary. They are typically curious and exploratory in terms of their behaviour. They may also react intensely when boundaries are drawn. As parents, it is important to draw boundaries for your personal wellbeing and also to keep the relationship with your children mutually respectful and beneficial.

Establish Effective Communication

When asserting boundaries, it is imperative to remain kind but firm, allowing for kids to express any needs or opinions they may want to communicate with you.

Be Consistent

Children usually model after their parents. They follow as their parents do, and less as they say. If you find yourself constantly overstepping your child's boundaries, or giving mixed signals when asserting your boundaries, note that the child might question the futility of these boundaries or fail to respect yours.

Have Family Rules

In order to avoid potential strife and resentment, it is a good preventive measure to keep family rules which are mutually agreed upon, clear, brief and consistently followed by every member. It might help to define some non-negotiables such as, not exceeding monthly personal expenses by a certain level and defining consequences of doing so, which can be a reduction in the recreational time for the child.

Have Patience

Like any learnt behaviour it is only natural for children to make a few mistakes here and there. It is unrealistic to expect that they will understand the rules, realise its gravity and implement it every time with just one experience. It might help to give gentle reminders in such cases.

Signs that you might be crossing a boundary...

Your child changes the topic, this could mean they are not comfortable talking about a specific topic.

Your kid might try to indirectly complain about an action you took or something you said.

If your kid hesitates making direct eye contact.

Your child's body language changes while you bring something up, their posture might become more rigid.

Crossing boundaries could make your child feel uncomfortable!

Let us understand how to react when your child draws some boundaries:

Assume that your child wants to keep their bedroom door closed while they are working.

They may say something like: Mom/Dad, I will be closing my room's door while I am working inside. My work requires a bit of privacy to focus effectively. I understand if you may want to call me out for something in the meantime or may generally want to supervise to see that I get my work done. You can call me or knock in that case and I will respond to you.

As parents, you can respond by assuming the best intention behind these words and putting across any reasonable opinions you may have, such as not locking the door when the child's friends of the opposite gender are present.

In such dialogues both parties are willing to negotiate and reach a constructive solution that ensures mutual respect and empathy.

Answering some common questions for you!

How are boundaries different from 'ghosting' or abandonment ?

When a boundary is asserted non aggressively, there is little chance that such misconceptions arise. However, some of us may not be able to process our emotions that come with our boundaries being violated and may react emotionally.

In such a situation, taking some time off and approaching the situation again might be a solution.

In ghosting or abandonment, there is usually no satisfactory explanation given for one's actions, which makes the other person confused and they may end up criticising themselves or the other person harshly. The relationship may sour eventually.

What are some non verbal cues to understanding that boundaries have been drawn/violated?

Many times, we are not equipped with the correct words or actions to draw a boundary. However, boundary violation can be distressing even to somebody who doesn't understand the literal concept.

They may announce their displeasure with a curt 'No!', taking time off from the situation, turning away from you or by facial expressions that may indicate negative emotions.

How to deal with the guilt that unconsciously comes with drawing a boundary?

The person drawing the boundary may feel a bit guilty about doing so. However, the concept has been in place in some form or the other in our social setup, to the extent that we have unconscious cues or even legal repercussions for violation in some cases like trespassing.

In order to draw a boundary and maintain the relationship while doing so, it is important to phrase our words mindfully.

Are boundaries set differently for different people or differently over different times? (a malleable concept)

Culture, age, gender, time and experience are some of the many variables that influence boundaries.

While this may seem complicated at first, being open to change only indicates mutual respect and improves relationships.

How to not feel anxious in case your child draws boundaries?

Boundaries, when initially applied to a family setup, especially in a society like India may cause anxiety within us and may be misinterpreted as distancing out or even termination of relationship.

For this, it is important to view a relationship with your child as a bond between two individuals with their own sense of agency over their body, time, resources and emotions. Boundaries do not indicate an emotional rupture in the relationship.

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