Teaching Healthy Boundaries to Foster Children

By: Children First FFA

<https://childrenfirstffa.com/foster-parenting-teaching-healthy-boundaries-shasta-county/>

Foster children often come from environments that did not have healthy boundaries and relationships. Because of this, they may struggle to apply proper boundaries in their interactions with others. Boundaries are lines that establish what one person will accept of another person’s actions and words. They are designed to keep out toxic behaviors, such as abuse, manipulation, harassment, and cruelty, and to encourage the kind of treatment that will be accepted. As a foster parent, you will need to help them recognize and respect these boundaries with other people and to define and enforce boundaries in how others relate to them.

Define Healthy Boundaries for Them to Respect

Boundaries exist in four different areas: physical, material, mental, and emotional. For instance:

Physical: Other people have personal spaces and will have limits on who can touch them, how they can be touched, where they can be touched, and when they can be touched. They may feel like their space is invaded when they’re hugged by someone they don’t know or when someone stands too close to them.

Material: Other people may not feel comfortable loaning or sharing their belongings. In such cases, it is also not appropriate to ask.

Mental: Other people may not share the same thoughts, values, opinions, and beliefs and attempts to coerce them into having the same ones may result in arguments or bullying behavior.

Emotional: Other people have emotions and your child needs to be aware of how their actions affect other people. Your child is responsible for his/her own emotions and choices. Control and manipulation are never okay.

Boundaries need to be age-appropriate. For instance, a toddler will need to be given boundaries on the type of behavior that is acceptable. He is not allowed to throw toys at people or throw food on the floor or run onto the road. A teenager, on the other hand, will need to be taught boundaries with cell phone usage, social interactions and events (i.e. they need to be home by a certain time), and time and resources (i.e. they will need to learn how to balance school, work, and their social lives).

When it comes to boundaries, children need to learn that “good fences make good neighbors”. The earlier foster parents can start to teach boundaries, the better—because a child that has not learned proper boundaries will grow up to be an adult that has trouble respecting, communicating, and interacting well with other people and may end up not having very many friends since people will prefer not to be around them. This is ultimately very damaging to him/her.

Teach Them When To Say No

Boundaries go both ways. Just as your child will need to respect other people’s boundaries, so they will need to communicate their own. Teach the child to identify when they are feeling like a boundary is being crossed. For instance, do they feel upset or uncomfortable when they are asked to do certain things by adults? It may indicate that they are being asked to do something inappropriate. Teach them that there are times when they need to say no for their own safety, health, or well-being.

Help Them Identify Too Many Boundaries

Many times, we think of boundary issues being related to not having enough boundaries, but it is also possible to have too many. For instance, a child that’s been abused may have very high boundaries, which ultimately end up shutting people out of his/her life and prevent healthy, life-giving friendships. If you see this pattern, you will need to encourage them in the direction of discerning trustworthy people and allowing these people into their lives.

In the words of Dr. Deborah Langebacher, a wise child psychiatrist, “Boundaries make a child feel safe.” As a foster parent, you are in the unique position of helping a child identify and enforce boundaries that may not have been adequately defined before. Most often, when they grow older, they will respect and value your gentle guidance in these areas.

Author: Children First FFA

Between Families Newsletter

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**PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONNAIRE AND RETURN TO YOUR ASSIGNED WORKER FOR ½ CREDIT.**

**Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

1. Boundaries are \_\_\_\_\_ that that establish what one person will accept of another person’s actions and words.
2. Boundaries are designed to keep out toxic behaviors such as:
   1. Abuse
   2. Manipulation
   3. Harassment
   4. Cruelty
   5. All of the above
3. What 4 areas do boundaries exist?
   1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
   2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
   3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
   4. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Boundaries need to be?
   1. Enforceable
   2. Unrealistic
   3. Make sense
   4. Age-appropriate
5. Choose the proper definition with the proper boundary:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Physical | a. Other people may not share the same thoughts, values, opinions, and beliefs and attempts to coerce them into having the same ones may result in arguments or bullying behavior. |
| 1. Mental | b. Other people have personal spaces and will have limits on who can touch them, how they can be touched, where they can be touched, and when they can be touched. They may feel like their space is invaded when they’re hugged by someone they don’t know or when someone stands too close to them. |
| 1. Material | c. Other people have emotions and your child needs to be aware of how their actions affect other people. Your child is responsible for his/her own emotions and choices. Control and manipulation are never okay. |
| 1. Emotional | d. Other people may not feel comfortable loaning or sharing their belongings. In such cases, it is also not appropriate to ask. |

6. (true/false) Toddlers and teenagers boundaries may look different.

7. A child that is not taught good boundaries may have issues such as:

a. Respecting

b. communicating

c. interacting

d. all of the above

8. Boundaries go

A. In one direction

B. In both directions

9. (true/false) It is not possible to have too many boundaries

10. In the words of Dr. Deborah Langebacher, a wise child psychiatrist, “Boundaries make a child feel \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

Answers are in Red

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