*What Every Parent Needs to Know*

*About Setting Boundaries For Teenagers*

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Some topics are good to know about, others are essential.  Establishing and maintaining clear and appropriate boundaries for and with our teenagers fits in the latter category. Whether the issue is communication, discipline, safety, conflict, or developing independence, boundaries is part of the answer.  With this in mind I thought it would be good to dedicate a post to outlining the basic what and why of boundaries for teenagers.

**Why Teens Need Boundaries**

Adolescence is a time of establishing independence and finding new limits.  As teenagers leave childhood limitations behind and reach towards adulthood they need help to moderate the rate of change.

Boundaries are the means by which parents control the rate of change; helping teens find a reasonable and balanced approach to growing up.  Allowing teens to take on more a little bit at a time rather than allowing them to take on everything and getting overwhelmed in the process.

Teenagers need clear structures and guidelines (although they will never admit to it).  Teens have enough change to deal with in their lives, having parents clearly define the playing field provides a vital degree of certainty and stability.

**Why Parents Need to Set Boundaries**

Setting good boundaries is one of the best ways to reduce conflict, improve communication, and build trust in your relationship with your teenager.

Having clearly stated and agreed boundaries means everyone understands the lay of the land and what the expectations are.  Instead of debating and arguing every time your teen asks for something, the boundary acts as an objective reference point that helps determine the outcome. This means you as the parent aren’t seen as the mean vindictive killjoy.

Similarly the practice of setting and adjusting boundaries forces you as a parent to regularly acknowledge the fact your baby is growing up and needs the parental controls loosened little by little so they can mature.

**What Are Good Boundaries?**

A good boundary is one that is clear and reasonable.

A clear boundary is one that can be easily identified and articulated.  A simple way to set most boundaries is to consider the following formula:

* Clearly state the specific boundary
* Clearly sate what is NOT permitted
* Clearly state any exceptions
* Clearly state the consequences of not honoring the boundary

A helpful way to confirm the clarity of the boundary is to get your teen to state what they understand the boundary to be in their own words and at the same time as they commit to honoring it.

Boundaries and limits must be clarified upfront.  They need to be clearly stated and agreed to well before they are in danger of being tested.  Trying to set boundaries once they have become an issue is doomed to failure.

Reasonable boundaries are those that acknowledge and respect your teenager’s age, circumstances, and capacity to be responsible.  It is reasonable that a 10 year old has different boundaries to a 13 year old. Similarly a 16 year old could rightly expect to have different boundaries to 13 year old.

The other factor that determines reasonableness is demonstrated capacity to be responsible and trustworthy.  Teens mature at different rates and are affected in different ways by those around them.  For these reasons determining when your teen is ready to have their boundaries expanded is very much a case-by-case assessment.

With this in mind some important points to consider are:

* Be mindful of you teenager’s age and changing circumstances.
* Everyone is different. Try to find the balance between a horses-for-courses approach and maintaining consistency and fairness.
* Be willing to change your limits as teenagers demonstrate increased levels of responsibility and trustworthiness.
* Giving extra responsibility is an important means of enabling young people to mature and develop independence.

**Important Boundaries For Teenagers**

There is no hard and fast list of boundaries and every family is different. However there are some issues that are pretty common amongst households with teenagers.

Some of the more important issues include:

* Contribution to the household life – chores, mealtimes etc.
* What nights can be spent out of the house and the associated times to be home by
* Use of phones, computers, and internet
* The consumption (or not) of alcohol, tobacco, other drugs
* Where and when boyfriends/girlfriends can be in the house (i.e. bedrooms, sleeping over etc.)
* Motor vehicle usage and passengers
* Number of after school activities per week

**Consequences**

Boundaries are meaningless unless there are consequences for violating them.

When rules are broken, there needs to be some consequence. These consequences need to be in proportion and relevant to the type and degree of the transgression.  If the response or discipline is over the top this will foster resentment and rebellion. If the response is insignificant the boundary will become meaningless and be ignored.

This is why agreeing to the consequences when setting the boundary is helpful.  Make consequences that fit the rules that were broken, for example if they come home late, they have to come home earlier next time.  Think of restricting the boundary a little then expanding it once your teen has demonstrated they deserve another chance. This is preferable to an all or nothing approach.

When responding to your teen violating a boundary some helpful things to consider are:

* Listen to what your teenager has to say before making any judgments
* Don’t respond out of anger or a desire to punish, take a few deep breathes and calm down before passing sentence
* Only make consequences that you can follow through with or they won’t work
* What might work for one young person might not work for another
* Set consequences that can be enacted quickly and provide your teenager a chance to try again, e.g. “You came home very late after we agreed on a time, so tomorrow I will pick you up”

**Other Helpful Tips**

Here are some other suggestions and practices that have proven to improve outcomes for parents and teenagers:

* Be proactive.  When your teenager has demonstrated consistently their trustworthiness and reliability expand their boundaries a bit without them having to ask.  This is a powerful statement of support and affirmation for a young person to receive.
* Negotiate boundaries when setting them.  Let your teen make their case and allow them to hear your reasoning.  When your teen makes a reasonable point acknowledge it by making the relevant concessions.
* Be generous and accommodating, especially when it comes to special occasions.
* Be willing to listen when your teen suggests that a particular boundary should be changed. Use trial periods as a way of testing the waters.
* Have realistic expectations. No one is perfect, and your teenager will be no exception. Don’t get too disappointed if and when they stuff up.



So there you have it, the basics of boundaries and teenagers.  It is one thing to know about it, but what matters most is putting what you know into practice.

- See more at: http://understandingteenagers.com.au/blog/what-every-parent-needs-to-know-about-setting-boundaries-for-teenagers/#sthash.mXtm4fCP.dpuf