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Know! to Build Better Boundaries

Healthy Boundaries

Some examples of healthy boundaries include:

- Telling a friend that you are not comfortable drinking or using substances and asking that they support this decision and never offer you drugs or alcohol.
- Asking a romantic partner to respect your time with friends by not calling or texting repeatedly when you are with friends and informing them that you will not respond if they do so.
- Requesting that a sibling honor your need for alone time by not entering your room when the door is shut.
- Communicating to your romantic partner that you are comfortable with kissing but are not ready to have sex.

What are boundaries?

Boundaries are how we define what we are comfortable with in our relationships and how we would like to be treated. Boundaries often look different for everyone and may change depending on the situation. Establishing boundaries requires us to recognize and clearly communicate our feelings and limits. Learning to create healthy boundaries and respect the boundaries of others is essential to maintaining successful relationships – both platonic and romantic [\(1,2,3\)](#).

Why do boundaries matter?

For young people, setting healthy boundaries is vital to forming respectful and supportive relationships. Boundaries allow teens to express their self-worth and their values. As teens navigate friendships and dating relationships, they may have trouble setting boundaries, which can put them at risk for bullying and abuse. Establishing healthy boundaries, however, is protective for teens' mental health and helps to keep them safe from unhealthy relationships (1).

Healthy vs. Unhealthy Boundaries

It can be hard to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy boundaries. Healthy boundaries are thoughtful, values-based, and built out of respect for yourself. Unhealthy boundaries are demanding, go against your values, and do not respect yourself or others.

How can caring adults help young people set healthy boundaries?

Help them to name their feelings

To set healthy boundaries, we need to recognize how certain situations make us feel. Encourage your teen to recognize and label their feelings, whether they are angry, frustrated, or sad. By acknowledging feelings of discomfort, young people can begin to learn which situations require boundaries and what kind of boundaries would make them feel safer (1).

Identify unacceptable behaviors

Sometimes teens will accept unhealthy behaviors in others, even when it puts them at risk. Start a conversation about the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships. Ask your teen what they think about certain behaviors in a relationship and guide them to understand why certain actions are unacceptable. Emphasize that it is never okay for someone to violate their boundaries and remind them that they always deserve kindness and respect (1,2,5).

Make a plan together

Establishing boundaries is difficult. It takes serious thought to determine your boundaries and communicate them. Work with your teen to plan for what they should do when someone isn't respecting their feelings. Come up with a few phrases to say in difficult situations like "Please stop. That makes me uncomfortable," or "Let me think about that and get back to you." Planning for what to say in difficult situations prepares them to communicate assertively and advocate for themselves in a way that works for them (1,2,5).

Let them practice at home

It takes practice to start setting boundaries. When young people start setting boundaries, it's helpful to have a safe environment where they know they will be respected. Show your teen that you are a safe person to set boundaries with by supporting them in saying "no" to things like visiting with extended family when they have a big test coming up or communicating their preference for a high five rather than a hug. Respect the healthy boundaries that they create and encourage them to continue to voice their values (1).

Model respect

Modeling respect for yourself and others' boundaries is an excellent way to teach young people about healthy boundaries. It's important that young people learn to respect others' boundaries just as they would like people to respect their own. Examine the relationships in your life – do you establish boundaries with people who don't treat you well and listen when your child tells you what is and isn't okay with them? If not, be a good example for young people and start setting your own boundaries and taking others' boundaries to heart (1,2,5).

Unhealthy Boundaries

Some examples of unhealthy boundaries include:

- Agreeing to participate in dangerous activities because your friends are doing so, even when it makes you uncomfortable.
- Demanding that your romantic partner is always available for you, even if they are spending time alone or with friends.
- Constantly invading your sibling's personal space or going through their belongings without permission.
- Ignoring consent and pressuring your romantic partner into emotional or physical intimacy (1,4).

Resources

How to set relationship boundaries | love is respect
Characteristics of Healthy & Unhealthy Relationships | Youth.gov
How to Set Healthy Boundaries and Foster Good Relationships
([verywellhealth.com](https://www.verywellhealth.com))
Teen Consent and Boundary Skills | Kidpower International

[Numbered sources are hyperlinked at the start of this document](#)

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