

## ***The Role of Caring Adults in Establishing Boundaries***

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Unless someone “crosses the line,” many people don’t often consider having or establishing specific boundaries. When someone gets too close to us and we get uncomfortable, we simply step away or leave. Typically, we learn how to deflect questions that are “too personal” by changing the subject. We don’t usually consider these types of situations to be a violation of personal boundaries, but they can be.

“Boundaries” are the limits that define one person as separate from another or from others. A boundary promotes and preserves personal integrity. Boundaries give each person a clear sense of self and how to function in relation to one another. They are unique to each individual and are based on perceptions, personal histories, values, goals, and concerns.

Boundaries empower people to determine how others treat them, and they exist in the context of a particular relationship. For example, appropriate boundaries between a husband and wife are not appropriate boundaries between friends or acquaintances.

For the most part, we may not be consciously aware of the personal boundaries in our lives. We don’t think much about how they got established. We just instinctively *know* when someone crosses them.

Personal boundaries are often established during our early years and are necessary to our development as healthy, well-functioning human beings. Our individual boundaries are formed largely in reaction to the amount and type of attention we get from our parents and from other influential adults in our lives.

For example, do you remember a time when you were enthusiastic or excited about a personal accomplishment and the important adults in your life didn’t seem interested? Or, do you recall an incident when you were participating in a school or church activity and nobody came to watch you or support you? Maybe you had the exact opposite experience. Perhaps your parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles were there for every ball game, class play, and picnic in which you were a participant. Each person has a unique history of this type of interaction with their parents and other caring adults. The actions of the influential adults in your life helped form your personal boundaries.

However, caring adults can sometimes say or do things that leave children with a distorted view of the boundaries in their relationships. By reflecting on the impact that hasty words, harsh reactions, or broken promises had on each of us as a child, we can be better aware of the lasting effect of these actions. Caring adults who are committed to empowering their children to establish healthy, appropriate boundaries listen carefully to children. They don’t merely talk “to” children and young people; they have a meaningful two-way conversation “with” them. By really listening to children and young people, they learn to serve as role models for appropriate boundaries that give children an opportunity to safely grow into healthy, well-functioning adults.

Setting boundaries and using discipline helps children to maintain a safe life. Discipline is an important part of raising a child and allows them to prepare for failures in their later life that are inevitable. Rules, regulations, and boundaries allow for the physical and emotional

safety of the child. Affirming them as a child truly loved by God allows them to accept that others, too, are loved and special. Praising children when they maintain a boundary is crucial, as is offering consequences when boundaries are violated or broken. In teaching them responsibility, you teach them the important value of respect for you, others, and God.

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