



Parent Worksheet 2

Boundaries

This worksheet is one of a series aimed at supporting caregivers to parent their teenagers. The 4 worksheets include: 1) Youth Development, 2) Boundaries, 3) Positive Family Relationships and; 4) Communication.

Being a part of a teenager's development can be a real joy. However it can also be a time of incredible frustration. Teenagers may present as adult-like in their appearance and have grown up expectations, yet also display childlike emotions and behaviours.

For the young person, teenage-hood is often a very emotional and difficult time. During this period it is important they know that their parent or caregiver will support them to get through it. One of the ways parents can do this is by setting appropriate rules and boundaries for their teenager.

Boundaries are essential

Boundaries are a signal to young people that they are cared for and that they are important. A lack of boundaries may be welcomed by the young person (as it means more freedom) but it can send a message that caregivers don't really care. And if Mum and Dad don't care about the young person, why should the young person care about themselves.

Having boundaries with appropriate consequences teaches young people about responsibility. Facing the consequences of breaking rules and boundaries is important, as it helps young people move away from being impulsive, develop self-control and make more adult decisions.

One of the difficulties with setting boundaries is knowing how much freedom and responsibility is appropriate for a specific young person. Rules that are too tight and restrictive often lead to frustration and rebellion, whereas rules that are too loose mean young people have no guide to know when they should stop.

To help teenagers make good decisions they need clear guidance from their parents. Here are a few suggestions for setting boundaries with your teenager.

Boundary setting suggestions

1. Start with support and love

When setting rules for your young person let them know you care about them and that the rules are about supporting their development and keeping them safe. Discussing the reason for the rules will help your teenager accept and understand them easier. *'I'm doing this because I love you and want the best for you...'*

2. Be clear about what you expect

Young people need guidance. Rules should describe how you expect them to behave. Make 3 - 5 rules (no more) that are realistic and straightforward. Don't overcomplicate things. *'I have some rules I want you to follow...'*

3. Decide on appropriate consequences

If rules are broken there need to be consequences. You could also have a reward if they keep to the rules or do well. This is a good opportunity to get feedback from your young person about what they think should happen. Although you will have the final decision, they may have better ideas than you so make sure you listen. *'So what should happen if you break the rules?'*

4. Write down the rules and keep to the contract

Acknowledge your young person is free to make choices, *'You can choose to accept or reject these rules...'* Recap with your young person what you expect from them. Be clear about what will happen if they choose to cross the line. *'Here's what will happen...'*

5. Follow through

The most important step is following through with those consequences. Unless the young person faces the consequence at some point, the rules will be meaningless.

1. Establish clear rules

Parents need to develop clear and concise family rules for their teenager. It's good to organise a specific (and calm) time to discuss this and agree on (write it down if possible) a contract. Your teenager may groan at the prospect of a 'family meeting' however they will understand what it is and participate (as it is their chance to provide input).

2. Hold the line

Teenagers will test boundaries; that is to be expected. When they do, it is important to hold the line. No matter how well you set the boundaries they will mean nothing if you don't follow through with the agreed consequences. It is especially important to be clear and direct when resolving problems with your young person. Make sure they understand and then move on. On the other hand nagging is seldom an effective communication strategy, particularly with teenagers.

3. Reinforce positive messages

Reassure your teenager that this is about the behaviour, not them. Reinforce the positive things that they have done. Notice when they do keep to the rules and reward them for it. Tell them you love them as often as you can, in both the good times and the tough times.

4. Work as a team

Setting boundaries for teenagers is the first step to helping them set their own boundaries. Discuss the responsibilities that go with setting boundaries. Using a collaborative approach with your teenager.

5. Lead by example

All the advice in the world will count for little to a teenager if you don't walk the talk. Demonstrating acceptable behaviour is much more effective than talking about it. Model to your young person how to handle conflict, how to be honest, how to be kind, how to say sorry.

Teenagers will respect you if you are real and genuine, even when you make mistakes. So be prepared to be an imperfect parent, admit your mistakes and don't be afraid to say you're sorry.

Examples of rules:

- No swearing at your parents
- Being home at curfew (or ringing for a lift if unable to make it home)
- No illegal substances in the house

Examples of consequences:

- Grounded for the following weekend(s)
- Withhold allowance
- Remove cellphone / internet privileges

TIP: If you feel yourself getting wound up, walk away and continue the discussion when you are both in a calmer frame of mind.

Jennifer started coming home late, well after curfew. We'd shout at each other and I'd get furious. It usually ended in tears and was destroying our relationship. Then I stopped arguing about it. I made it crystal clear that if she didn't come home on time, she'd be grounded the following weekend. It only took a couple of weekends moping at home for the rule to sink in. You just have to stick to it – and not take it personally.

Reflective Questions

Think about the rules and boundaries you have for your teenager:

- Do you feel your teenager is mostly compliant with your rules/boundaries? Why/why not?
- Are the rules flexible if your child does well or shows ongoing maturity?
- Are there ways you reward good behaviour as well as consequences for misbehaviour?
- Are there alternative ways to communicate your rules better?
- What are some non-negotiables you have in your house? i.e. no physical aggression towards family members / no cannabis in the home etc.
- Do you remember your parents setting boundaries for you when you were a teenager? What worked well and not so well?