



# Saner Parenting

Real Help for Desperate Parents of Acting-Out Teens

## 6 Things: A blueprint for creating healthy boundaries

Setting boundaries is all about knowing who you are and what you value, and being prepared to stand up for that without compromise. It's believing your life is as valuable as anyone else's. Everything becomes possible when you decide you're worth standing up for – and that includes your time, your space, your attention, your money – everything.

### What are the signs that you're not setting boundaries?

I'm probably not setting boundaries if . . .

- I feel like a doormat.
- I feel like others take advantage of me.
- I feel manipulated.
- I feel pushed around.
- I overextend and overburden myself, to my detriment, for fear of what might happen if I don't.
- I'm a nervous wreck from trying to live up to everyone's expectations and anticipate everyone's needs.
- I run myself ragged trying to meet everyone else's needs while neglecting my own.
- I'm not clear on the difference between help and rescue. (What *is* the difference?!)
- When I say no, I feel guilty. When I say yes, I feel used and resentful.
- I believe others are responsible for how I feel.
- I believe I'm responsible how others feel.
- I'll agree to anything to keep the peace.
- I feel victimized.
- I worry about what others think and say about me.
- I feel others don't respect me.



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## “Everybody knows” boundaries

Everybody knows what boundaries are:

***A boundary is a rule that you set for others, or that others set for you.***

We all know the language: “You can’t ask for more money.” “Don’t phone me after 10:00.” “You have to be on time for the meeting tomorrow morning.”

The problem with this method of setting boundaries is that it requires the cooperation of others – and that’s something you can’t control.

## Effective boundaries

***A boundary is a rule you make for yourself.***

- An “everybody knows” boundary is an attempt to get others to change what they’re doing. Its success relies on others buying in.
- An effective boundary provides information on what *you* will or will not be doing. Its success relies only on *you*.

Here’s a comparison:

<b>“Everybody knows” boundaries</b>	<b>Effective boundaries</b>
You can’t ask for more money.	I won’t give you any more money.
Don’t phone me after 10:00 at night.	I turn the phone off at 10:00 at night.
I feel disrespected when you show up late for meetings, because then the meeting runs late and I end up having to readjust my schedule for the rest of the day.	Looking forward to seeing you at the meeting tomorrow! Just so you know, I have another appointment afterwards, so I’ll be leaving right at 11:00.
When you don’t put your laundry in the hamper, I feel frustrated because I don’t know what’s clean or dirty.	I’m doing laundry tomorrow, and I’ll wash whatever’s in the hamper.



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## 6 Things

A while ago, I discovered William Glasser's 6-step process for setting boundaries. I took it to the next parent meeting, and a few of the parents got working on it right away, with great results.

Here's how it works: Answer the following questions, and then use it as a reminder when you're feeling caught between a rock and a hard place. Or do what some parents did and post it on your fridge! NOTE: This can be easily adapted to *any* relationship.

### 1. Who you are

We're always curious about others, so reveal something about yourself that your teen may not know. Share some of your life and vulnerabilities with them, stories about issues that you, too, have struggled with. Become a little more human.

### 2. What you stand for

What's important to you? What values do you try to live up to? Do you practice what you preach – and is it hard for you? Do you vote? How do you get to know the candidates? What are your views around world issues?

### 3. What you will do for and with them

As your teen gets older, it's less and less your job to do *for* them, so get clear for yourself what those things are. Things you may still be willing to do for them could include providing a home, paying the bills, buying groceries, cooking meals, lending them the car, picking them up after a party so they don't get in the car with a drunk driver. Commit to stop doing *to* them: nagging, criticizing, threatening, punishing, lecturing, and advising. And what about *with* them? What about a movie? A museum? A camping trip? A game of cards? Redecorating their room?



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## 4. What you *won't* do for them

What have you done for them in the past that you're now going to turn over to them? What will you be turning over to them in the near future? Let them know you won't do their work or solve problems they should solve themselves, and you won't tell them what to do, but they're always welcome ask for help.

## 5. What you will ask them to do

You will ask them to work with you on problems as they arise – and you're more interested in their solving their problems without you.

## 6. What you will *not* ask them to do

Let them know you won't ask them to do anything you wouldn't be willing to do, or ask them to do things just because you say so, but you'll share how to do the job better. Tell them you won't ask them to do anything useless, and if they think something is useless, they should let you know.

You can find a full description of the 6 things in *The Control Theory Manager* by William Glasser.

### Points to ponder

- Would you rather be in charge of your life, or forever accommodating others?
- How does disregarding your boundaries impact your relationships?
- How can you help others get what they want without giving up your boundaries?

### Exercises

#### Know what you want.

- How would I like things to be?
- How would my life be better if I had that boundary?
- What problem am I trying to solve?



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## **Evaluate your current boundaries.**

Examine your current boundaries and ask yourself:

- Is this boundary a directive for someone else or just information?
- Who has to respect it in order for it to work?
- How well has this boundary worked in the past? What kind of results did I get?

## **Unhook from the drama.**

One of the hardest things to deal with when setting boundaries, or changing any behaviour that others have come to expect, is the fallout. Others will likely be upset, and that's okay. Here are two strategies to help you stay the course: Don't hook into the drama. If you're feeling anxious, recognize it, and focus on calming yourself down. This can be difficult to do in the face of others' anger or rage, but it's crucial. Remind yourself of the payoff. In order to have effective boundaries, it's necessary to be consistent. It is *not* necessary to be angry or upset! When others attack you (and they likely will), listen, acknowledge, and be respectful, but don't hook into their strong emotions. They're just emotions – and they *will* pass.

## **Find a "yes" that gives strength and power to your "no."**

What do you want that you're trying to get by creating this boundary? Keep your eye on what it will feel like to have that.

## **Question others' expectations.**

Do you sacrifice your boundaries to satisfy someone else's expectations? Your teen will likely have all kinds of expectations of you: "If you were doing your job as a parent, you would (fill in the blank)." But the fact that they say it, and maybe even believe it, doesn't make it true!

Your job isn't to do *for* your teen, but to continually help prepare them. And part of this must include having a clear sense of what it means *to you* to be a good parent. So take some time to figure out what that is.



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## Reduce guilt and worry.

Here are some questions to consider:

- What results do I want?
- What results am I getting with the boundaries I have now?
- If I created better boundaries, what's the worst that could happen?
- How likely is it to happen?
- If that happened, could I handle it?

## Reading list

William Glasser, *Choice Theory: A new psychology of personal freedom*

William Glasser, *Take Charge of Your Life*

William Ury, *The Power of a Positive No: How to say no and still get to yes*

Harriet Lerner, *The Dance of Anger: A woman's guide to changing the pattern of intimate relationships*

Melody Beatty, *Codependent No More*

Greg McKeown, *Essentialism: The disciplined pursuit of less*

## Final Note

Changing any behaviour requires attention, commitment, and consistency. Even small changes are *work!* It'll take a while for these new behaviours to take hold and become new habits, so be patient with yourself.

And while you're working to make these changes, consider that it's equally difficult for your teen to change his or her behaviour. When you remember that, you'll be able to deal with your teen more calmly and compassionately.

If you've bought into the myth that it's your job to make your teen happy, you can let go of that now and consider this: Our teens learn from watching us. They learn how to be happy by watching us do things that make us happy, and they learn to set effective boundaries by observing how we do it. As Einstein said, "Example isn't one way to teach. It's the only way to teach."

You owe it to both of you to get good at this!