

PARENT INFORMATION SHEET

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Boundaries

REMEMBER:

- *Boundaries are essential to children*
- *They encourage good behaviour by helping children know what is expected of them*
- *Discuss your family boundaries so that your children understand them*
- *Provide a consequence when boundaries are crossed*
- *As children get older, boundaries will need to be adjusted*

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It is important for children to know who is in charge of the family. At the same time children need to feel that they have a voice within the family.

Getting the Balance Right

Parents often make the mistake of focussing too much on being in charge without listening to children. Others can allow children too much say in making decisions for the family when they are not ready for such responsibility. The right to discuss issues in the family naturally increases as a young person gets older, but young children can still have input.

Authority versus Democracy

The key to developing good boundaries is a balance between authority and democracy. As children grow up they are able to think things through in more detail and as a consequence might be able to contribute more to family rules and expectations. This is one of the rights that comes to children when they have the skills and responsibilities needed for the task at hand. It is the parent's task to assess when the child is ready to make more of a contribution.

Developing Values

The most resilient families develop broad boundaries that help children understand what is expected from them in the home, at school and in the community. These boundaries help children develop values about what is right and wrong. It takes a while for children to have these values internalised. That means that they don't have to check with an adult if something is right or wrong. They understand why certain rules are in place and why it's important to follow them.

What kind of boundaries are we talking about?

There are some basic principles that are helpful but obviously each family can add more to their list.

- **Be kind and respectful to other people or property.** Parents can have a discussion about what this means - don't hit, bite, scratch others, or say things to others that will hurt them. Apologise when you are wrong or don't deliberately or carelessly damage property or things
- **Act responsibly and as part of the family.** Discuss examples such as - don't leave things lying around, clean up your own food plates, look after pets etc depending on the child's age and ability
- **Use problem solving and communication skills when you don't agree with someone.** Each family will have their own way of dealing with problems. Some ideas include raising it at a family meeting, discussing it with a parent/adult, taking time out and thinking about what might be the right thing to do, don't say things you will regret later etc.

Boundaries are for Everyone

Boundaries are for all family members including parents. If parents also follow these principles, it will be much easier for children to follow them. However understand that children are NOT small sized adults. Sometimes it takes them some time to understand concepts, to self regulate their feelings and control their impulsivity. Be patient and understand where they are developmentally.

Communicating the Boundaries

It could be useful for families to have these principles written up and displayed. Many children will have experience of this in their schools, where school rules are prominently displayed in classrooms.

Use a family meeting to explain what the boundaries or family rules will be. Give a short explanation of why they are important (try not to give long lectures).

Think about Consequences

Explain what will happen if boundaries are crossed. Each behaviour must have a consequence that is natural or logical.

For example, if children argue about what TV program they are going to watch, then the natural solution is to turn the TV off, give the children a short time out and then help them negotiate. Another approach might be to give the children a warning "This is the first warning; do not argue over the TV". Many times it is enough to tell them not behave in a particular way without saying much more.

Parents can be very creative during this process. The most important thing that children learn is that when they break the rules, something happens that teaches them not to do it again.

Remember!

- Creating boundaries helps children learn how to behave in the world.
- It is an opportunity for children to learn about their feelings and master a way to regulate them.
- Be consistent with the family rules and consequences.
- It helps children develop life long skills around managing their feelings and developing appropriate problem solving skills.
- And lastly, you're the adult, you have a lot more understanding of what are safe, acceptable, healthy and respectful ways to live. It's OK to be the boss!

Some of the material used was adapted from - *Andrew Fuller, "Creating Real People – Creating A Resilient Family", 2006, Australian Council For Educational Research, Melbourne, Vic*