



Healthy Family Boundaries

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.

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.

Do you have a parenting issue that you might want to talk through with one of our counsellors? For the cost of a local call you can call Parent Line NSW – Free, Professional Counselling 24/7 on **1300 1300 52** or visit our website www.parentline.org.au