

Nine Things to Remember When Setting a Boundary

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1. Use boundaries to let your students know your limits and tolerances, your availability, the conditions under which you will participate in some activity, which privileges are available or the conditions under which a privilege is available to your students. Use boundaries to give your students information they can use in making decisions.
2. Using past experience (and common sense), anticipate what you will want and what your students will probably want as well. Consider both your needs and the students' needs when formulating your boundary.
3. Be clear and specific about what you're asking for, what you would like, which options are available, the times or conditions under which a positive outcome is available, or any other factors that your students will need to know in making their choices or anticipating a particular event.
4. Communicate your boundary before there is a conflict, or before the conflict continues or re-occurs: *"You can get credit for your homework as long as it's on my desk before the 3:30 bell rings tomorrow."* *"I will read as long as it is completely quiet."* *"The hall pass will not be available during the test this afternoon."*
5. State boundaries positively, as promises rather than threats: *"You can watch the movie if your seatwork is done by 2:00,"* rather than, *"You're not watching the movie if your seatwork isn't done by 2:00."*
6. Be prepared to follow through. If you're not willing to withhold positive outcomes until your students do their part—whether it's finish their seatwork, complete a chore, put their plan in writing or tone down their voices—don't bother setting the boundary in the first place.
7. Examine your attachment to particular outcomes. For example, if you are heavily invested in your students' performing at a certain level in order for you to feel OK about your teaching ability, you may find yourself asking for excuses or making excuses in order to avoid following through. Either refrain from setting this boundary (and don't complain when your students act irresponsibly) or use your resistance to following through as a chance to look at your need to protect your students (or yourself) from the negative outcomes of their behavior choices.
8. Watch the tendency to make excuses, give warnings or let things slide "just this once." This is a great way to teach kids that you don't really mean what you say and that it's OK to disrespect your boundaries. If you want to build in some flexibility, do so *before* your students blow it.

(For example, let students know at the beginning of the semester that they will be responsible for, say, 37 out of 40 assignments you anticipate giving. Or give students a “Get Out of Jail Free” card each grading period [or after the student has done a certain number of assignments in a row] which can be submitted in place of homework assignments.)

9. If the student is unable to perform or complete his or her end of the bargain because the request or time limit was truly unreasonable, because the instructions were not clear or understood, or because the child was developmentally incapable or lacked the necessary skill or experience to do what you want, it’s a bad boundary. This is not the same as making excuses for a developmentally capable kid who simply doesn’t come through. In this instance, back up and try again (delaying the request until the child is more capable, setting a different boundary or offering more clarity, instruction or a more reasonable time limits, for example). Do not withhold positive outcomes at this time.

Excerpted from *The Parent’s Little Book of Lists: Do’s & Don’ts of Effective Parenting*, by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D.

Buy the book at: <http://janebluestein.com/2012/book-the-parents-little-book-of-lists/>.

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