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5 Characteristics of a Good Boundary*

By Jane Bluestein, PhD

1. **Clarity:** Boundaries are clear, specific and clearly communicated. They work best when you have your child's attention, when she understands what you're requesting, when the positive outcome of her cooperation is clear and when specific requirements, conditions or time factors are spelled out.
FOR EXAMPLE: "I'll read you the next chapter in our story as long as you're in your pajamas with your teeth brushed by the time the big hand is on the six."
2. **Win-Win:** Boundaries respect and consider the needs of everyone involved. They attempt to create ways for both you and your child to get what you want.
FOR EXAMPLE: "I'll be happy to drive you to the mall as soon as you finish your chores" or "I want to hear about your day. I'll be free to give you my full attention in 15 minutes."
3. **Proactivity:** Boundaries work to *prevent* problems and are typically expressed *before* a problem occurs or before it is allowed to continue (or get worse).
FOR EXAMPLE: "You can play my stereo as soon as you can demonstrate how to use it correctly (or replace the CD you damaged)."
"When we go to the store, you can select one kind of cereal (or other treat)."
4. **Positivity:** The most effective boundaries typically focus on the positive outcomes of cooperation. They are also expressed positively, as promises rather than threats, or simply as information (with the implication that the positive outcome is available until a certain time or under certain conditions).
FOR EXAMPLE: "if you put your dirty clothes in the hamper by 9:00 Saturday morning, I'll wash them for you" or "The Kitchen closes at 8:00pm."
5. **Follow-through:** Follow-through – allowing a positive consequence to occur only when your does what you've asked – is what communicates that you mean what you say and say what you mean. It increases the likelihood that your child will take you seriously when you ask for what you want, and it improves the chances that she will cooperate as well.

Consider this non-parenting scenario to draw parallels with how everything we do (when done well with consciousness and awareness) can be used in our own parenting. LOVE THIS! It's so brilliantly visualized with this example ☺.

"A store that wishes to build positive relationships with the public opens at 7am and closes at midnight. The hours are *clearly* noted in their ads, on the door or over the phone if you call ahead, so you can find out *proactively*, before you go down there when they're not open. Their hours accommodate most schedules while closing long enough to clean up and restock (*win-win*). As long as you get their on time, you get what you need (*positivity*). And ordinarily, if you get there even a minute or two after midnight, the store will be closed (*follow-through*), even though you may have a perfectly reasonable excuse for being late!"

* Boundaries are tools for building cooperation in relationships, for letting others know what you want and for letting them know which options are available to them. Set boundaries when you want behaviors to change and wish to avoid negative, stressful behaviors such as nagging, yelling, threatening or punishing to get what you want. Whether you use boundaries in relationships with children or other adults, the characteristics of boundaries and dynamics of boundary setting are the same.

* Boundaries allow you to follow through without even getting angry!! Follow through works wonders, but it requires patience, faith, consistency and courage!!