

How to Create Healthy Boundaries for Rebellious Teens

When dealing with teenage rebellion, it's important to first understand *why* your teen may be rebelling. Then you can address *what* you can do about it.

OK, imagine you're at a basketball game. But this is no ordinary basketball game. In this arena, there are no rules and no boundaries. The only goal for the player is to get the ball into the basket. But he can do it any way he can.

After the whistle blows, the players fight for the ball, fall to the floor and start wrestling. One guy punches the other, grabs the ball and runs into the stands. A fan gets hurt when the player falls on him, but the player keeps going toward the hoop ... it is pure chaos.

I know that illustration is ludicrous, but it illustrates the importance of having rules and boundaries in the game and what happens when those rules and boundaries aren't present. Rules and boundaries are present in just about every arena of life, including school and work. And they are there for a reason so that there is clarity in who is responsible for what, what someone can and cannot do, where someone can go and not go, and so on.

The rules and boundaries are there to protect the person and other people, keep them accountable, and to give them a framework where they can be productive and do what they need to do.

Just as the boundaries on the basketball court establish the area within which each player must play, the boundaries in parenting establish the area within which your child must play

in daily life. Let's talk about each of those boundaries that we must establish to effectively raise our children, especially our rebellious children:

1. Sideline of rules. Clear rules must be established to address attitude and behavior. Rules may include showing respect, telling the truth, curfews, grades, chores, driving, computers, television, movies, and immoral behavior, including drinking, drugs, and sexual activity. In order to clarify expectations and to ensure that your teen knows the rules, writing down the rules and consequences for breaking those rules is important.

2. Sideline of consequences. In his very good book *Boundaries with Teens*, Dr. John Townsend states that, "Teens need consequences, because that's how they experience a fundamental law of life: good behavior brings good results and bad behavior brings uncomfortable results." Townsend goes on to say that a consequence "can be either removing the desirable or adding the undesirable to your teen's life as a result of a rule violation." Additionally, the consequence should match the offense as closely as possible. For example, if your teen is not respectfully talking to you, they lose the privilege of talking to their friends on their cell phone.

The sidelines of rules and consequences change based on age, trust, maturity and responsibility. As our children demonstrate responsibility by staying within the boundaries consistently, grow in age and maturity, and earn our trust, the rules and consequences will become fewer and our children will have more freedom as the gap between the sidelines of rules and consequences expands. In other words, their "playing court" will become larger and larger.

3. Coaching with truth and love. It's important to note that, as parents, we are not only the "referees" who establish the rules of the game and blow the whistle when our kids go out of bounds, we are also their "coach." And it is absolutely

critical that we coach our kids with truth and love. If we do not always speak the truth and show love to our children, the sidelines of rules and consequences will be disregarded by our children and the rebellion may even worsen.

Truth is vitally important when dealing with a strong-willed child who is overstepping the boundaries or behaving like there are no boundaries. I can only have credibility with my children if they know that I always tell them the truth and that I am a man of my word. So when I tell my children that I am creating these boundaries and rules because it really is what's best for them, they can believe it without any doubt. Then, I can tell them that I expect them to always speak the truth as well.

Love is vitally important also. Love is all about serving and giving selflessly and sacrificially to your child. It's doing what's best for your child no matter what it costs you personally. Love says, "I want what's best for you! That is why I'm talking to you about this, that is why I'm doing this, and that is why I'm making this decision."

And when we genuinely love our children, when they know we want what's best for them, they'll follow us. They'll say to themselves: "You've loved me. You've earned the right to lead me. I'll follow you. I'll live by the rules and take the consequences when I break them."

So, as you establish those boundaries for your kids, please make sure that that you coach them with both truth and love.

I'd like to hear your suggestions on how you have created boundaries in your home and how you've handled rebellious teens. Please share them below.

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