Boundaries vs. Requests:

Setting Limits Without Escalation

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Why Boundaries Matter

- Kids thrive on structure and connection.
- Boundaries = safety, trust, predictability.

Why Boundaries Matter

Normalize that boundary-setting is not about control; **it's about teaching skills, protecting relationships, and supporting nervous system regulation**.

> **It's my job to support you to be safe, healthy, and developing.**

Boundaries with Kids

CONNECTION, NOT CONTROL

Children don't have to like the boundary.

They might respond with...

- Resistance
- Shutting down
- Running away
- Ignoring
- Melt downs
- Lashing out

Nervous System Reactions

Fight

Flight

Fawn

Freeze

It's your job to set the boundary.

It's the child's job to push the boundary to see if it's real.

It's your job to hold the boundary.

Common Misconceptions

~~"Boundaries are mean"~~
Boundaries are relational.

"I will not let hit your friend. I'm here to help you. I love you."

~~"Boundaries limit kids"~~
Boundaries free kids to feel secure.

"You can use the shovels for digging or patting dirt. If you have another idea for safely using the shovels, come chat with me!"

Boundaries vs. Requests

Requests depend on the child's choice, with no plan if they don't comply.

"Please put your jacket on to go outside."

↓

Boundaries are about your action, not theirs.

"I set the timer for 2 minutes. When the timer beeps I'll come help put jackets on if they aren't on, yet. If you want to do it yourself you can do it before the timer."

How to Set a Boundary

Adult is in charge of **what.**
Child has choice in **how.**

→

What: *We are going to the rug.*
How: *We get over there.*

The child can choose: *"Would you like to fly like a bird or hop like a bunny to the rug?"*

Boundaries & Consequences vs. Punishments/Threats

Punishments are about making kids pay for behavior.

If you hit me I will...

- ✕ *take away play time*
- ✕ *feel sad and won't talk to you*
- ✕ *shame you in front of your peers*

Boundaries are about keeping kids safe, connected, and regulated.

Boundary: I won't let you hit my body.
Consequence: If you hit my body, I will hold your hands to keep myself safe.
OR If you hit my body, I will move back to stay safe.

Boundaries vs. Punishments

Clearly stated boundaries +
Clearly stated consequences = Expectations

The core difference: Boundaries are proactive, not reactive.

I'm not mad at you...

You are not in trouble...

I love you and I can't let you...

Consistency is Key

Is this still the rule when...? What about...?

Life Changes = Increased Boundary Pushing

Is this still the rule when...?
What else is changing?

Curiosity as an Asset

What are they trying to communicate?

When/How to Change the Boundary

When more context/ preteaching is needed.

"When you asked if you could bring the trucks over to the paint I said no quickly. Let me tell you what I was nervous would happen."

When innovation pokes a hole.

"I hadn't thought about that. That makes sense. Yeah, let's try it this time and see how it goes."

Attention seeking = Connection seeking

Notice the attention seeking and state it.

"Did you want my attention?"

Calmly reinforce the boundary.

"I can't let you throw the ball across the room."

Provide another way to connect.

"I wonder if you can make it in this basket over here? Let's see how many you can make in!"

Boundaries Don't Require Child Action

Preteach

Let them know what to expect before you're in the heat of the moment whenever you can.

Visuals

- Timers
- Clocks
- Calendars
- First/Then

Adult Prep

"What am I expecting their response to be? How can I regulate in the moment if I am triggered?"

Boundaries as Relationship Builders

How boundaries actually strengthen connection:

- Show kids: "I care about you enough to keep you safe."
- Provide security: Kids don't have to manage adult moods.

Boundaries as Relationship Builders

Boundary Language = Respectful, Predictable, Regulating.

Script examples:

- "I won't let you..."
- "I will..."
- "It's my job to..."

Boundaries ≠ requests

Boundaries ≠ punishments

Boundaries don't rely on child compliance

Boundaries build trust & safety

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Book #1: Tiny Humans, Big Emotions

Book #2: Big Kids, Bigger Feelings