

Why should I put boundaries for my child?

This is the question many parents ask themselves, or have already found answers for. Whatever the category you may be in, this article is about the importance of establishing healthy rules and boundaries for your child.

Some of us may have had critical or severe parents, that used to put a lot of restrictions, or strict teachers that sometimes apply physical punishments. A person in that category often decides: "I will never treat my child like that; I'll let him make his own decisions". The solution is not moving from one extreme to another, rather finding a balance.

Child development and boundaries

The most crucial period in child development related to boundaries starts at about 2 and a half – 3 years and usually ends before the age of 7. This is the moment when the child realizes that he is a different entity and begins to test where the other entities begin and he ends. For example, the child asks himself: "What is mine?" "What can I do/how can I act in this space?" "How are the others?" Seeking answers to similar questions, he will often test our patience and see what happens if he does what he's not supposed to.

Therefore, throughout this whole period, negotiation is the key word. Rather than imposing strict rules, teach your child that every action we do has a consequence. You will do him a great favor for the rest of his life! Learning about consequences is the first and most important step in good decision-making. For example: if you don't wash your hands after playing, the consequence is that you may not eat; if you will interrupt when others are speaking, you will go to another room. This is better than rules, because it doesn't say "I'm bigger than you, you have to do as I say" it says: "In life every action has a consequence; whatever you choose it's your responsibility and I will still love you even if I find your behavior unacceptable".

When the condition or rule is negotiable, teach your child negotiation skills. Example: "Mommy I want to go outside and play" "You may go and play, after you finish your dinner" or "You may go and play if you help me with the dishes afterwards". If you make a proposition, stick to it, because if you don't your child will quickly understand that rules can be easily broken and he will most certainly use this information next time you want something from him.

In conclusion, boundaries are not negative; on the contrary, they are very beneficial: they teach the child survival skills, they offer protection and a safe environment to grow and develop and they help the child learn important abilities for later on in life. Boundaries only become inefficient and even toxic when they are too rigid or too flexible.

