

Setting Boundaries Without Constant Power Struggles

A practical guide for setting limits clearly, calmly, and consistently.

Boundaries work best when they are clear, predictable, and connected to a purpose. The goal is not to win a battle. It is to teach responsibility while protecting the relationship.

Before Setting the Boundary

- ☐ What specific behavior needs to change?
- ☐ Why does this limit matter for safety, respect, health, or responsibility?
- ☐ Is the expectation realistic for your teen's age and current abilities?
- ☐ Can both caregivers enforce it consistently?
- ☐ What will happen if the boundary is not followed?

A Four-Step Boundary Formula

1. State the expectation	"Phones are placed in the kitchen by 10:00 p.m."
2. Give a brief reason	"Sleep affects your mood, health, and ability to function tomorrow."
3. Explain the consequence	"If the phone stays in your room, it will be kept overnight the following evening."
4. End the debate calmly	"You may disagree, but the expectation remains the same."

Make Consequences Effective

- ☐ Related to the behavior whenever possible
- ☐ Known in advance rather than invented during anger
- ☐ Reasonable enough that you can follow through
- ☐ Time-limited, with a clear way to earn trust or privilege back
- ☐ Delivered calmly without humiliation, threats, or long lectures

Common Power-Struggle Traps

- Repeating the same direction many times
- Adding new punishments during the argument
- Trying to convince your teen to agree with the boundary
- Threatening consequences you will not enforce
- Discussing important limits when either person is highly emotional
- Treating every mistake as disrespect or defiance

Boundary script

"I hear that you disagree. I am willing to listen, but I am not going to argue. The expectation is _____. If it is not followed, the consequence is _____. We can discuss how it went tomorrow."

Create Your Boundary Plan

The behavior I want to address is:

The expectation will be:

The reason I will give is:

The consequence will be:

How I will stay calm and follow through:
