ADULTS SAVING KIDS

Founded by Alvin Erickson

Skill 2

Boundaries

Teach children to say no.

Teaching Children the Right to Protect Themselves

Why Boundaries Are Essential

Boundaries are not about being unkind, antisocial, or fearful. Boundaries are about **staying in control of one's body, time, attention, and choices**. Children who do not understand boundaries are not more loving—they are more vulnerable. They are easier to pressure, easier to manipulate, and less likely to recognize danger when it appears in subtle forms.

> *Boundaries are one of the strongest protective tools a child can have in a complex world.*

What Often Goes Wrong

Many parents unintentionally teach children to **override their own limits**. This happens when children are forced to hug or kiss adults, politeness is valued over comfort, saying "no" is treated as disrespect, or adults dismiss discomfort as an overreaction. Over time, children learn:

> *"My feelings don't matter as much as keeping others comfortable."*

This belief can be deeply dangerous.

What Boundaries Really Are

Boundaries exist across multiple dimensions: internal (thoughts, feelings, intuition), physical (body, space), emotional (what feels safe or unsafe), and digital (screens, messages, images).

> *Boundaries are not walls—they are filters that allow good in and keep harm out.*

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The Parent's Role

Parents are a child's **first boundary teachers**. Children learn boundaries when parents respect their "no," model saying "no" themselves, question unsafe situations, and back children up when boundaries are challenged. A child who knows their parents will support them is far more likely to speak up.

Real-Life Examples

EXAMPLE 1

Physical Boundaries (Young Child)

When a relative wants a hug and the child hesitates, a boundary-respecting response is: "You don't have to hug if you don't want to." This teaches the child that their body belongs to them, consent matters, and affection should feel safe.

EXAMPLE 2

Situational Boundaries (Elementary Age)

If a child is invited to a sleepover where supervision feels unclear, a parent can say: "Something doesn't feel right to me. We're going to say no." Through this, the child learns that adults can say no even when something sounds fun, safety outranks social pressure, and intuition matters.

EXAMPLE 3

Social Pressure (Teen)

When a teen is pressured to stay somewhere uncomfortable, teach them direct scripts like "I'm leaving now," "I don't feel comfortable," or "I need to go." No explanations are required.

Teaching Children to Say No

Children must hear and practice that **no is a complete sentence**. This includes saying no to touch, no to secrets, no to uncomfortable situations, and no to online requests. Practice phrases at home—such as "I don't like that," "Stop," "I need to leave," or "I'm calling my parent"—because practice builds confidence before it is needed.

Digital Boundaries Matter Too

Children need help understanding that not everyone online is who they claim to be, private images should never be shared, and pressure online is still pressure. Teach children clearly:

> *"If someone asks you to hide something from your parents, that's a red flag."*

Common Boundary Mistakes Parents Make

Common parenting traps include prioritizing politeness over safety, minimizing a child's discomfort, explaining away intuition, and expecting children to "be nice" at all costs.

> *Kindness without boundaries is not kindness—it's vulnerability.*

Boundaries at Different Ages

Young children	Elementary	Teens
Body autonomy, simple choices.	Situational awareness, saying no.	Social, emotional, and digital boundaries.

Boundaries evolve, but the core principle stays the same.

One Rule Parents Must Remember

THE ONE RULE

If someone withdraws approval because your child sets a healthy boundary, that is not approval your child needs to earn.

Children need explicit permission to disappoint others in order to protect themselves.

Biblical Wisdom

> SCRIPTURE
> *"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."*
>
> **Proverbs 4:23**

Healthy boundaries are not about shutting people out; they are about protecting what God has entrusted to us—our hearts, our minds, our bodies, our relationships, and our choices. Children often receive mixed messages when lessons to be kind, helpful, and polite are misunderstood as "always say yes" or "never disappoint anyone." Scripture teaches a different balance: we are called to love others, but we are also called to exercise wisdom and stewardship. Teaching children healthy boundaries helps them understand that they can be respectful and still say no, be kind and still protect themselves, and care about others without surrendering their own safety, convictions, or well-being. Boundaries are one of the primary ways we guard what God has given us.

> SCRIPTURE
> *" All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."*
>
> **Matthew 5:37**

> *Together, these verses create a strong biblical foundation for boundaries: guard what is valuable, and speak clearly and honestly.*

Practical Wisdom / Application

Most people hear *"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it"* and think about protecting their faith or personal character. That's certainly part of it, but imagine a parent teaching that verse to a child when someone wants a hug they don't want to give, someone pressures them to keep a secret, a friend repeatedly ignores their "no," someone online asks for private information or pictures, or someone makes them feel uncomfortable and tells them they're overreacting. In each situation, the mandate is clear: **Guard your heart.**

Healthy boundaries are not about being unkind. They are about protecting what God has entrusted to us—our bodies, our minds, our emotions, our relationships, and our choices. Now consider Jesus' words: *"Let your 'Yes' be yes, and your 'No,' no."* Children need permission to be clear—not rude, not angry, just clear. Sometimes wisdom sounds like "No," "I don't like that," or

"I need to leave." Boundaries teach children that they can be respectful and still protect themselves. Guard what is valuable, and speak clearly and honestly.

FINAL TAKEAWAY

Boundaries do not make children fearful. They make children strong, wise, and less easily exploited.

A child who knows they can say no—and be backed up—is far safer than one taught to always comply.

THIS WEEK

One Thing to Try This Week

Option 1: Practice Boundary Scripts

Role-play with your child using phrases like "No," "Stop," "I need to leave," or "I'm calling my parent." Make it fun and low pressure.

Option 2: Give Permission

Tell your child: "You never have to be polite at the expense of your safety." Then discuss what that means in daily life.

Option 3: Respect One Boundary

Notice one time this week when your child says "No," "I don't want to," or "I'm uncomfortable." Pause before overriding them and explore what they're feeling.

Wisdom Principle: Guard what is valuable.

Scripture Acknowledgment

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