ADULTS SAVING KIDS
Founded by Alvin Erickson

Lesson 8

Developing Convictions and Protecting Boundaries

Helping Children Stand Firm in What They Believe

SCRIPTURE

Romans 12:2

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Romans 12:2 (NIV)

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version® (NIV®). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ All rights reserved worldwide.

From Knowing Their Worth to Protecting It

Throughout these lessons, we have emphasized helping children understand that their worth is grounded in God's love, not in their accomplishments, mistakes, or the opinions of others. As children grow, this secure foundation helps them develop another important quality: the ability to make decisions based on their own personal convictions rather than simply following the expectations of others. While children naturally want to belong and view friendships and approval as important, that strong desire to belong can sometimes make it difficult to say no—especially when someone they admire or care about pressures them to do something uncomfortable or unwise.

We want our children to understand that they never have to compromise their values or personal safety just to earn someone's approval. The apostle Paul encourages Christians not to conform thoughtlessly to the world around them, but to develop renewed minds capable of discerning what is truly good, providing a valuable foundation for teaching children to think independently and form convictions rooted in faith and wisdom.

© 2026 Adults Saving Kids

Identity Is Shepherded by Parents, Not Culture

Children are constantly receiving messages about who they should be, what makes them valuable, and what they must do to belong. These messages come from friends, entertainment, social media, and the culture around them.

Parents have the responsibility and privilege of helping children evaluate these messages in light of God's Word.

Identity is shepherded by parents, not culture.

Shepherding does not mean controlling every thought or decision a child makes. It means providing loving guidance, teaching discernment, modeling Christian convictions, and gradually helping children develop convictions of their own.

Our goal is not simply to raise children who follow our rules while they are young. It is to help them develop an identity grounded in Christ that will guide them when we are no longer standing beside them.

Rules and Convictions Are Not the Same Thing

Parents establish rules to guide and protect their children, but as children mature, we want them to understand the reasons behind those rules and gradually develop convictions of their own. For example, while a rule might be *"Don't get into a car with someone who has been drinking,"* a personal conviction becomes *"My safety matters, and I will not ride with an impaired driver, even if my friends are doing it."* Similarly, a rule might state *"Don't send private photographs to someone online,"* whereas a conviction becomes *"My body and privacy deserve respect, and I don't have to prove my love or loyalty by sharing something intimate."*

Rules provide necessary guidance, especially for younger children, but personal convictions help children carry that guidance with them out into the world when parents are not present.

Give Children Opportunities to Think

One of the most valuable things parents can do is invite children to consider important decisions long before they are pressured to make them. Rather than only telling a teenager what to do, we can ask questions like:

- *"What do you believe is right?"*
- *"Why does that matter to you?"*
- *"What would you do if someone challenged that belief?"*
- *"What might make it difficult to stand by your decision?"*

These conversations allow children to examine their values, consider consequences, and mentally prepare for difficult situations, while also giving parents a chance to share their own convictions and explain how faith guides their decisions. Our goal is not to force children to repeat the right answers, but to help them develop the understanding and confidence to recognize why a particular choice is right for them.

Consider a parent discussing romantic relationships and sexual boundaries with a teenager: rather than beginning only with prohibitions, the parent might ask, *"Have you thought about what boundaries you want to establish before you find yourself in a situation where someone is pressuring you?"* This allows the family to talk about faith, values, and healthy relationships beforehand, ensuring a conviction has been thoughtfully considered before any moment of strong emotion or pressure arises. Even if a child later makes a decision that conflicts with their convictions, they must still know they can come to their parents for guidance and support.

Boundaries Put Convictions Into Practice

While a conviction is something we believe, a boundary helps us put that belief into action. A teenager may believe honesty is important yet struggle when friends ask them to lie, or a child may believe they deserve respectful treatment but find it difficult to respond when someone repeatedly insults them. Because children need opportunities to practice what they might say and do, we can help them develop simple, direct responses:

> - *"No, I'm not comfortable with that."*
> - *"I've already made my decision."*
> - *"I don't want to do that."*
> - *"I'm leaving."*
> - *"I need to talk to someone I trust."*

Children also need to know they do not owe anyone an elaborate explanation for a boundary involving their body, safety, or personal privacy. Someone who truly respects them will be willing to hear and honor their no, and if someone continues pressuring, threatening, or manipulating them, seeking help is always a wise response rather than a failure.

Boundaries and Love Belong Together

Christian love does not require children to accept mistreatment, surrender their judgment, or comply with harmful demands. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul describes love as patient, kind, truthful, and protective—qualities that apply not only to how we treat others, but also to what healthy relationships should look like. Children can learn to be kind without being easily manipulated, respectful without agreeing to everything someone asks, and capable of forgiving someone while maintaining necessary boundaries. Ultimately, they can recognize that another person's

disappointment does not automatically mean they have done something wrong, because healthy boundaries protect our ability to love others without abandoning our own dignity, values, or safety.

When Convictions Are Tested

Even well-prepared children may struggle to maintain their boundaries because the desire for acceptance, fear of rejection, or pressure from someone important can make decisions intensely difficult. If a child crosses a boundary they intended to maintain, parents can help them understand what happened and consider how to respond differently next time. If a child makes a choice that goes against a boundary they intended to maintain, parents can help them understand what happened and consider how to respond differently next time. As we emphasized previously, our children should continue to hear:

> *"If something goes wrong, please come to us. We'll sort it out together. You don't have to handle it alone."* Their worth and our love for them remain fully secure.

Questions for Reflection

1. Am I helping my child understand the reasons behind our family's rules and values, or am I mainly expecting obedience without discussion?
2. Does my child have opportunities to practice saying no, expressing disagreement respectfully, and maintaining appropriate boundaries—even with people they care about?

THIS WEEK

Put It Into Practice

Choose one age-appropriate value or boundary and discuss it with your child, asking what they believe, why it matters, and what might make it difficult to stand by that conviction.

Then, practice a realistic situation together—such as a peer pressuring them to share private information or participate in something dishonest—and help your child develop a simple response they could use.

At the end of the week, ask yourself: *Did I help my child develop greater confidence in understanding and expressing their own convictions?*

LOOKING AHEAD

A Thought to Carry Forward

Our goal is not simply to raise children who follow rules when we are watching, but to help them develop the wisdom and convictions to make thoughtful decisions when we are not there. A secure sense of worth provides a foundation, discernment helps them recognize what is right, personal convictions guide their choices, and boundaries help them act upon those convictions. These skills make children more resistant to manipulation while reminding them that they never have to face difficult situations alone.

In our final lesson, we will turn our attention outward: helping children recognize the worth of others through gratitude, compassion, and love.