

# BOUNDARIES & CONSENT: OVERVIEW FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

## WHY ARE BOUNDARIES A STRUGGLE FOR TEENS?

The world we live in promotes the violation of boundaries in many ways. We see dominating others as a form of strength, and we encourage kids from a very young age to either “be strong” or “play nice” rather than assert their opinion calmly and compassionately. Teenagers often mimic the power imbalances of our culture in the way hierarchies form in peer groups, because they are developmentally primed to want to fit in with their peers above all else. Many youth will experience situations where they are either silencing their own needs, or forcing other people to go along with their perspective.

## HOW CAN I TEACH MY CHILD TO UPHOLD BOUNDARIES?

In order to shift these patterns, there are things you can do to help your child build the skills of listening to their own needs as well as the needs of others.

## TIPS FOR TEACHING TEENS TO SET & UPHOLD BOUNDARIES

### 1. DISCUSS DIFFERENT FORMS OF BOUNDARY VIOLATIONS

Help your child notice all the different ways that people dominate and harm others (often without intending to). Openly explore why we might be inclined to make fun of someone, gossip about them, or leave them out of our activities. Help them reflect on what it feels like when these things happen to us, and how we are likely to respond (eg. Do we hide away in embarrassment, do we lash out at others?) There are no right or wrong answers, and simply allowing your child to contemplate these issues starts the process of change and empowerment.

### 2. HELP THEM NOTICE THEIR CONFLICT PATTERNS

When they are calm, gently point out to your child any patterns you notice in them, such as becoming aggressive or changing themselves to please others. Help them identify what feelings lead to these actions. Let them know these feelings are ok, and help them make choices to express these feelings in different ways that lead to more helpful outcomes.

### 3. PREPARE THEM FOR ISSUES OF CONSENT

Even though it can be awkward and uncomfortable, we want to openly discuss with our teenagers the common dangers that occur in sexual dynamics between young people. In these conversations, we can help teens think through why these situations might occur, and what steps they can take to make changes when these experiences arise.

### 4. TALK TO THEM ABOUT POWER

Reflect with your child on the experience of having and not having power in relationship dynamics. What does it feel like to be seen as less important? Why is it hard to notice it when we are the one who is holding the power? Reflect on the cultural inequalities that might cause these power imbalances. The more these issues are spoken about openly, the less influence they have on all of us, and the more respect we cultivate for everyone.