

11. Family Boundaries

Clear, concise, consistent boundaries—for all

What happens if you're late to a business meeting? Run a red light? Fail to pay for your morning coffee? Rules and expectations are important. They help establish the do's and don'ts for society and help things run smoothly. But rules are not automatically known; they must be created and learned. That's where parents come in. If young people are not taught early on that there are rules they must follow, they think they can do anything they want at any time. And, while we may like the freedom to make choices, having boundaries to follow—and expectations to live up to—can make life easier for everyone. Family Boundaries is Asset 11 of Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets, the qualities, experiences, and relationships that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

Here are the facts

Research shows that young people are more likely to engage in positive behaviors and attitudes—and less likely to practice high-risk behaviors—if their families set clear rules and consequences and monitor the young people's whereabouts. About 46 percent of young people, ages 11–18, have families with clear rules and consequences and parents or guardians who regularly monitor the young people's whereabouts, according to Search Institute surveys. Working with young people to set boundaries is an important way to show them you care.

Tips for building this asset

As a family, set clear, concise, and consistent boundaries based on your values and expectations. Make sure everyone—not just the children—is following the same rules, although there may be some differences depending on ages and maturity. Be sure to set up clear consequences for family members who break the rules. Also, make it clear everyone must always let the rest of the family know where he or she is.

Also try this

In your home and family: Meet monthly as a family to discuss boundaries: Are they fair? Do they still work? Do they reflect your values and principles? Adjust them as needed.

In your neighborhood and community: Communicate with your neighbors about the rules and boundaries in your family. Ask for their support. For example, neighbors can remind children to ask a parent's permission before accepting sweets.

In your school or youth program: Divide students or participants into groups. Have each group discuss family boundaries and consequences. Identify the reason for each rule.