

Consistent Boundaries Makes Discipline Easier

By Judy H. Wright © 2005 www.ArtichokePress.com

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Homes should be run by parents, not children. So many times, however, either the children are in charge or the parents are so eager to be liked, that whatever rules and standards are talked about, few are enforced, especially on a consistent basis.

Children, whether they are two or 18, feel more confident when they know that you, the adults, are in charge and that their environment is predictable and safe. They need to be taught what is right and wrong, what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, what is appropriate, and what is rude and out of place.

Though they will get mixed or conflicting messages from the television, magazine and friends, they need you to set and enforce clear, respectful rules and limits. They need to know that you expect them to do and be their best. By providing this guidance you will help them learn how to be responsible, contributing members of society.

Consistency in discipline is the number one factor in successful families: It is important that love, respect, cooperation and expectations are unconditional.

Consistent boundaries within the family are pretty predictable ;

for instance:

- • They will grow up knowing that mom and dad must know the 4 Ws before they are allowed to leave with friends. WHO are the friends, WHERE are they going, WHAT are they doing, and WHEN will they be home.
- • A child can count on dinner being at six o'clock or there about.
- • They need to know that bedtime is 8:30 on school nights and that homework is done before playtime.

But sometimes in life, opportunities come up that make boundaries and rules flexible. A relative visits from out of town, so it might be okay for the kids to stay up till 9:30 one night to enjoy the experience. Rules can bend occasionally, but if they get broken, we are all in trouble.

As long as the family knows that in general, there is a structure that they can count on and limits to what is accepted and what is not, they will flourish in a system that gives them guidelines and direction.

Consistent boundaries and standards give a child and the whole family a feeling of security and safety. It is within this environment that self-discipline and life skills begin to flourish and develop.

When we, as a community as well as a family, give consistent messages to our children concerning dangerous and unkind behavior, it will be easier for them to forgo temptation to participate. It is our responsibility as adults to help them learn and live by the basic rule that actions have consequences.

Those children who develop a habit of thinking about the connection will be in a position of strength. Their choices will be immeasurably easier to make because they have been given a framework for decision-making.

Repair or rebuild the boundary, if necessary

I encourage you to be firm, consistent and kind in your discipline. It is vital to always follow through. Don't make threats, make promises. If you take away TV privileges the first time he doesn't take out the garbage, but ignore it the second and third time, he will soon learn that you don't always mean what you say. The child will learn how to be a manipulator, and you will still have the misbehavior to deal with. You are the adult, and so it is your job to repair the fence when it is broken or stretched out.

Boundaries don't fence us in but rather they allow us freedom to grow and develop, knowing that we are safe and loved unconditionally. It is never a guessing game of what will happen but rather a sure foundation.

You can do it. I believe in you. You are doing the most important job in the world, raising self-disciplined, thoughtful and contributing children.

This article was written by Judy H. Wright, author and international speaker on parenting and family issues. For a full listing of books, articles, tele-classes and workshops please go to www.ArtichokePress.com You may also sign up there for FREE articles and newsletters having to do with "finding the heart of the story in the journey of life."