

PEDAGOGICAL INPUT

for the adventure of family life



27_How about boundaries?

Children look for boundaries! Children need boundaries! We seem to believe these statements to be true. But that's not quite the case.

Children do not seek boundaries. They seek contact.

Children want to get to know their parents and other adults. They want to know who they really are. They are looking for the authentic personality of their father and mother. And, in doing so, they of course encounter their parents' limits and overstep them again and again. Children want to know: Is this yes really a yes? Is this no really a no? Children seek authenticity and sense when people are not authentic.

If I say no and have a guilty conscience, then the children will feel it. It's better to say: "I have to think about whether I want to allow you to do that or not. I'll let you know in an hour." That's authentic and the adult is taking himself seriously.

Children need people around them who take their own limitations and needs seriously.

Boundaries per se have no value, but children absolutely need people who can feel themselves, perceive their own needs and take themselves seriously. In relationships, respecting your own boundaries plays an important role. Boundaries arise from my needs. They arise from what I want and don't want, what I like and don't like. Therefore, it's good when parents talk about themselves: "I don't like mopping the floor every day. I want people to take their shoes off when they come into the house." Or: "I want time to myself starting at 8 p.m. today, so I want all the kids to be in their bed/rooms by that time."

Boundaries are often expressed with criticism:

"Turn the music down! Can't you see I can't take it? How many times do I have to tell you?!"

It would be better to talk about yourself here: "I don't want you to listen to music that loud."
Teenagers: "But yesterday you didn't care." Mother: "Yeah, I didn't care yesterday, but today I do. I am tired. I want you to turn the music down a little now. Thanks."

Here there is no criticism of the child, as in the example above, but a clear statement from the adult. When parents clearly express their boundaries using personal language, i.e. when they talk about themselves, what they want and don't want, then this is warm communication because the parents show themselves as they are. This gives parents personal authority and children learn to respect them.

Children learn what is shown to them – even in conflicts.

If, when setting the boundaries, you disregard the children's boundaries by criticizing or insulting them, they will not learn what they are told, but what they are shown. They learn you can violate the boundaries of other people in order to protect your own. Thus, they will increasingly violate the parents' boundaries. On the other hand, when parents talk about themselves without criticizing the children, the children learn how to set boundaries for themselves without hurting the other person.

It's wonderful for little girls when they have a mother who is aware of her own limits and is not always available. This is how the girl learns: We women are allowed to take ourselves seriously and set boundaries for ourselves. Of course, this also applies to boys and fathers.

If you threaten consequences, then you have given up on a relationship.

Parents then no longer expect the child to respect its personality, but instead hope the child is sufficiently afraid of the punishment. And then the important question arises: "Do I want the child to respect me? Or do I want it to be afraid of the penalties?" If I want the child to respect me, then I should show who I am and talk about what I want and what I don't want. This creates closeness and warmth in the relationship. Children want to get to know their parents. The more authentic the parents are, the easier it is for the children.

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