

Setting Boundaries For Your Teens

Helping your children learn to live within limits.

by [Dennis Rainey](#)

Recently I challenged our staff team here at FamilyLife to "draw some lines" in their lifestyles. In other words, establish some boundaries about what they would do and would not do as they sought to walk with God in their everyday lives and in their families. That prompted a wonderful grandmother who has worked in our ministry for more than 10 years to write me a letter about some lines her mother drew for her many years ago:

I remember my mother drawing the line for me when I began to date. She instructed me about how a guy should and should not touch me with his hands. For example, she said to never let a guy place his hand on my knee. I see so many dating couples with their hands on each other's knee or with his hand in her back pocket and I always remember mother's words.

Because that line was drawn, my husband and I remained pure in our four-year dating relationship before we were married. I can remember 40 years ago the pleasure we both experienced when my husband put his hand on my knee as we drove off on our honeymoon---he laughed and said he had been waiting four years to do that!

I am thankful to my mother for helping me draw the line for purity.

What a fresh reminder of the power of a parent who sets boundaries. It takes courage—you certainly won't win any popularity contests with your children. But your children don't need you to be one of their buddies—they need parents who are moral and spiritual leaders. They need parents who love them enough to occasionally "cramp their style." Otherwise they can easily end up like King David's son Adonijah, whom we meet in 1 Kings 1:5-6. He is spoiled, arrogant, and rebellious, and verse six shows why: His father never disciplined him.

So how do you set boundaries? I would begin by prayerfully discussing a few topics with your spouse: What are we going to drink? What magazines and books are we going to read? What movies and television shows will we view? What music will we listen to? Are we going to swear?

At this point I can hear you saying, "Hold it ... why do you keep saying 'we'? I thought you were going to help me with my children?"

I just did.

One problem in Christian families today is that many parents fail to establish limits in their own lives. You need to set standards for your kids that you will keep yourself. Otherwise your children will ask, "Why should I live by a standard that you ignore?"

I'm grateful to God for His gift to me in my wife, Barbara. Back when the kids were little, Barbara starting pressing me about some movies and television shows I watched. In fact, she bugged me about it, and I didn't like it one bit! But I'm glad she bugged me, because her persistence caused me to think about the model I was setting for the kids.

In addition to limits you set in music, movies, and television, here are some questions to help you determine limits in other areas:

Dating: At what age will they begin dating, and with whom? What role will you play in approving dates?

Clothing: Will you allow them to wear grunge? Sexy clothes? What is allowable in prom dresses? And yes, bathing suits—better deal with that one before they turn 13!

Calling boys, or asking boys out for dates: Are you going to let your daughter phone boys? If you don't define it, she will. "Everybody else does it!"

Bedtime: What type of curfew will you set for your teenagers?

Physical affection: Will you let your teenager decide "how far to go" with the opposite sex, or will you challenge them with tough boundaries that reflect holiness and purity?

Friends: Will you play a role in determining whom your kids spend time with, especially when they are 11 or 12 years old? If you don't, then don't expect to have a say in the friends they choose as teenagers.

I often sense a feeling of hopelessness in the Christian community as we look at the evil and worldliness in our culture. It's easy to feel you have no power to change things.

But that is a lie. You do have the power to change things by influencing the most important group in our country—your family. And you start by determining what you believe and what standards you want to establish for your everyday lives.

And remember: The boundaries begin with you. With your choices. Your limits.