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THE JOE TORRE SAFE AT HOME FOUNDATION PRESENTS

UNDERSTANDING CONSENT AND BOUNDARIES

A guide for parents, families, and educators

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WHAT IS CONSENT

Consent means actively agreeing, giving permission, or saying "yes" to participating, engaging, or receiving anything. This might include hugging, getting gifts, sharing supplies, and sexual activity.

Consent and Boundaries are crucial to healthy relationships. Often times consent is mentioned when talking about sexual activity. However, people engage in consent activities every day. A child might ask if they can play a friend's video game or take a turn on the swings. *Boundaries* are limits that people set for themselves to maintain their physical and emotional well-being. Learning from a young age to respect others' boundaries, to set one's own boundaries, and to always receive appropriate consent in relationships, can support children and teens in having lasting healthy relationships.

This guide includes activities and information for parents and families around practicing healthy boundaries, and talking about consent and boundaries with children of all ages!

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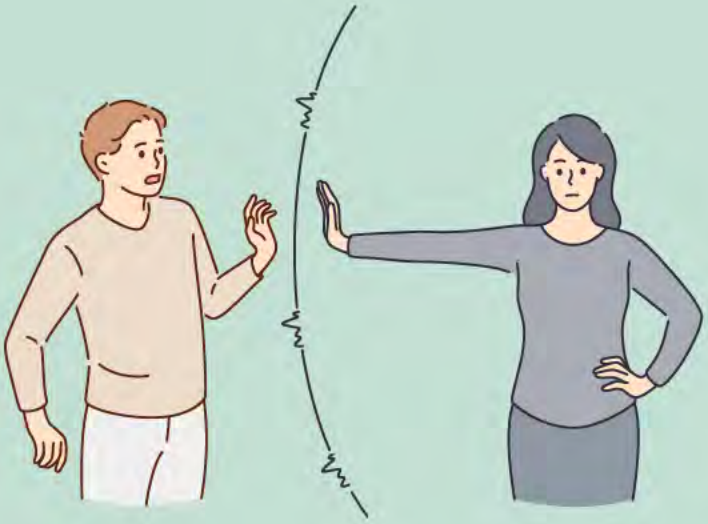
Consent and Boundaries: Media from Safe At Home

Safe Keeping Podcast

Join SAH Staff in a look back at episode 5, as we explore how parents can support their children and teens in talking about boundaries and consent.

Episode 5 -Understanding Consent



Boundaries and Consent for Teens

Visit SAH's YouTube Channel for a video focusing on teaching youth about boundaries and consent as well as how to help a friend who has experienced dating violence or sexual assault.

Boundaries and Consent for Teens

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TALKING ABOUT BOUNDARIES AND CONSENT

With children and teens

WHAT EVERY PARENT NEEDS TO KNOW

Boundaries are rules that we put in place to keep ourselves safe. This can be emotionally or physically.

Consent is actively agreeing to participate in anything. Consent can be given by words or actions, as long as those words or actions create a clear permission and willingness to engage in the activity. Silence or lack of resistance, in and of itself, does not demonstrate consent. It's important to remember that consent can be given or taken away at any moment.

Encourage Self-Agency

Children and teens should be encouraged to set their own boundaries at any age. Forcing young children to hug a family member that they may not want to gives them the impression that they do not have control over their body and choices (when it comes to their boundaries).

Understand All Aspects

Consent is not just about sex! We often talk about consent in regards to sexual intercourse or sexual activities. Consent is something that we all give (or don't give) every day. Did you allow someone to borrow your pen? That's consent! Did you agree to take your child to the park? That's consent! Talking about consent in a broader and age-appropriate sense allows the more "adult" conversations about consent to flow more easily when the time is right.

Lead By Example

Children and teens often learn more from what we do than from what we say! Make your actions match your words. Continue to set your own boundaries in a healthy way. This shows your child or teen how it's done. Healthy ways to set your own boundaries can include saying no to taking on more work projects than you can manage, or ending an uncomfortable conversation in a respectful way.

Teach NO!

It's okay to say "No!" Remind your child or teen that saying no to something they don't want to do is not being rude; it's creating safety. If their friends are pressuring them to do something, they can say "no," mean "no," and continue to have their answer be "no."

Talk to them about ways to say no that make them feel comfortable and unapologetic. Maybe your child doesn't want to attend something they were invited to. Instead of forcing them to go, or telling them to ignore the response, try this: "Thank you for the invitation. I cannot attend. I hope you have fun."

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Learning About Boundaries

A key step in learning about setting boundaries is learning how to accept other people's boundaries. In very small children, this might mean parents reinforce the boundary and provide suggestions. For example, "I know that you want to give Johnny a hug goodbye. Johnny said that he didn't want to. Not everyone feels like hugging all of the time. Do you want to wave goodbye to Johnny instead?"

Asking whether something is OK is one way to learn about someone's boundaries. Learning about boundaries and asking for permission is a great way to explore consent with children of all ages. Here's an example!

The answer could either be an enthusiastic "Yes", which might sound like:

Or the answer could be a "No", which might sound like:

How would you respond to the no?

- Ok!
- Maybe another time.
- That's ok. Would you want to high five instead?
  - The answer could be an enthusiastic "Yes"
  - Or the answer could be a "No

Parents can help support their children through the feelings of disappointment. For example, "I know that you want Alex to be your best friend. He doesn't want to today. We need to respect Alex's boundary here. You asked if it was ok and he said no. It's really tough when we want something and someone else doesn't. It's frustrating and disappointing!"

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How do you set Boundaries

We can practice "setting boundaries" together, by coming up with examples of situations to practice saying "Yes" or "No".

The boxes below show a person asking for permission for a hug from a friend. The first box shows the question. The second box shows the response. The third shows respecting a boundary.

Can I give you a hug?

Naw, I'm good. I don't like hugs.

Ok. Can we high five instead?

Now try your own! In the first box below, draw someone asking you if something is ok. Think about whether you are comfortable or not, and in the second box below draw your response. In the third box below, draw what them respecting your boundary might look like.

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MY BODY BELONGS TO ME

Supporting Children to Develop Body Autonomy

"Body autonomy" means we all control our own bodies and what happens to our bodies. This helps promote body safety in even very small children, and helps build a foundation for understanding consent.

ASK PERMISSION

Try This: In children who are verbal, you can ask before touch. Say: Can I tickle you? Can I pick you up?
In children who are nonverbal or very young, you can narrate touch. This sets the expectation that touch involves communication. Say: I am going to pick you up and put you in the bathtub.

OFFER CHOICES

One way to help your child learn that they are in control of their bodies is to offer choices for how they want to interact with others.

Try This: We are saying goodbye to Grandma now. Do you want to wave goodbye or give her a high five?

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TEACH BODY SAFETY

Explain to your child that there are parts of their body that are special and are just for them. These parts are covered by their bathing suits.

Try This: Sometimes kids need help cleaning in the bath. Mom or Dad might need to help you clean, but this kind of touching is never a secret.

IDENTIFY "SAFE" ADULTS

Explain to your child that adults who are safe do not make them feel scared or uncomfortable.

Try This: It's ok to tell an adult if you are hurt. I want you to be safe because I care about you. If you are hurt or someone is hurting you, I want to listen.

TALK ABOUT CONSENT

Make asking if something is ok a part of how people interact in your family, especially the grownups. Ask if it is ok to borrow a pen, before making plans, etc. Children learn from watching the adults around them!

Try This: I really like this picture of us making dinner together. Is it ok with you if I share it online?

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Thank You!

Thank you for your continued support of Safe At Home's mission to end the cycle of violence! For more information about supporting healthy relationships, self-care, maintaining mental health, and many more topics and activities, please visit joetorre.org/resources