

# Setting boundaries for toddlers

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3 min read

When a child is small, we often use boundaries to protect them and keep them away from harm or danger. But it is important that you explain why boundaries are there – for instance, if you pull away from an open fire explain why. They are exploring their curiosity and independence at this age, which can feel like a battle of wills. Setting clear boundaries is essential for their development and your family life. Our advice can provide practical tips and strategies to help you navigate this challenging phase.

## Key points

- As children grow, most will test the limits. When they become older you may need to change or amend these boundaries to reflect different or new behaviours and experiences
- Make a visual poster of boundaries and ask them to help draw it with little symbols so they feel involved
- When your young child does keep within the boundaries you have set, give them lots of praise and positive attention





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## Coping with resistance

When parents ask a child to do something that they don't want it, it is natural for them to be met with resistance. One way to stop this happening is to let them know why something is important. Boundaries are about setting the bottom line or making agreements about what is acceptable and what is not.

Boundaries work far better if they are made and agreed by everyone. When children see the sense of it, or know you've taken their opinions into account, they are more motivated to co-operate. Although we can understand it is not easy trying to do this with young children.

## Testing your limits

As children grow, most will test the limits – this is quite normal behaviour. When they become older you may need to change or amend these boundaries to reflect different or new behaviours and experiences.

When you do this, involve your child so that you can negotiate the new boundaries together. Too many boundaries can cause resentment and be impossible to maintain. Work out what is really important to you and what you could let go.

Rules can help you keep your child safe, but as they get older you will need to negotiate and let them take more responsibility for their own safety. There may be times when your values conflict with the values that your children are learning from others or from watching something from the TV or online. This may be when you find yourself negotiating and setting boundaries.

## Our top tips for setting boundaries



Setting boundaries with toddlers is an important part of their development. It can help them feel safe, respected, and heard. It can also help them with their social skills and friendships as they get older.

- Remember that setting boundaries can sometimes make children feel safe when the world seems otherwise out of control
- Occasionally giving children responsibility for their own safety is a good thing
- Get books to help you reinforce your message, the library or book stores will have lots of different books that are age appropriate
- It is ok to try lots of different ways before you find a method that works well for your family
- When your young child does keep within the boundaries you have set, give them lots of praise and positive attention
- Allow them time to practice and understand that they may slip up now and again
- Use positive language when you are asking them to do something
- Give them choices out of two options so they feel they have choices but it helps you to manage activities or what you are doing next
- Praise positive behaviour as much as possible
- Make a visual poster and ask them to help draw it with little symbols so they feel a part of it

## Further Resources

If you would like further support and advice, call our helpline on 0808 800 2222 or email us at [askus@coramfamilylives.org.uk](mailto:askus@coramfamilylives.org.uk). You can talk to us online via our [live chat](#) service or message us via WhatsApp on 07441 444125 to connect with experienced professional family support workers and highly-trained volunteers. You may find it helps to find out how other parents and carers have coped with this on our [online forums](#). We also have a range of free self-guided [online parenting courses](#) that can help through the ages and stages of parenting.

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