

Basic Boundaries Activity

Step 1: Sit you child down. Have pencil and paper and a stopwatch (phone, kitchen timer, microwave timer) ready.

Step 2: Draw the diagram explaining each piece.



Comfort zone: centered, balanced, happy medium, at peace

Uncomfortable zone: Physically uncomfortable: in pain, cold / hot, hungry / thirsty, fatigued / restless

Emotionally uncomfortable: worried, anxious, mad, frustrated, embarrassed, sad, offended, ashamed, scared, stressed, impatient

Boundary: Like in sports, when a ball goes out of bounds. Everything stops. Reset.

Panic zone: freaked out, flipped out, snapped, lost it, lost control, hysterical, melt down, temper tantrum

Step 3: *Feel* each part of the diagram. Challenge your child to hold their breath, and do it with them. Notice when you're comfortable, when you first notice an impulse to breathe – that's your boundary. Raise your hand when you feel the boundary being crossed. Keep going and feel it getting progressively more uncomfortable, until you cross the second line (the "I can't take it anymore" line) and gasp.

Point to the different zones on the diagram as you talk about them.

Notice that different people have different boundaries and panic lines! This is where the Golden Rule (do unto others as you'd have done unto you) fails! It's impossible to predict someone else's boundary.

Alternatives: If your child has triggers around breathing (asthma, other issues), try feeling each part of the diagram by holding ice instead. You can also play with the volume on a stereo, or a light using a dimmer switch, even how close you bring your hands to a fire or hot tea kettle.

Step 4: Talk about healthy and unhealthy boundaries.

The price of Unhealthy Boundaries:

If you have unhealthy boundaries, you're unable to take care of yourself. You might make decisions you later regret. You can't predict what you can handle, so you might overcommit yourself. If you're not doing what you say you'd do, or you're doing things you said you wouldn't do, there's a lack of integrity. Ultimately, you see this about yourself and your self-esteem suffers.

You may not have the bandwidth to take care of others, which means you're not a great friend or partner. In fact, others might feel they need to take care of you (since you're not taking care of you) and so it might be stressful to be around you. If you're not true to your word, others won't find you trustworthy.

Healthy Boundaries: You feel the boundary line and take action to move back into your comfort zone. You problem solve and take care of yourself!

Step 5: Ask your child to reflect, out loud or by journaling.

1. Where are you right now on the diagram?
2. What's an example of a time you felt comfortable? Uncomfortable? Panicked?
3. How do you tolerate discomfort? What's your coping mechanism at the Panic line?
4. What are some ways that we cross each other's boundaries?
5. What's one time when you had healthy boundaries?
6. Where would you like to have healthier boundaries?