

Creating and Respecting Boundaries

Creating and maintaining a healthy, working foster relationship requires creating and respecting boundaries. You cannot have one without the other. All sides of the foster team have their own life experiences, opinions, perceptions, and sensitivities. Because of this, sensitivity and empathy are necessary to have a healthy foster relationship with other members of the team. The first rule is to understand the other person and empathize with them as best you can.

Boundaries are specific to the individual. Something that may be perfectly acceptable to one person is offensive to another – particularly foster/adoptive language. You'll find that when you're trying to cultivate a meaningful relationship, the wrong use of foster language can get in the way. It's always a good idea to ask which foster terms are preferred before having an in depth conversation. This shows respect and concern for the other party.

Like most things in this life, communication is crucial and necessary for relationships of any kind. Communicate what your boundaries are to all other members of the foster team. Let them know what makes you feel uncomfortable and what is acceptable. This is an important step, a crucial step. For example, what name would you prefer to be addressed by? What is your preferred method of communication? These are all important boundaries that should be established as soon as possible. Foster care workers are a great resource to help parents/foster parents determine and establish boundaries around phone calls, visits to the home, sharing of goods, support structure, communication, or other things that may arise.

In order to maintain a relationship by respecting boundaries, it is important to reassess the situation regularly. Every so often, get together with the other members of the foster team. You'll find that your boundaries and the boundaries of others can change, and progress. The decided on boundaries will need to be re-evaluated to make sure every person on the team is comfortable with moving forward. Reaffirmation of boundaries will demonstrate your desire to have a healthy foster relationship.

Reference: <http://www.parentprofiles.com/pregnancy-articles/creating-and-respecting-boundaries>

As a review, here are the basic steps to establishing and maintaining health boundaries in a healthy relationship. These even extend outside the realm of foster. It is applicable for all relationships:

- Determine your own boundaries; they should not be too rigid or loose- remember to empathize and imagine yourself in other's situations
- Vocalize your boundaries and stick to them – remain consistent
- Listen, understand, and respect the other person's boundaries
- Come to a common understanding and agreement after your discussion of boundaries
- Live within those relationship boundaries
- Re-evaluate those boundaries a little while down the road
- Start the process all over again

By establishing boundaries and respecting everyone involved in the foster process and in the foster team, you will find that worthwhile and beneficial relationships are within reach.