

Boundaries:

A Research-based Rule and Boundary-setting Program for Parents/Caregivers and Youth

www.ndsu.edu/4h/youth_development/boundaries

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Purpose: The idea for *Boundaries* originated with the Beulah, North Dakota Ministerial Association. The Association recognized a need in the community to offer programming for parents and youth related to rule setting or boundaries. When the Association's members realized a program such as this did not exist, a committee formed to begin working alongside NDSU Extension specialists to develop a program to meet the need in the community.

Boundaries, available both through NDSU Extension and eXtension, provides guidance not only for parents and caring adults in setting and enforcing appropriate rules or boundaries for youth, but the program also teaches youth to set their own boundaries and make good decisions. *Boundaries* was written for 7th through 12th grade youth and their parents or caring adults. Due to the growing interest in *Boundaries* and the need for the same type of program for a younger audience, *Boundaries* was adapted for youth in 3rd through 6th grades and their parents or caring adults. This new version of the curriculum, *Boundaries Jr.*, teaches the same concepts as *Boundaries*, but the activities, examples used, and terminology are tailored to younger youth.

Objectives: Four overarching program objectives guide both programs. Participants should be able to:

- Recognize why boundaries are important.
- Understand how boundaries reflect personal values.
- Identify negotiable and non-negotiable rules.
- Respectfully work through disagreements with authority figures.

Curriculum: Both curriculums are structured into five interactive educational sessions designed to be taught over five consecutive weeks. Each session incorporates a variety of teaching methods to facilitate learning. For example, participants engage in icebreakers, guided discussions, video clips, hands-on learning activities such as role playing and group brainstorming, and take-home assignments.

Impacts: To date, approximately 150 youth and adults have completed either *Boundaries* or *Boundaries Jr.* The retrospective session evaluations suggest that for both curriculums, youth and adult participants gained knowledge and understanding related to the objectives for each session. For example, youth indicated a 50% improvement both in knowing how to respectfully work through boundary disagreements with authority figures and in understanding the process of internalizing values. Additionally, adult participants reported a 71% improvement in better understanding their individual parenting style and a 75% increase in understanding how their parenting style impacts the youth in their lives. Overall, there was a 63% increase for both youth and adult participants in knowing strategies to set, change, and negotiate rules in a family setting.

Evaluation comments from the youth participants show how *Boundaries* or *Boundaries Jr.* impacted them:

- "I should and can negotiate with my parents."
- "Rules are a good thing and serve a purpose."
- "I should act now how I want to be looked at in the future."

Likewise, evaluation comments from the adult participants demonstrate how the two programs influenced them:

- "Communication is more important than I realized."
- "Give youth more room to negotiate boundaries."
- "Repeated, consistent consequences are crucial."

Overall, the evaluation data illustrate the positive impact the curriculums are having on both youth and their caring adults alike. Developed originally to fill the need in a small community in North Dakota, both *Boundaries* and *Boundaries Jr.* are now guiding youth and adults across North Dakota in setting and negotiating rules in a family setting.

Implementation: Implementation of both *Boundaries* and *Boundaries Jr.* offers an opportunity to build youth development partnerships, deliver programming focused on protective factors for youth, and enhance 4-H program offerings. Four key steps in successful implementation of the programs are included here:

- A key first step is to identify and collaborate with community partners interested in targeted programming for youth and parents addressing important protective factors for youth. In this case, the protective factors focus on family connectedness, regulation of youth behavior, and healthy youth decision making. As a case example, the original group of partners that conceptualized *Boundaries* included the county Extension agent, Mercer County Youth Bureau, a local ministerial association, and local law enforcement personnel. Formation of a program committee comprised of individuals in the community with a background or interest in youth development is helpful. The committee also serves as group from which to pull facilitators to implement and promote the programs in the community.
- A second key step for successful implementation is to address training, timing, and location needs. Make sure that key facilitators are trained and are comfortable with the content, learning activities, and program delivery. Timing is important in order to maximize support from partners such as local schools, youth ministry programs, and others who may offer activities involving youth and their parents. Facility use may include the county Extension office. However, if the programs are delivered in a community apart from the county Extension office, a school or library are both good minimal or no-cost options that typically have video equipment available.
- A targeted recruitment effort is the third key step for successful implementation of either version the program. Both curriculums target both youth and their parents or the caring adults in their lives. Since *Boundaries* (7th through 12th grades) and *Boundaries Jr.* (3rd through 6th grades) are each written for somewhat wide age spans of youth, it can be helpful to target smaller age ranges, such as youth in 7th through 9th grades and then youth in 10th and 11th grades. Participants are typically recruited through referrals from local schools, law enforcement agencies, or youth-serving agencies. Also, invitation letters could be sent to all age appropriate youth and their families in the schools in the community where the programs are being offered. Additionally, announcements should be placed in local media outlets and shared with local faith communities and community centers to reach other youth and their families who live in the community but may attend a different school or be schooled at home.
- Consistent effort and follow-up is the final key step in making the programs work for youth and their families. Since both *Boundaries* and *Boundaries Jr.* are more intensive than a one-shot program and involve youth and their families, getting started may require a greater commitment of energy and time. However, results to date suggest both programs are effective in serving as a common point of focus for youth community support and in delivering effective programming focusing on youth protective factors.

Both *Boundaries* and *Boundaries Jr.* offer multi-faceted educational opportunities that can be effectively used in 4-H youth development work. In addition, potential partners include schools, Scouting organizations, Boys and Girls Clubs, juvenile justice programs, youth ministry groups, and other youth-serving entities.

Both programs offer guidance in rule setting using adult-youth partnerships while incorporating key protective factors that can offset the effects of unhealthy influences while fostering resiliency in today's youth. With roots in 4-H youth development, both programs aim to reach youth and their families beyond North Dakota to further positive youth development nationwide.

Positive Outcomes of *Boundaries*

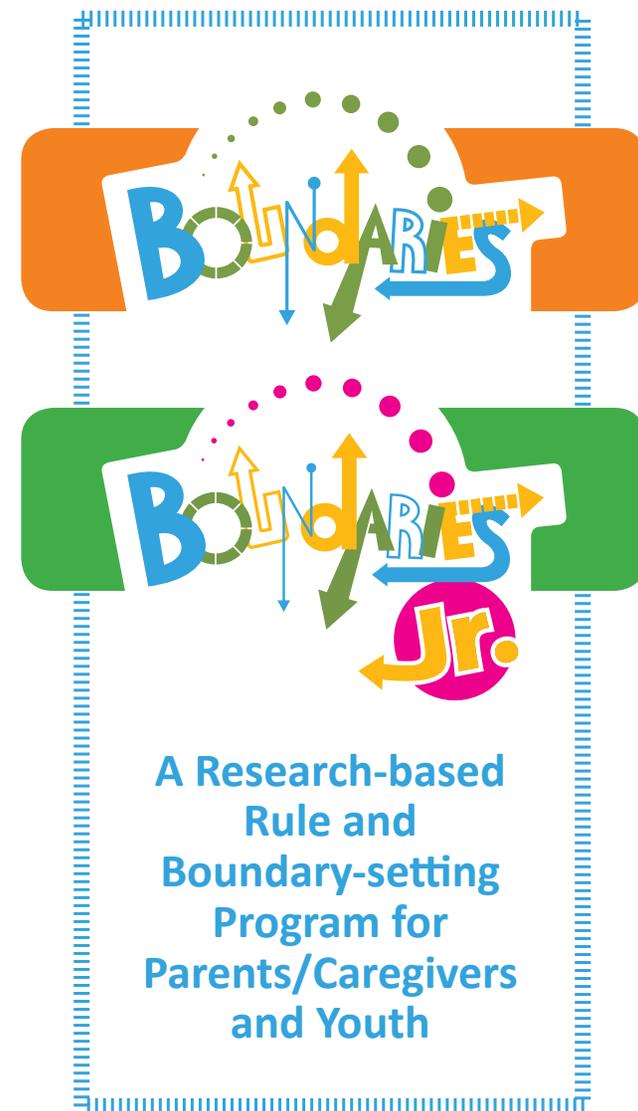
Participation in *Boundaries* will teach parents/caregivers how to use boundary setting to:

- Avoid conflict with youth
- Encourage responsibility and self-management
- Resolve problems
- Prevent pointless, frustrating, no-win power struggles
- Establish a foundation of mutual trust, consideration and respect

Basic Concepts

The core concepts from which *Boundaries* was developed include:

- **Rules** and **procedures** refer to stated expectations regarding behavior (Emmer, 2006).
- **Boundaries/rules** are a reflection of values of family, school, faith communities and organizations.
- A youth's job is to **push** boundaries; the parents'/caregivers' job is to **set** them.
- Youth come face to face with their parents'/caregivers' values. Their decision is whether to incorporate those values into their lives as they grow (Walsh, 2007).
- Adults also follow these concepts in new relationships and work settings.



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Who is in the driver's seat: the parent or the child?

As we look at setting boundaries for youth, this is one of the questions we must ask ourselves.

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EXTENSION





What is *Boundaries*?

NDSU Extension developed *Boundaries* to offer programming for parents/caregivers and youth related to rule setting.

Program Objectives

Parent/caregiver and youth participants will:

- Recognize why boundaries are important
- Understand how boundaries reflect personal values
- Identify negotiable and non-negotiable rules in their lives
- Work through disagreements with authority figures respectfully

What Does *Boundaries* Include?

The interactive program includes videos, homework and hands-on activities to encourage learning for parents/caregivers and youth.

The program includes five weeks of material:

- The **first two weeks** focus on the need for boundaries and understanding how and why rules are set in different contexts and environments. During the first two sessions, parents/caregivers and youth are together.
- During **weeks three and four**, youth and parents/caregivers are in separate sessions. Youth focus on Working Alongside Authority and Setting Their Own Boundaries. Parents/caregivers learn about Parenting Styles and Setting Rules for Youth.
- The **final week** includes a lesson on setting rules and boundaries as a family.



Who is the Target Audience?

Boundaries is written for youth in grades seven through 12 and their parents or caregivers.

Boundaries Jr. is available for younger youth who are in grades three through six and their parents or caregivers.

Outline of Sessions

Week 1: Boundaries, Boundaries, Boundaries

Week 2: They Are Everywhere

Week 3: Parents/Caregivers – Parenting Styles; Youth – Working Alongside Authority

Week 4: Parents/Caregivers – Setting Rules for Youth; Youth – Setting Your Own Boundaries

Week 5: Setting Family Rules

Cost: \$25/version if purchased (Free to NDSU Extension)

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Boundaries Chart

Activity for Session 2

Contact: meagan.scott@ndsu.edu
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On each topic line, **write a rule** unique to each environment listed at the top of the columns.

	Friends	Family	School/Activities	Work
Technology Use				
Time/Curfew				
Language				
Eating/Drinking				
Dress/Tattoos/ Piercings				
How We Treat Others				
How We Treat Ourselves				
Privacy				
Safety				
Relationships/ Sexual Behavior				
Money				
Routine				

