



Erasmus + VET Strategic Partnership

**IENE 8 - Empowering migrant and refugee families with parenting skills**

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**Bite-sized Learning Tool no. 1.2**

**BOUNDARIES IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT (2-6 YEARS)**

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Irena Papadopoulou and Runa Lazzarino

Middlesex University

August 2019



National and Kapodistrian  
University of Athens



*This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.  
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## BOUNDARIES IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

This bite-sized learning unit will address what healthy boundaries are and their specific relevance to the refugee parent-child relationship. Advice will also be provided on how to set and maintain healthy boundaries.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To briefly explain what healthy boundaries are especially in relation to refugee families in transit.
2. To discuss why setting healthy boundaries is important for refugee families in transit
3. To propose ways of how to set and maintain healthy boundaries

### WHAT ARE BOUNDARIES IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Boundaries are about setting a limit or making agreements about what is acceptable and what is not. In parent-young child relationships, the adult sets and maintains healthy boundaries in order to guide and protect the child. This intergenerational boundary is core to healthy parent-child relationships where the role of the parent and that of the child are separate and clear.



Refugee families in transit often have to face the disruptions of family structure and parenting roles, values, and practices. The extreme and unique conditions of refugee families contribute to the risk of a loss of identity and control as parents. Furthermore, parent's emotionally distraught state can lead to unhealthy boundaries, such as overprotectiveness, harshness, and reversal of parent-child role. Refugee children's internalising and externalising behaviour problems require the

establishment of limits as well as a sense of being protected. Finally, the time and space conditions of uncertainty and danger of unsettled refugee families require the establishment of protective boundaries. All this make healthy boundaries crucial for refugee families.

### KEY POINTS

**Types of Boundaries:** Important boundaries in parent-child relationship are:

1. Physical boundaries. This limit can be physical and tangible, such as one's own body. This involves explaining to a child that their body belongs only to themselves, as well as what appropriate touch is. Explaining, "Daddy's body belongs to him" and "Your body belongs to

you” is a good place to start. The conversation can, over time, add information about other issues on this topic such as what is appropriate touch, the importance of telling parents or teachers if an adult suggested or did things to them that made him /her feel uncomfortable or ashamed and so on. Other physical boundaries may have to do with establishing where children can play, e.g. in front of the tent only.

2. Emotional boundaries. Teaching children that it is not okay to say hurtful things to others is an example of an emotional boundary. Teasing would be another way of crossing a person’s emotional boundaries. Respect and kindness are instead positive attitudes to be taught to children.



3. Behavioural boundaries. Behavioural boundaries can include the two types of boundaries described above, and refer to appropriate behaviours, or codes of conduct, often linked to safety. Children must be helped to understand that, for instance, drinking water from a puddle, throwing stones, crossing the road without the supervision of an adult are all life-threatening behaviours.

### Boundaries Explained

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 you are saying ‘no’ - for instance, if you pull them away from an open fire, explain why.

As children grow, most will test the limits of the boundaries you set- 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. For older children, giving them some responsibility for their own safety is a good thing.

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. It is very important to learn to be patiently assertive without being harsh or getting angry or over-irritated. Always give choices and set rules from a place of compassion. However, let children suffer the consequences that come with breaking the agreed rules.

### Boundaries as Safety Net for All

Remember that setting boundaries can sometimes make refugee children and parents feel safe when the world seems otherwise out of control. Expectations should be clear and positive. Evidently, this is extremely relevant for unsettled refugee families whose life has been totally disrupted. The establishment of an agreed daily and family routine for example is reassuring for all



family members. Agreed routine and rules allows the perpetuation of cultural habits for examples, while also allowing the safeguarding of everyone’s time and space. Having a visual calendar or a poster for routine, chores, and rules can be very helpful, and fun to create altogether.

### ACTIVITY

Try to make your own creative visual poster of a daily or weekly schedule, chores, or of the family rules and values. Make this as a fun activity to do with your children and all the family members. Plan in rewards for achievements.



## REFLECTION ON ONE ISSUE FROM THIS BITESIZED

## SELF ASSESSMENT

Boundaries are not that relevant to refugee families	True	False
Older children will often try to test the boundaries set by their parents	True	False
It is not important to explain rules to toddlers as they will not understand	True	False
Negotiating boundaries would imply a loss of parental control	True	False
Visual schedules can help the entire family stick to a routine and reduce conflicts	True	False

## REFERENCES

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[https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/boundaries and expectations are important parenting tools](https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/boundaries_and_expectations_are_important_parenting_tools)

<https://childmind.org/article/teaching-kids-boundaries-empathy/>

## PHOTOS' CREDITS

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