Module 2: Setting boundaries

In this module we'll be talking about the importance of setting boundaries

People sometimes say that children need to know their limits. I disagree. What they need to know is that we need to respect other people's boundaries.

1. **Set boundaries towards other people** (including your child/ren)
   Setting your own boundaries towards people to show your child that that's how adults deal with personal limits is important for your child to learn and also for him to understand that it's not just HIM you're setting boundaries for.

Setting boundaries to your child and pulling through with your decision is just as important, even when he or she starts to cry, to threaten, to get angry etc. because if you give in, the problem is not that you just 'lost' the battle but there might be serious danger for the future.

Let me give you an example that hit home with me when I read it in a book:

Imagine you haven't been keeping your boundaries up, giving in too often when your daughter has been begging and crying for you to change your mind about her getting something.
As a teenager she might be at a party with her best friend who is trying to convince your daughter that it would be fun to try drugs with some guys they just

met. Your daughter initially says no but when her friend starts saying things like ‘You’re so boring’ or ‘I won’t be your friend any longer if you don’t do it’ etc. your daughter gives in and tries the drugs. She learned from you that when someone nags and begs enough, giving in is what you do.

From the moment I read this a few years ago I always kept it in mind when my daughter(s) didn’t accept a No from me (even little things like ‘Can I have a lolly’).

This doesn't mean you have to say No to everything.
It’s your choice what you allow and not allow or buy and don’t buy, however, the

point is that once you've said No it's best to stick to it.
Therefore, when your child asks you to do or buy something, wait a moment before answering and think about whether a No is appropriate or not. If you feel it's appropriate then set your boundaries in a calm way.
Chances are that your child will not like your answer and get upset. It's ok to say No and it's ok to get upset about it so let your kid be angry/sad/frustrated etc. How to react we'll discuss in the next module.

That you give your child as much freedom as possible doesn't mean you say Yes to everything either.
It means you treat her as an equal and respect her choices.

When she makes a choice and there's no danger in sight and your intuition tells you it's ok too, then there should be no reason for you to deny her the freedom to choose what she wants for herself.

An example for danger would be:
Someone who gives off signs of being a potential predator asks your daughter if she'd like him to take her to the playground to play with his niece and your daughter says Yes. If this was your friend with kids who are your daughter's friends asking her this, it would be your daughter's choice to agree to go along or not but in this case you're having to protect her from a potential danger so you'll make the last call and say No.

An example for intuition:

Your teenage daughter wants to go to a party with her friends. Your intuition tells you No and you have been watching your behavior. In this case it would be an option to find a way for you to make sure she'll be safe (taking her and picking her up or letting her older sibling go with her if everybody is ok with this) or to simply turn down her wish to go to the party explaining your reasons and expecting for her to get upset, naturally.

Every person, family and situation is different and you're the one who has to think, feel, observe and then make a decision in each moment of course.

´Do you want to play with me?´
When your daughter asks you to play with her, be honest:

- ‘No, I don’t feel like playing anything right now. Thanks’
- ‘I’m just in the middle of X but I can play in Y minutes/later.’
- ‘Yes. What would you like to play?’ If she wants to play something you absolutely don’t enjoy then be honest: ‘When we play it has to be fun for all of us and I don’t enjoy playing X. Would you like to play Y with me?’ Then just converse with her until you find something that both of you like to play and play until either one of you has had enough.
- ‘Yes. I have X minutes. Let’s go!’

If you are able to be true to yourself and set your boundaries in a respectful way your child will learn to do the same.

2. **Respect other people's boundaries, including your child's.**
   When he or she says No you have to stop whatever you're trying to do (unless it's an emergency situation). Children need to feel that what they say also has meaning in this world and that they have control over their lives.
   This is a worst case scenario but imagine your child is used to his parents and teachers not respecting his boundaries. He learns that he has to do what he's told. If a predator comes along and wants to molest your child he's more likely to be his victim because he can't say no.
   And if your child learns that you don't have to stop when another person says No he won't stop when another child

says Enough which will most likely lead to trouble and confusion.

I could give you an extended list of ‘stupid’ things I’ve done in my life because of the fact that I wasn’t able to set my boundaries and say No. One example: I got married when I was 21 years old to someone I didn’t love.

3. **Let others set their boundaries towards your child** instead of stepping in every time he does something that you think might be bothering them.
   As you probably are not a mind reader you cannot know whether a person might be or get bothered by your child’s behavior so instead of trying to avoid your kid (or YOU) from being told off, wait and see. Most of the time people

won’t say anything or even give you a look (They’re simply truly not bothered). You will have saved many unnecessary ‘No’s’, ‘Stop’s’, ‘Don’ts’ that make you more of an authority every time and take bits of your child’s authority away.

If a person will say something he’ll most likely do it in a friendly and respectful way and your child can own up to the action that bothered the person. It will be his responsibility to stop and think about it, whereas if you say something beforehand you will be the one responsible for him having to stop.

4. **Set boundaries for your child**

If you see that your child is unsure about saying No even though it’s clear he

doesn’t want something then step in and say something like: ‘He doesn't seem to want this. Please stop.’ There’s nothing else you need to say to your child. He now knows that it’s ok to say No to others and when he’s ready to do it himself he’ll say No.

And if your child asks you to tell the other kid/person that she doesn't want/like to X, then you can do that in a friendly way. Your child will learn to set boundaries bit by bit.