

THE NEST

A CCS Resource for Discipleship in the Home

BOUNDARIES

Dr. Henry Cloud on boundaries with kids and teens.

Boundaries. It's a word that many people love to hate. I mean, really, who enjoys the word, "no"? Boundaries are one of those things that are often just out of our peripheral until all of a sudden they urgently require attention. Like most roads in Saskatchewan, we all know the rumble strip is there but it has a way of jolting us awake when we drift!

One of the most helpful voices and writers on boundaries is Dr. Henry Cloud. He has authored and co-authored several books focusing on personal boundaries, boundaries with kids, teens, leadership and marriage.

"A boundary is a 'property line' that defines a person; it defines where one person ends and someone else begins. If we know where a person's boundaries are, we know what we can expect this person to take control of: himself or herself. We can require responsibility in regard to feelings, behaviours, and attitudes."

A word that is closely related is *agency*. It is "the sense of control that you feel in your life, your capacity to influence your own thoughts and behaviour, and have faith in your ability to handle a wide range of tasks and situations."

Healthy boundaries lead to strong agency. A Christ-centred, Spirit-led agency is the ultimate vision for our parenting.



In A Glance:

A Boundary is a "property line" that defines a person; it defines where one person ends and someone else begins."

Agency is the sense of control that you feel in your life, your capacity to influence your own thoughts and behaviour.

Clear boundaries result in:

- A well-defined sense of who they are
- What they are responsible for
- The ability to choose
- The understanding that if they choose well, things will go well, and if they choose poorly, they will suffer
- The possibility of true love based in freedom

You need to interpret a child's behaviour as a response to your own [behaviour] as well as in terms of his motives, needs, personality and circumstances.

Cloud comments, “Children are not born with boundaries . . . a child needs to know where she begins, what she needs to take responsibility for, and what she does not need to take responsibility for.”

Cloud, a little tongue-in-cheek, describes “children are little people who are out of control of themselves and attempting to control everyone around them. They do not want to take control to adapt to the requirements of Mom and Dad; they want Mom and Dad to change the requirements!”



THE POWER OF BOUNDARIES:

If boundaries are clear, children develop several qualities:

- A well-defined sense of who they are
- What they are responsible for
- The ability to choose
- The understanding that if they choose well, things will go well, and if they choose poorly, they will suffer
- The possibility of true love based in freedom

Cloud summarizes to say: *the essence of boundaries is self-control, responsibility, freedom, and love.*

KIDS NEED PARENTS WITH BOUNDARIES:

A sobering thought from Cloud is this: “You need to interpret a child’s behaviour as a response to your own [behaviour] as well as in terms of his motives, needs, personality and circumstances.” Cloud states that in general children do not know what they’re doing. They are still learning what works and what doesn’t and that children will mature to the level the parent structures them, and no higher.

A classic example of this is when my friend and mentor describes the experience of his exasperated spouse asking, “Why do the girls clean when you ask but not when I ask?” My mentor gently responded, “Because our girls have discovered that if they say no enough times that you’ll do it for them.” My friend’s spouse acknowledged this was true - especially with the more stubborn of the two children. As a peace-maker and seeker, my friend’s spouse would rather avoid the confrontation and just do the cleaning. The teenager came to learn that after two or three rounds of resistance, the parent would give in and the job would be done and she could head to her friend’s house.

Now - Cloud has tons of chapters on all kinds of helpful topics from friends, to alcohol and relationships (especially in his book *Boundaries for Teens*). I think the thing that stands out is that we as parents want to find that balance between pushing and challenging our students toward agency and knowing when it is the compassionate and gracious thing to alleviate the pressure or pain. A good boundary is meant to be a muscle-growing moment - for their heart, mind, and spirit - so they continue to mature and develop the character muscles of responsibility and agency. I would highly recommend picking up these books and having some conversation together in your home about healthy boundaries!

Resources for the shelf:

