

Family Boundaries Without Punishment

Use this guide to describe what you can offer, what you cannot do, and what you will do yourself. It is written for family members and other supporters making ordinary practical arrangements with another adult.

Keep completed notes private. Use short notes in each box; continue on another copy or separate paper when needed. Save the completed PDF on your device and reopen it to check your notes before closing.

SAMHSA encourages supportive listening and attention to caregivers' own health. The boundary examples below are original communication prompts; they are not a tested treatment method or rules every household should adopt. [1] [2]

Original examples: describe your own action

A situation	A clear limit and an offer	Why the wording helps
Repeated requests for rides	I can drive on Tuesday after work. I cannot leave work every day. Let's ask about another option for Thursday.	States actual availability and a practical next step.
Late-night nonurgent calls	I will answer ordinary planning calls before 9 p.m. We can choose another time to talk tomorrow.	Describes your availability; does not promise to cover urgent needs.
Pressure to make a decision	I am not able to agree to that today. I need time to understand what you are asking.	Allows time without making a threat.

Check the boundary before saying it

- Does it describe an action or resource that is actually mine to decide?
- Can I say it without demanding a confession, agreement or change of feeling?
- Am I offering help I can realistically give?
- Have I separated an ordinary arrangement from an urgent or unsafe situation?

Prepare one conversation

The practical issue

Describe what has happened and what it affects for you, without assigning a label.

My limit and any offer

I can __. I cannot __. If helpful, I can offer __ instead.

How I will follow through and seek support

An action within my control; a trusted person or professional to help me think it through.

If the situation involves safety, housing or control

Do not use this worksheet as an eviction notice, punishment plan or confrontation script. If stating a limit could expose you to threats or harm, seek individual support before attempting the conversation. Serious safety or housing questions need help specific to that situation.

Revisit what can change

An arrangement can be reviewed as circumstances change. Another adult may disagree; this exercise cannot guarantee their response or decide either person's rights.

Sources and Further Reading

[1] SAMHSA: Helping Families Cope

<https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/children-and-families/coping-resources>

[2] SAMHSA: Talking to Someone About Help

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/helping-someone/how-to-talk-to-someone-about-help>