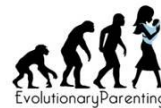


SHARING CONTROL

AN EMAIL COURSE ON
DISCIPLINE ACROSS THE
AGES



Welcome to Week 2 of Sharing Control. Hopefully you've had the chance to take stock of the children in your life (whether your own kids or those you teach or care for) and had a chance to figure out where your own expectations may be hindering your relationship and your sanity. If you haven't done this yet, I strongly recommend at least looking at the Homework from Week 1 before moving on to boundaries as the boundaries you set will be dependent upon the developmental capacities of the child(ren) in question and your expectations for them.

I find most parents struggle with the concept of boundaries in our society primarily because the response to most acts of misbehaviour or tantrums is to tell parents they need to set *more* boundaries. If you set more then things will be okay. You can see this advice in modern discipline books, but also even in some gentle circles where parents are led to believe that if they just put themselves more in charge, things will be better. This suggestion really implies that parents need to have absolute authority over their children and that the key to a well-behaved child is obedience.

I disagree. Strongly.

What we will focus on this week is looking at the issue of control and how it pertains to boundaries. Importantly, we will take the time to look at what boundaries should be considered (versus how they are treated in our society), how to teach boundaries, how to determine if boundaries are appropriate, and again a final look at common issues and how we can think of these in terms of what boundaries we looking to teach and what areas of control we have over them.



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Section 1: Control

“You must be in control or your kids will run all over you!”

This is the common mantra preached to parents today in our Western culture. The idea is that to parent effectively and successfully, you are supposed to be the one in charge, the one in control, the Alpha. This is true in a very particular sense, but the problem is that many people have failed to understand how this is true and instead have focused on a very, very narrow definition of control that actually undermines the true control we need.

I ask you all to first think back to school all those years ago (if you weren't homeschooled, if you were, please think to other teachers for other classes you may have had or your own parents). I'm sure you had a mix of teachers. Now think about the best teacher you had and the qualities that made them the best teacher. Did they scream, yell, punish the students regularly? Probably not. Were they fair, set realistic expectations, and were willing to listen to you? Probably. Though we know from our own lives how those who exert that coercive control over us may get us to fall in line quickly, these people do nothing for us emotionally, relationally, and we certainly don't learn much from them as we spend too much time focused on avoiding their wrath. We also can probably pinpoint some people that seem to get everything together without actually forcing people to do as they wish; it feels like they just have a gift for getting people to go along.

It is those latter folks who have found true control. They do not attempt to force or coerce others into doing things, but rather focus on the areas they *do* have natural control over and maximize those while treating others with kindness and respect. This provides others with their own levels of control which means they come to things through choice which is essential if we are going to learn and grow. When things go wrong, these people remain calm and are able to help others during that time, often still getting done what's needed, despite the setbacks.

This is how it has to be with our children.

When we speak of control with our kids, we do have natural authority over them in many ways, but how we choose to express this control is what will affect the relationship we have with our kids. The first point of business is to realize where your domain of control is and is not.

Your Domain of Control	Not Your Domain of Control
Your emotions	Their emotions
Your behaviours	Their behaviours
Your reactions	Their reactions
The environments	(The environments – depending on age)
Safety	

I know this may seem overly simplistic and perhaps you think I'm joking, but I'm not. The key issue here is that despite what you may have been led to believe, you have no domain over other people's emotions, behaviours, and reactions to situations unless we are dealing in the realm of safety in which case all bets are off and do whatever you need to do. If you can accept this, it will open up an entirely new way of interacting with the children in your life.

Now, I understand that for parents especially this can seem hard because when our kids are babies and infants, we actually do have some control over what they do because they need us to move around. This is why the toddler years become so difficult for so many – that budding independence is a hard thing to fight and also a hard thing to accept if you are used to getting your way. In a classroom it's no different because the expectation for teachers is that they will have this remarkable control over multiple kids at once. But the most successful parents and teachers are those who relinquish this dream of control.

You may ask if we don't have control over others, what do we have? Well, first we have our emotions and our behaviour. It shouldn't be surprising that children learn so readily from modeling that we really are teaching by how we behave; we may not want to look in the mirror, but sometimes the very behaviours we are trying so hard to control in our kids have actually come from us. Learning to control our own emotions and the subsequent behaviours is essential if we are to have a chance at helping our kids.

Second, we have our reactions. Too often people mistake a lack of control as giving in to children. Let me be perfectly clear: *Giving in against your better judgment is not being in control, it is not having control over yourself either.* The basis of our reactions should be in remaining calm, cool, and collected so we can better assess the situation and determine what the best course forwards is, without making things worse by our own knee-jerk reactions. When we can control how we react to our children's behaviours and emotions, we are in a better position to get where we need to go.

Finally, we have our brains and they are essential to helping us persuade and work with other people – all people, not just kids, but the way we have to engage with kids is different and this requires additional thought. This is where control over environments comes into play because often we can set limits by modifying the environment in ways that work with what we are hoping to teach our kids and with their level of development.

Before we get onto boundaries, let's take a moment to talk about what it means for our kids to have control and how this shared control works. Hopefully it's clear that shared control means that we are sharing control over the behaviours, relationship, and engagements with our kids. They are a part of

this life and this unit (whether it's the family, classroom, etc.) and so they do inherently have some control, but the extent to which they have control will vary based on their development and the specific situation. The very obvious pattern is that as children get older they take over more and more control of the environments they find themselves in (remember they've always controlled their behaviour and emotions and reactions unless we stifle them through fear). This means that our goals in using control to set boundaries has to be with both the immediate needs of setting up an appropriate environment, but also helping our kids learn how to structure their own environments and behaviours in ways that benefit their growth and their needs. So let's get to boundaries.



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Section 2: The Role of Boundaries (and Why More Isn't Always Better)

What are boundaries really? Many people simply equate boundaries with rules, but this is far too simplistic and can result in us making some serious mistakes when we try to create and enforce said boundaries. Boundaries may involve certain practices we hope to see in our kids, but as touched on earlier, they also may involve how we structure an environment that our kids are in, and so I think we really have to view boundaries as anything that helps us teach a child what is and is not okay in various circumstances; boundaries are concepts, not rules. As concepts that need to be taught, boundaries should never be subject to punishment; instead, we need to view them as subject to teaching moments that *require our help*.

Overall, I think it's fair to say that most boundaries are there to help people feel physically and psychologically safe which is why they are mostly about safety and social interactions. However, we also have some that may seem like they don't fit in this category, but probably actually are. Things like cleaning up can stem from the normal, psychological anxiety that comes from being surrounded by mess and the unease of not knowing what is around us. Or perhaps what clothing to wear as this can also reflect our evolutionary desire to conform and be a part of a group for larger safety purposes. Sometimes we need to identify these links in order to help us really assess what the driving force is for a given boundary and to determine how important it actually needs to be.

Let's look at a couple examples to highlight how viewing boundaries as concepts, not rules, can help us in our engagement with our kids and how we move forward.

Example 1. The Importance of Bodily Autonomy. One of the primary goals of socialization in our culture is teaching bodily autonomy or a person's rights to their own body. In terms of young children, we focus on things like not hitting or hurting others and so the boundaries we are looking to teach are about what is acceptable in terms of physical interactions. In terms of older children, we focus on issues like consent for touch and respecting people's rights to choose what to do with their own body. The actual boundary here isn't really a rule, but rather an understanding of how physical space works and how we can violate that in a number of ways. We will expect younger children and older children to make mistakes when we are working on introducing this boundary; if we use punishment, it really just serves to create discomfort and a dislike for the boundary which leads to a refusal to learn and engage with the boundary. And if our punishment somehow involves our violating this boundary, we've doubly failed because we're teaching them that this boundary is actually fluid in ways that won't be logical to them. Thus in teaching this boundary, we may focus on setting up environments that are conducive to not harming others or asking consent, we may focus on reasoning and discussion when the boundary was violated, or we may use props and games to practice with the boundary, as we would any other skill. But these all involve us not just setting up a rule and expecting kids to follow, but actively engaging with them to teach them how to handle this boundary with and without our help.

Example 2. Cleaning Up. Most families have ideas about cleaning up after yourself and we start early on with this, but this is also a very individualized boundary as each family has their own ideas about tidiness. It's also one of the few that ends up with lots of threats and frustration on behalf of parents; however, instead of cleaning up being a rule, if we think of it as another boundary that is about an individual or societal norm we wish to uphold, we no longer see it as something to be easily expected. We have to teach our kids about the value of cleaning up, how to clean up, and if they violate the boundary, we have to look at why and what is going on that makes it hard for them. Cleaning up is not an innate behaviour that we are born wanting to do (though some people feel as if it's an impetus for them) and so we want to focus on ways our kids of all ages can organize their environment in ways that make cleaning conducive and equally to leave spaces where it may not be necessary.

So now we hopefully can see boundaries as being about teaching concepts, not rules or obedience, and as such, our methods have to reflect this (what we will touch on next), but this also should highlight why having too many is not a good idea. Think about how much work it takes to learn new skills, especially more abstract skills involved in managing your own environment. If we have too many boundaries, there is too much for our children to learn and thus we are almost inherently setting them up for failure, no matter what their age is. Of course older kids can manage to learn more than younger, but they also have their limits and we need to be cognizant of that and work *with* them not *against* them.

As a parent or teacher then, you need to take some time to identify the boundaries you are looking to teach given the age of your child or children and then rank them in order of importance because you may only be able to actively teach a few while passively teaching the rest. This week's homework is really focused entirely on this issue so that you can rework the way you approach boundaries.

Section 3: What Boundaries Are Needed and Which Aren't

Let us begin with the least debatable boundary: Safety. Our goal as parents is to keep our children safe and help them be able to be safe on their own; how this is done is highly culturally variable and depends a lot on the environment you find yourself in. There was a wonderful article in the news on how the Inuit use scary stories and play acting to help teach their lessons or boundaries. Many people in our Western culture were somewhat horrified by how they would lie to their kids and invent scary monsters to keep young kids away from things like the water or other dangerous areas. What these people were forgetting is that the Inuit culture is one where young children have far more autonomy and thus need to be responsible for their safety much earlier on; parents need tools to teach these kids safety when they don't have the developmental capacity to understand abstract notions of safety, hence the use of stories and play. Our culture is different and the expectation for safety is that we adults will be in control of that domain until our kids are old enough, so lying to our kids generally seems like a bad idea. However it is done though, safety is an area for boundaries that is a part of all cultures, even if the teaching is only through natural consequences.

A second common boundary is bodily autonomy, but even this is highly variable amongst cultures. Some are far more touchy and don't expect the topic of consent to be explicitly taught at young ages, but most cultures at least claim to be against the physical harming of another person (in practice, this seems to be much different). This right to bodily autonomy is actually a difficult one for parents of younger children because young kids inherently view everything as interconnected and related to them which gives them, in their minds, rights to everything around them – your body, their body, all toys – and so the idea of people being separate can be very hard. Add to that, our youngest children have no bodily autonomy, instead being part of a dyad with adults who have to do all the care for them. Thus this movement from dependency towards bodily autonomy is often rife with lots of violations of this norm. Sadly in our culture we seem to push this boundary as a rule far too early and with far less consideration of the biological norms of our young kids. Personally, I think this goes a long way in explaining why our older kids often struggle with this as well.

Finally, there is the issue of social engagement, whether it's making amends, taking responsibility for our actions, honouring our word to someone, cooperation, and so on. These are culturally constructed, but essential for our social survival. We may disagree with the ways in which we have enforced or visualized these boundaries, but most of us would agree they are essential to the survival of our society. In some ways, some of these seem incredibly innate for young children and research suggests that very young children like social helpers, understand making amends in the most basic way, understand fairness, and so on which makes these easier to teach when we start from where they are and work slowly towards the more complex areas.

Outside of these three concepts, most boundaries we look to teach will be culturally and individually constructed. That is, things like what or where we eat, what we wear, levels of tidiness expected, homework, and so on will depend on where you live, how enmeshed in your culture you are (to determine how much you will abide by cultural expectations), and what your personal preferences are. Now in our Western culture, most of our boundaries seem to reflect a desire for obedience, but as I

hope is clear, this is a massive problem because not only do we not actually want our kids to become doormats who just obey, but also because obedience is actually not the same as learning. There is a very important distinction between someone who does something because they are told to do it and someone who does it because they believe it to be the right thing to do; only in the latter case will they be able to reflect and stand up against anything that is morally wrong. Sadly the focus on obedience has led to a culture where many people no longer reflect on what is wrong and do follow along, whether it be with friends or people of authority. You don't want this for your child.

What about biological functions like sleeping, eating, sex, or elimination? (I include sex here because this covers teens as well and it is relevant to their life.) As discussed above in the control section, you do not have control over another person's body, emotions, or behaviours, and thus you really don't have control over these biological functions. Nor should you. It is not up to you to dictate when someone else will sleep, eat, poop, or even have sex, even if you may have very strong suggestions and thoughts on the matter. It just isn't. Does this mean you have no control at all? Absolutely not.

The thing about biological functions is that what you do control, and where boundaries are relevant, is in the environment surrounding them. They are the classic example of how we have gotten stuck on the behaviour and thinking we're supposed to be in charge of that when in reality our control stems from our ability to set up the environment in which our children learn about their own bodies.

Take sleep, for example. If your child isn't tired, they won't sleep, but you can absolutely set up the household environment and daytime routines to be conducive to sleep, you can have rules about when it's time to wind down and not watch TV or when an older child is expected to be in their room for the night, and these can be very helpful, especially when they include discussions about *why* these are part of the boundaries around sleep. A child that learns how TV or screens negatively impacts their brain for sleep can then start to implement that on their own as they get older, but only if they understand why this has been a boundary.

So in sum: safety, bodily autonomy, and social interactions are all prime areas for boundaries. Biological functions are prime areas for environmental control as boundaries, but not boundaries around the actual behaviours. And anything that involves obedience should never be a boundary as this is not something you want to teach your child.



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Section 4: Teaching Boundaries (Even When It's Hard)

I initially had called this section “holding boundaries” because that’s often what we think we’re doing – like holding a wall up or holding off an offensive – but really that shouldn’t be how we think of it because that brings us back to this rule-like schema. In reality what we’re doing is teaching the boundaries all the time, but sometimes that’s really hard to do.

The key to teaching boundaries is to look at those areas you have control over and see how they can be used to help the child learn these boundaries, or concepts, that are essential for their safety and social development. The crucial part to remember here is that, like any skill, teaching comes in layers. You aren’t teaching the entire concept all at once, but rather doing so one step at a time, just as a child learns to crawl before walking (typically) and then walk before running. Therefore when you start to look at how to teach certain boundaries, you need to take the developmental level of the child into consideration to know where to start and where to go next, even if these are not the final destination.

Area of Control	What it Looks Like
Your Emotions	<p>This is one of the crucial areas where you have control and one that is essential to any teaching of anything, but especially boundaries. I often tell families that you are in charge when you are in charge of yourself and this starts with our emotional selves. It’s normal to find ourselves triggered in response to a child’s behaviour, the key here is knowing that this is not a time to react to the child or even try to teach; you need to get yourself into a calm state before you can do that. Remember that you and your children are in sync and your emotions are contagious so if you can be calm, your child can be calm and has a better chance of learning at least some of what you are trying to teach. But if you remain agitated, so too will your child, and teaching goes out the window.</p> <p>You know you have lost your control over your emotions if you are yelling, berating, speaking in an exasperated tone, feeling angry or ragey, and so on, and in these moments you should breathe and count to 10 before responding. Sometimes this is</p>

really hard and so the more you practice when you aren't in a high state of emotion, the easier it will come when you are.

Your Behaviour

This is about modeling the behaviours you want your children to learn. We have ample evidence that most of the learning children do comes not from being told what to learn but by observation. Unfortunately, this holds for the bad in addition to the good. The famous Bobo doll experiments highlighted how quickly children will model adult behaviour, even when they know it's not the right thing to do, likely because our doing it blurs the lines between what is right and wrong. Regardless, watching us do things is the type of passive learning that our children do all the time and it is the type of teaching we can do for all of the boundaries we aim to teach, even those we may not be explicitly focusing on because of our child's age or developmental level.

I strongly recommend that as you set up your list of boundaries that you aim to teach your child(ren), you take a moment to think about how you can express these behaviours or concepts yourself so that your children receive passive teaching moments at all times. For example, if you want to model doing homework, you may have to find work you need to do that you don't enjoy and actively speak about how you do it for a greater purpose. If you want to model calming oneself when angry, you need to actively do that in front of your children and speak about what you are doing. Crucially, we can do these things, but it helps if we also narrate what we're doing so we draw attention to the act for our children's sake.

Your Reactions

This is in line with behaviours, but slightly different as it involves specific reactions to your children, likely when they have failed to live up to the boundary you are attempting to teach. Our reactions are almost always in response to our emotions at the time and so getting control over our emotions allows us better control over our reactions, but that is still only part of the puzzle. You see, our reactions may still be based on erroneous beliefs, either expectations that aren't in line with what our kids are capable of or beliefs about the need to punish in an attempt to teach.

In reality, our reactions need to stem first from a place of calm, and second from a place of teaching. If we shift our view and see boundaries as concepts to be taught, then the reaction really needs to be based on an evaluation of why the child failed in this particular instance. In many cases it will just be because the teaching process is ongoing and the boundary concept is not fully understood or appreciated yet, but if there is no improvement over time and children regularly fail at displaying an understanding of the boundary or working within it, then it's time to do some troubleshooting which is discussed in the next section, and not simply let ourselves get more frustrated and upset.

The Environment

This is one of our best tools to teach boundaries and one that is multi-faceted. That is, there are different aspects of the environment that we need to consider and each one will be more or less relevant for certain boundaries.

1. The physical environment. This is how we structure the actual environment the child is in to better facilitate certain boundaries. Examples where this comes into play would be setting up a space conducive for work for a child to do homework; creating a play space that doesn't overwhelm the child and is easy to clean (e.g., using bins for the kids to throw toys into); having a visual schedule for kids to remember regular chores or routines in the morning.

2. The emotional/social environment. This is to do with how approachable our children view us and how safe they feel in a given environment. If we are distracted or unavailable emotionally, they will not feel as safe. If a classroom is filled with loud children and our kids struggle with noise, they will feel anxious. When we experience things like fear or anxiety, it is very difficult to learn anything. In the case of your own child, it means being emotionally available and calm as much as possible when you are with them and when you are teaching. In the classroom, it may mean being aware of certain children’s needs and finding ways to work it into the classroom, like using tents as spaces where kids can calm down if the room becomes overwhelming.
3. The situational environment. This refers to the temporary situations that may be at play for our children which we have to be aware of because they impact the learning experience of the child. One part of this includes things like the child being hungry, tired, sick, and so on. When these factors are at play, expectations shift (as discussed last week). The second part of this is how we respond differently in different environments; that is, a child may be quite successful with a boundary at home, but struggle in school. Being aware of how different situations result in different successes or failures helps us better see the individual struggles our children can have which allows us to tailor our teaching methods.
4. Chunking. Chunking here refers to our ability to set appropriate size tasks or times for various boundaries. This can be both the time frame to achieve some success, or some predetermined amount that is needed for success. Often when we are teaching boundaries, the sheer size or timing is something our kids can’t fathom. The idea of “always or never” doing something is overwhelming in and of itself so they can feel like one failure is the end of it all. Sometimes looking at how much may need to be done (think homework or cleaning) can also be overwhelming and thus they struggle to even begin. Chunking times (e.g., don’t hit while we’re at the park) or tasks (e.g., just get your English homework done) can be very helpful in giving them a sense of success and planning that they can carry forward.

What and How You Teach You’ve got yourself in control. You have structured the best environment possible. Now what? What and how you teach is also an integral part of this process. If we only think we are teaching rules, there’s little to actually teach, right? But if we see ourselves as teaching skills, then we have a wide array of methods at our disposal. Let’s review a few examples:

Examples	Rule Mindset	Skill Mindset
Tantrums	Don’t tantrum.	Learn to calm oneself. Learn to appropriately express emotions. Learn to identify a build-up of emotions ahead of time. Focus on prevention through learning the causes of tantrums and how to avoid them.

	Being rude	Don't speak back to people. Don't speak in a rude voice.	Learn how to express oneself in a way that facilitates what they want to achieve. Learn how to be honest with kindness.
	Homework	Do your homework.	Learn how to approach things you don't want to do but have to. Identify barriers to getting things done and how to overcome them. Learn how to set up an environment to make things easier, including the physical environment and the use of chunking.
	Physical Aggression	Don't hit.	Learn how to express this anger or frustration using other means. Learn how to walk away. Learn how to calm down when feeling overwhelmed or seek help to do so. Focus on prevention through lots of physical exercise and connection.

Hopefully this makes clear that you have a lot of areas under your control. They require more from you than simply a rule, but I believe the benefits far outweigh the additional effort.

A couple special notes on both how we use language and teaching boundaries in the classroom. First, on language. I find it incredibly important for adults to regularly speak out loud from the child's perspective when focusing on boundaries. The more we speak out loud what is going on for our child and what our actual aims are, the better able we are to take that crucial perspective-taking step to see what might be going wrong and how we can make it better. For example, if you have a child that is refusing to share a toy, it can be helpful to first speak out the issue from their perspective, like "I know that you love this toy so much and you're scared to part with it because you might not get it back". Once these words are out of our mouths, it helps us turn away from a rule-based, punishment-minded system to one of empathy, teaching, and calm. When we see where our kids are at, we can then view this not as deliberate misbehaviour, but a child that is struggling and likely sits in a place where our expectations aren't valid.

The second issue is teaching boundaries in a classroom. This can be very difficult as different children are at different levels of development and thus while some boundaries would be appropriate for some kids, they would not be for others. This is not impossible, however, and we just have to look to how

families with multi-age kids handle things or how teachers used to handle things in multi-age classrooms. The following elements may help:

1. Set different boundaries for different children.
2. Set up stages of success for children in a classroom so they are more prone to listen to you and work towards learning the various things you are aiming to teach (not just boundaries!).
3. Let kids help each other. Kids are excellent at learning from each other and so having some kids model certain skills can be very helpful for others. Even just discussions of what the successful kids do can help give ideas to others.
4. Set up practice tasks in the classroom. This practice can go a long way towards helping kids learn about a given boundary in a safe and easy way. Using play to learn is also an excellent means for children so lots of dramatic play may be helpful in this regard and gets everyone involved.
5. Set up the environment so children have lots of visual cues to help them with the various boundaries.



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Section 5: Is This Boundary Appropriate?

Many parents find themselves frustrated over what they may refer to as rules, but which I hope you now see as boundaries. No matter how many times they ask, enforce, discuss, whatever this boundary, the child seems unable to follow it. So parents double down on it, or move towards punishment, or abandon it altogether. None of these are ideal and instead I propose parents go through the following process when struggling with a boundary:

1. Look at your expectations for your child and determine if they are reasonable given your child's age, developmental capacities, and current circumstances. For example, if you are frustrated that your toddler continues to hit, this may be an unreasonable expectation as their developmental capacity almost necessitates a level of physical aggression to release frustration or it may be a product of being hungry or tired at the end of the day. In addition to expectations for behaviours, we also have

to set realistic expectations for a time frame to learn. That is, some boundaries take longer to master than others and so we have to have patience and remember that what we are doing is teaching for the long-run, not for immediate rewards, and so we may need to just be willing to keep at our plan and re-evaluate down the line.

2. Determine how invested the child is. Sometimes our kids don't see the value in the boundary and thus have no interest in learning it, no matter how great we are at teaching it. This means we need to go back and focus on teaching our kids the value of the particular boundary. For example, a child who resists doing homework because they don't see the benefit to it for them needs parents or teachers who will not just drill in the importance of homework but find ways to help the child value the work or see it as something they may not enjoy but know the necessity of for a greater goal they do care about. If your child isn't invested, there will be almost no method that will work to teach the boundary.
3. Determine if there needs to be an environmental change. Sometimes our kids need a different environment to learn and it's our job as adults to help facilitate that in the teaching process. For example, if you have a child that is regularly grabbing things they shouldn't and throwing or breaking them, you may need to move those things out of reach until the child has more control over his or her impulses. (Note that this one is particularly important for classrooms where the environment has a huge impact on child behaviour and yet the typical set up is not always conducive to learning.)
4. Look at how you are actively teaching the boundary. Sometimes the expectation is correct, but how we are teaching the boundary isn't working for our children. This can be particularly hard for us adults when we think we've got this amazing method in our minds, but it just isn't clicking with the kids. We can sometimes persist well beyond what is reasonable – like that caricature of the bad teacher who just speaks louder when someone doesn't understand something. Not all methods work for all kids and so it's up to us, the adults, to be flexible in knowing when something is just taking longer, but is working, versus when it's not working and the plan needs to be overhauled. For example, not all kids will readily grasp deep breathing as a means to calm down and may do better with compression or a calm-down jar. Some kids may not do well with getting aggression out on a pillow, but may do well jumping and running around for a moment to get those feelings out. This is also a time to examine whether this is something you need to be actively teaching at the moment or passively teaching through your actions first, depending on the developmental stage your child is at. Sometimes we are actively teaching when our kids aren't ready for it and would do better with some more passive teaching for a while longer.
5. Look at your emotions. Are you able to remain calm or are you getting angry when your child fails with respect to a boundary? If you are getting angry each time, you are preventing learning from taking place and you need to go back and work on your own emotional responses in order to better teach.
6. Look at your behaviours. Another common problem is the failure to model these boundaries thus blurring the lines for our kids of what we are actually teaching. For example, if we are preaching the

importance of bodily autonomy while never asking consent or disrespecting a child's wish not to be touched, we are actively interfering with their learning.

7. Look at how consistent you are. As human beings, us adults can often do things that actually interfere with our child's learning and the most common one is inconsistency; sometimes we let things slide, sometimes we don't, and this is highly confusing for a child and can create other problems. If you are inconsistent, chances are you need to revisit the boundary a bit because it's likely less important to you than you think and either shouldn't be a boundary or you need to identify the part of it that is important and how to turn that small part into the boundary to be taught.
8. Determine if you're impeding learning by preventing failure. Another of the larger mistakes we adults make is to inhibit learning by avoiding natural consequences. We don't want to see our children upset or hurt so we buffer that fall so much that it doesn't seem like much of a fall at all. If I'm honest, we are a culture that fears failure instead of embracing it as the teaching tool it is. This is discussed in more depth next week.

Section 6: Common Issues – Boundaries

Last week we reviewed some common issues and how they pertained to expectations, now we'll look at the same issues and what kinds of boundaries we might be able to set based and where your control lies in order to teach. As always, these are examples and for specific situations, I am available to chat via office hours or email.

Issue	What Do the Boundaries Look Like?	What Do You Have Control Over? (Aka What Can You Teach?)
Physical Aggression	Don't hit or hurt others at any age	<p>You control the prevention in terms of environments and avoiding situations that may bring out the worst in younger children.</p> <p>You control the teaching of techniques to help calm down when a child is old enough and multiple techniques for different situations for older children and teens.</p> <p>You control the teaching of alternatives to physical aggression like hitting a pillow or jumping up and down.</p> <p>You control the modeling of inhibition by not reacting with physical aggression against anyone, but especially the child.</p>
Relational Aggression	<p>Don't bully others</p> <p>Don't make fun of others</p> <p>Don't use your knowledge of a person to harm them</p>	<p>You control the teaching of empathy starting in the toddler and preschool years.</p> <p>You control the teaching of perspective-taking starting in middle childhood.</p> <p>You control the teaching of the effects of these behaviours on other people also starting in middle childhood.</p> <p>You control how the child learns to view new people because getting to know others is one of the most effective means of preventing relational aggression.</p> <p>(This is key for teachers who can introduce methods that get kids to work together and get to know each other and their similarities which is known to have positive effects on lowering bullying rates.)</p>
Disrespect or Speaking Out	<p>Don't be rude to others</p> <p>Don't yell or scream at others</p>	<p>You control how you model this for the child by not behaving rudely or yelling or screaming at them.</p> <p>You control the teaching of the effects of such behaviour.</p> <p>You control the teaching of appropriate ways to speak to people when feeling upset or wanting something.</p>

Issue	What Do the Boundaries Look Like?	What Do You Have Control Over? (Aka What Can You Teach?)
Tantrums	Don't lose your mind in public or at home Don't freak out when someone says 'no'	You control the environment that may be more or less conducive to tantrums (e.g., making sure your child isn't hungry). You control the teaching of emotion regulation skills, like taking deep breathes to calm down when they are old enough. You control your reaction to the tantrum which can either increase or decrease your child's stress in the moment. You control the teaching of alternative behaviours to tantrums when things are overwhelming.
Obedience ("My child doesn't listen to what I ask them to do")	Wanting your child to do what you tell them to do	You don't control them this way and shouldn't. You control how you speak to them to either make requests or make clear what has to happen and why. You control how you structure the environment to make requests more or less reasonable and easy to follow. You control your reaction to a lack of obedience.
Listening and Sitting Still	Listen when someone is speaking (in the classroom, at home, with friends) Sit still in places where you are expected to (in the classroom, at restaurants, etc.)	You control the environment and how much space you allow for your child to move as is biologically normal. You control how you speak to the child – are you looking at them? Are you distracted? Are you sure they are listening to you? You control the teaching of methods to stay seated as needed, including any techniques that may help make it easier for the child.
Homework	Do the homework assigned in a timely manner	You control the environment that can be more or less conducive to homework. You control your efforts at being there to help guide and teach as needed while the child does homework (kids often do more and better when there's support there to help them over bumps). You control the teaching of methods to focus and break down the work to smaller chunks and make it more manageable. You control the teaching of why this is important (but not whether or not the child agrees).

Issue	What Do the Boundaries Look Like?	What Do You Have Control Over? (Aka What Can You Teach?)
TV/Video Games	<p>Only watch/play at specified times</p> <p>Only watch/play after other chores are done.</p> <p>Limit the amount of screen time</p>	<p>You control the environment that may make these things more or less tempting (is there a screen in the child’s room?).</p> <p>You control the limits you place on these when kids are younger (but often not older so you want to make sure they are limits the child can get on board with so they are internalized).</p> <p>You control the types of shows or games that are brought into the house and played/watched.</p>
Remembering Things	<p>Remember certain regular chores</p> <p>Remember specific events that may be less regular</p>	<p>You control the environment that will help the child remember.</p> <p>Young kids need visual cues that are easy to see and understand and older kids still need a space to remind them of things. Visual calendars and family calendars can be very helpful for everyone.</p> <p>You control the teaching of techniques to help remember things, from writing them down to setting alarms to putting a string on your finger, all age-dependent.</p>
Cleaning Up	<p>Clean up toys in public areas after playing with them</p> <p>Clean up after yourself</p>	<p>You control the environment and how conducive it is for kids to clean (young kids need fewer toys out and easy ways to clean, like dumping in a bucket).</p> <p>You control the teaching of a cleaning routine that makes it part of a child’s life.</p> <p>You should not control the child’s space – they need a space to be messy if they like, but it doesn’t have to be a shared family space.</p> <p>You control the teaching of ways to make cleaning less tedious and why cleaning is important.</p>
Eating	<p>Eat healthy foods</p>	<p>You do not control when your child is hungry or how much your child eats.</p> <p>You control what foods you offer and in what portions.</p> <p>You control what is available for snacks for your child (that they can access themselves).</p>

Issue	What Do the Boundaries Look Like?	What Do You Have Control Over? (Aka What Can You Teach?)
Sleeping	Get enough sleep each night Go to sleep without struggles	You do not control when your child is sleepy. You control the environment which has a large effect on the circadian rhythm (lights, wake time, etc.). You control the teaching and modeling of healthy sleep habits including no screens within an hour of bedtime, dimming the lights in the evening, getting enough outside time, and so on. You control your responses when sleep is difficult for your kids.
Sharing	Share within reason with other kids when age appropriate	You control the environment and what toys are available for kids to play with. You control modeling of sharing behaviours with others. You control your response to non-sharing and how you explain this to others. You control the teaching of why sharing can be good, including the selfish reasons of others sharing with them.

Please take a look at this week’s homework to help you both identify the boundaries that are most important to you and then to work out ideas as to how to best teach them. As always, I am available in office hours or via email to help you with this process.