

Helping Your Adult Child With Boundaries

When your child has a problem, before they reach adulthood, it's easier to set boundaries on the help you give. It's usually, "I will help you every time, all the time, without limit." In other words, there was no need for a boundary. Is this because you were responsible for their life and their health and their future, and their well-being? Yes times four! When puberty and adolescence begins, now helping gets a little more dicey. How do I define a "problem" now versus before puberty? Is giving them everything they want necessary for solving the problem? The question of wants versus needs comes up. What about when they reach adulthood, what about limits now? From a theoretical perspective, setting boundaries and consequences, and faithfully following through on those consequences when boundaries are broken, will ultimately solve every problem you have with your son or daughter. That means resolving a *conflict of need* with your child. It doesn't mean you can get them to do everything you want them to do.

A simple example of boundary and consequence: "**Johnny, if you relapse, we will take your car away for a month**". From a practical perspective, if you negotiate that boundary in an adult-to-adult manner, and make sure Johnny really agrees with the consequence of breaking it (not just being "pressured" into accepting the consequence). That is an important element for parents to learn when dealing with their child. Also, you must be willing to follow through with the consequence, and it needs to be written out in simple detail and dated and signed like a contract.

Many loving parents have a history of saving an adult child from the painful consequences of their child's bad decisions. **Experiencing the painful consequences of making bad decisions is how people learn to make good decisions.** If Johnny was not a gifted addict, it wouldn't be such a big problem, but the addiction changes everything. You know how to help a child. But no parent is prepared, without special education, to best help a gifted, addicted child in this drug age. The good news is that you are willing to learn some "advanced parenting skills for the drug age" as I call them. However, not every parent is done yet with exhausting every strategy for good parenting that they already know. At some point they may be ready to try something new that is not only challenging, but difficult, that new strategy can be: "*The opposite of good parenting.*"

These new skills and methods are offered as *theory*. And each parent is expected to try whatever part they wish. This experimenting with new actions is needed in order to prove to a parent, which if any, of these new strategies work better than the old, habitual, automatic-reaction, methods for helping and saving their child.

Addicted children in recovery are learning how to live in this anxiety filled life without using drugs to cope with life's ups and downs. They are far from normal, and yet can hide their abnormalities so well, that parents are lulled into using their normal parenting strategies. "At what point are my normal parenting strategies actually **funding** my son's drug use", I can ask myself. The answer can be best seen in reviewing your shared history: "Which actions that we took to help our child worked, and which ones did not work? Just as addicts are learning a new way to live, parents can learn a new way to help. Here are some simple guidelines about setting boundaries when helping your child. If you want, you can tell them:

1. "As your parent, I will never stop helping you, but the help I give you will have limits and sometimes consequences if you exceed those limits."
2. "I will explain my reasons for those limits and consequences."
3. "I will negotiate the details with you of the limits and consequences for the help I provide."
4. "I may put in writing the details of that help; then have it dated and signed by both of us."