

ADOLESCENT BOUNDARIES

Adolescents not only need but often want limits imposed. They need externally imposed limits because they are not able to set their own limits. Many adolescents become frightened when they feel that limits have not been defined. They seek a fence beyond which they cannot go, within which they can experiment and by trial and error and accidental success find a self-concept with which they can feel satisfied.

In a documented case of adolescent therapy a 16-year-old girl says, "I'm going-to-get-out-of-here-and-get-an-apartment-and-get-married-and-you-can't-stop-me!"

Her doctor replies, "No you're not, and yes I can."

She acknowledges, quietly enough, "Oh" and responds in the remainder of the therapy session in a way that indicates that she has received positive reassurance.

Psalm 16: 5-6 says "Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; and have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance."

As an educator, don't hesitate to impose clearly defined boundaries and enforce them rigorously. Educators often tend to relax the boundary lines out of compassion for learners that are known to be experiencing emotional difficulties. Adolescents, and particularly those with such problems, are more likely to benefit from clearly defined boundaries than a lack of or inconsistent boundaries.