

SOCIAL BOUNDARIES

What is this developmental skill?

Social boundaries are the ability to understand appropriate physical, emotional, and interpersonal limits in relationships. Healthy boundaries help children recognize personal space, privacy, consent, and different expectations across relationships.

How does this normally develop?

Children learn boundaries through consistent caregiving that respects their needs while teaching expectations about personal space, touch, privacy, and appropriate behavior with family members, friends, teachers, and strangers.

How can neglect interfere with its development?

Neglect often creates inconsistent or absent boundaries. Children may receive little guidance about privacy, physical affection, personal safety, or appropriate relationships. Some become overly trusting, while others become extremely guarded.

What might this look like?

A child may:

- Hug unfamiliar adults.
- Invade others' personal space.
- Share highly personal information with strangers.
- Resist all physical affection.
- Have difficulty saying "no."
- Misunderstand appropriate relationships with peers and adults.
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Parenting Implications

Healthy boundaries are taught through consistency, respect, and modeling rather than fear. Caregivers can explain expectations clearly while honoring the child's own boundaries and helping them recognize those of others.

From Understanding to Attunement

Rather than asking, "Why are they so inappropriate?" ask, "Who has consistently taught them what healthy relationships and boundaries look like?" Every respectful interaction helps children develop the skills needed to build safe, healthy relationships.