

PUSHING BOUNDARIES

A COMMON REALITY OF CARING FOR A TEENAGER

Pushing boundaries is a normal part of adolescent development, sometimes with young people pushing these boundaries to their limits! Young people going through adolescence are experiencing significant physical and psychological changes, plus increased demands on them in many areas of their life. So why do young people push boundaries (and our buttons)? How can we encourage safer, healthier and more respectful relationships?

Psychological distancing

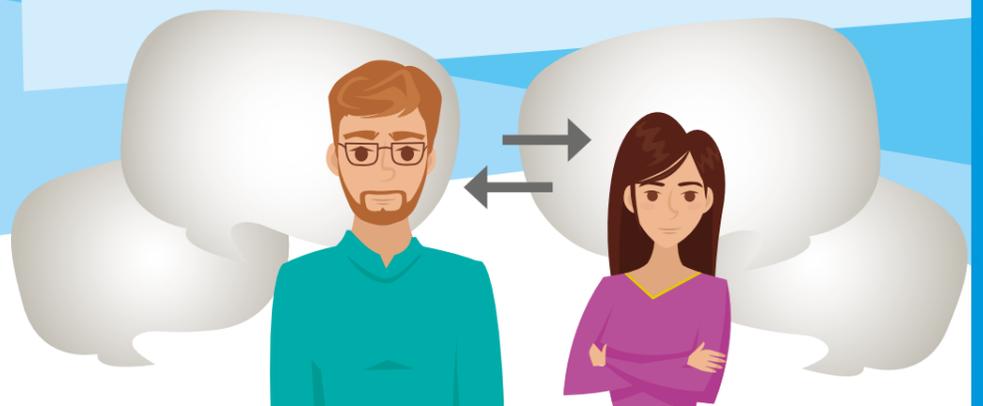
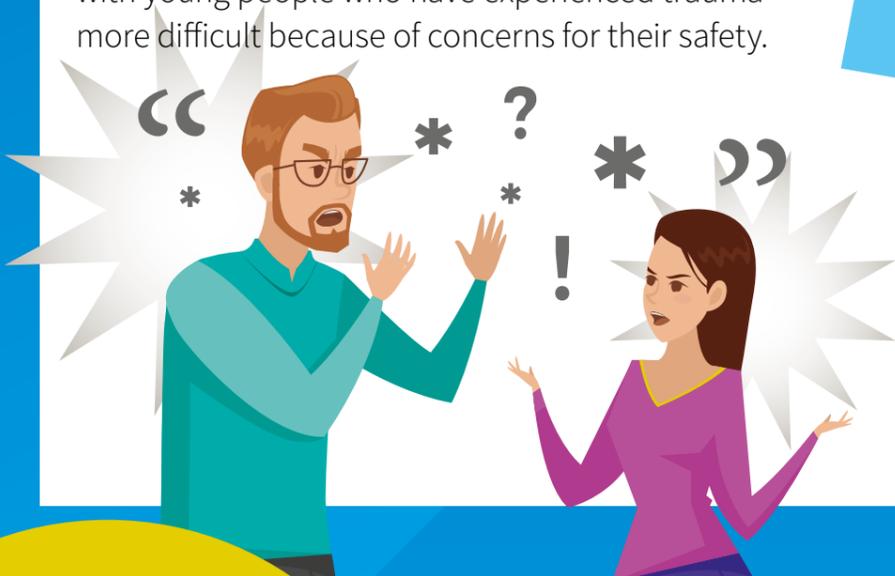
In many tribal cultures, as well as many species in the animal kingdom, it's common for the young to leave their family unit around the time of puberty. However, in industrialised nations like Australia, young people are typically still dependent on those caring for them and cannot leave their family as soon as they may like. As a result, a substitute seems to have emerged – 'psychological distancing'.

Disputes between young people and their carers focus largely on every day matters, often involving the young person's **desire for independence** – driving, dating, curfews. Beneath these disputes are **parental efforts** to protect the young person from harm. The larger the gap between the carers' and young person's views of the young person's readiness for independence, the more the pair will result in conflict and the larger the psychological distance to overcome.

Some young people who have **experienced trauma** may not have been exposed to boundaries or rules before, and some may have had their own personal boundaries violated. Some young people may not have experienced safety and dependence with their primary carers, which is crucial for them to develop safe independence. These experiences, or lack of, make setting boundaries with young people who have experienced trauma more difficult because of concerns for their safety.

What you can do to bridge the gap

- ✓ **Be curious** about the young person's behaviour and why they might be pushing boundaries.
- ✓ **Connection before correction!** Maintain a connection with the young person as you set boundaries with them to show them you still love them, even when they break the rules.
- ✓ **Explore with the young person** what rules and boundaries are important to them? What actions do they feel demonstrate respect?
- ✓ **Co-develop** rules and boundaries with the young person. Young people are more likely to adhere to boundaries when they feel a sense of ownership.
- ✓ Give young people **age-appropriate choices**, and **model** conflict resolution and negotiation skills.
- ✓ **Give yourself permission** to be in charge but **set limits with empathy**. Explain why the boundaries are important, what they will achieve and what the natural consequences are if they are broken. Young people are more likely to adhere to boundaries where they see some sense in the reasoning behind them.
- ✓ **Re-evaluate the appropriateness** of the rules over time and ask yourself if they are still developmentally appropriate?
- ✓ **Manage your expectations**. Young people **will** break rules and push boundaries. It is important to consider how **you** will respond when rules are broken.



Here to help! Come and talk to us if you'd like more practical ways you can be trauma informed.


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