



BONDING *with*
YOUR CHILD *through*
BOUNDARIES

— PEGGYSUE WELLS —

June Hunt *with* PEGGYSUE WELLS

“Bonding with Your Child through Boundaries is brimming with solid, biblical advice on the situations parents face day to day. Whether you’re struggling with your kids over temper tantrums or dishonesty or bullying, or even if you’re just looking for ways to structure chores around the house, this book has something for you.”

Jim Daly, President, Focus on the Family

“If children are a part of your life, you now hold in your hands the *real* answers to the *real* challenges you face. Each practical chapter spells out ‘What you could do’ and ‘What you could say’—not to win a war, but to win a *relationship* of respect. *Bonding with Your Child through Boundaries* encourages every parent to build a positive connection with their kids through wisdom, grace, and responsibility.”

Karol Ladd, Founder, Positive Life Principles; author, *The Power of a Positive Mom*

“Every parent who holds biblical principles sacred **MUST** read *Bonding with Your Child through Boundaries*. Not only is this practical book grounded in God’s Word, it’s born out of real-life struggles. Don’t miss out on this immensely practical message.”

Les and Leslie Parrott, Founders, Center for Relationship Development, #1 NYT Authors, *The Parent You Want to Be*

“From back talk and bullying . . . to temper tantrums and bedtime battles, June presents parent-tested ideas that really work for real challenges as verified by coauthor and mother of seven, PeggySue Wells. If you have children in your life, you will be grateful for this valuable parenting guide.”

Catherine Hart Weber, Director, Flourish in Life and Relationships Center for Wellbeing; author, *Flourish: Discover Vibrant Living*

“Once again, June has captured the attention and the hearts of parents! What parent hasn’t cried out, at least internally, for help to rein in their children? What parent hasn’t prayed for help to lovingly guide sons and daughters in the way of the Lord? Well-respected and loved for her *Biblical Counseling Keys* for life’s issues, June provides the guidance parents are seeking to set healthy boundaries while bonding with their most precious gifts from God.”

Carmen Pate, Principal, Communications, Alliance Ministries and The 210 Project

“Parents today face an increasingly complex task in raising children in a fast-paced world full of digital distractions while immersed in a post-Christian culture. This book will serve as a wonderful resource for parents to strengthen their bond with their child through boundaries.”

Daniel Egeler, President, Association of Christian Schools International

“As a guidance counselor in a Christian school, I’ll refer to *Bonding with Your Child through Boundaries* constantly in my work with students, parents, and teachers—just as I’ve done for years with June’s companion book for teens. June’s biblical, practical approach is evident on every page. It’s an indispensable resource for every Christian school administrator, counselor, and teacher.”

Angela Paxton, Guidance Counselor, Legacy Christian Academy,
Frisco, Texas

“Never has this book been more needed than now and no one is more perfect for handling the responsibility than June Hunt. June’s ministry provides a background for understanding why children need boundaries to grow into healthy, productive adults. This resource is refreshing and full of helpful insights.”

Janice Shaw Crouse, Management Committee, World Congress of
Families; author, *Children at Risk* and *Marriage Matters*

“Just as football—or any other sport—needs boundaries and rules to make it fun and interesting, children need boundaries to feel secure and confident. June’s book makes this plain in a powerful way, with lots of great action points to help you put boundaries into practice with your kids. These insights are important—not only for us, but for our entire culture, and the next generation of parents and children.”

Carey Casey, CEO, National Center for Fathering

Bonding with
Your Child through
Boundaries

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Bonding with Your Teen through Boundaries (with Jody Capeheart)

Caring for a Loved One with Cancer

Hope for Your Heart: Finding Strength in Life's Storms

Bonding with Your Child through Boundaries

June Hunt

with PEGGYSUE WELLS

Bonding with Your Child through Boundaries

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Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover design: Connie Gabbert

Cover image: Shutterstock.com

First printing 2015

Printed in the United States of America

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Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-4334-0

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-4337-1

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-4335-7

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-4336-4

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hunt, June.

Bonding with your child through boundaries / June

Hunt, with PeggySue Wells.

pages cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-4335-4334-0 (tp)

1. Parent and child—Religious aspects—Christianity.
2. Child rearing—Religious aspects—Christianity.
3. Parenting—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BV4529.H85

2015

248.8'45—dc23

2015000586

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my niece Kathryn,
the most exceptional mother I know.

Kathryn is always the first to
redirect praise for her parenting back to God . . .
and to the other women who have spoken into her life.

- Women like her Granny Ruth, who always invited Kathryn to kneel beside the bed with her . . . so they could talk with the Lord together. Today, Kathryn devotes daily time to praying with her own children because she views prayer as a precious privilege.
- Then there's her mother, Helen, who taught Kathryn, when she was little, to make decisions for herself . . . to avoid being too dependent on others. Likewise, Kathryn again and again allows her children opportunities to become great decision makers!
- And of course, her kids' "Aunt Kimmy" is a consistent encourager . . . assuring them all, "You are unconditionally loved by your family . . . and by your Lord."

Some would say educating six children at home isn't the most promising path for a bright, capable PhD—one who is sought after by universities to speak and teach. Yet long ago, Kathryn chose not to have a splintered life, but rather a boundaried life in which she would "do one thing well."

She chose to say *no* to other paths so she might say *yes* to God's path. She dedicates her time, talent, and treasure to be the best wife and mother possible—a decision she's never regretted.

Kathryn guards her time and invests it intentionally, modeling a life devoted to God and family. In so doing, she instills that same intentionality in her young ones. Her genuine relationship with Jesus . . . her unwavering focus on holiness . . . her prayerful reverence for God . . . permeates every aspect of her life.

She strategically plans her days with character-building projects . . . often cleverly disguised as “family fun.” Just as God’s boundaries have become hers, they increasingly become her kids’ as well. And as a result, her grateful children—ranging in age from one to fourteen—“stand and bless her” (Prov. 31: 28 TLB).

Today my genuine joy is to “stand and bless”
this extraordinary mother and mentor . . .
and especially now *a remarkable mentor*
to other young mothers.

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Acknowledgments

This book is the product of dozens of committed Christians who contributed ideas, research, writing, editing, proofing, critiquing, and other forms of indispensable expertise—all for a common goal: to help parents train up future generations of godly children.

Though space prohibits me from detailing your generous contributions, I am keenly aware of them and, of much greater comfort and consequence, so is *God*!

My friends . . .

Angela Paxton	Kathryn Rombs
Angie White	Kathy Hughes
Barbara Spruill	Kay Yates
Bea Garner	Peggy (Karra) Schaffer
Beth Funk	PeggySue Wells
Carolyn White	Phillip Bleecker
Elizabeth Cunningham	Sheila Brown
Jill Prohaska	Steve Hunter
Jody Capehart	Steve Murphy
Julia Camarigg	Tara Davis
June Page	Titus O'Bryant
Karen Billman	Trudie Jackson
Karen Stebbins	Vallene Hendrix
Karen Williams	

12 *Acknowledgments*

. . . may God bless and richly reward your diligent work, done in his name and for his glory.

“We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

(1 Thess. 1:2–3)

Introduction

A Personal Word to Parents

Oh, the joy of little ones in our lives! Hearing gurgling giggles from chubby cheeks. Smiling at tongue twisters lisped through missing teeth. Seeing tiny tots run on tippy toes, plopping down on padded bottoms, then snuggling close for bedtime stories. Is there anything cuter than a freshly bathed cherub in footed pajamas? Not on this side of heaven!

Parenting is one of life's greatest privileges—one of God's highest callings. The Bible tells us, "Children are a gift from the LORD" (Ps. 127:3 NLT), and those with a full house are indeed blessed. Realize, *your children are your personal, God-given priority, your closest and most enduring "mission field."*

Yet, over the years I've seen so many parents perplexed—and too many parents in pain. Well-meaning parents say, "Just tell me what to do, June—I promise I'll do it!" But the answer isn't a simple, one-step "it." The answer is a mind-set that seems to work miracles. This life-changing mind-set is centered on the word *boundaries* and flanked between two Rs—*repercussions* and *rewards*.

When I was a youth director in my twenties, I saw dismayed parents who obviously had never heard of *boundaries*, or at least had never learned how to use them. They had no concept of how boundaries could be a relationship lifesaver—so helpful for both parents and kids. That is the "why" of this book.

Raising respectful, self-disciplined children is such an important assignment that the apostle Paul even makes it a litmus test for those seeking church leadership (see Titus 1:6; 1 Tim. 3:4). The inference is clear: If parents can't lead their own children, who on earth *can* they lead? But what about godly parents who practice God's principles and follow in his footsteps, yet have children who are bent on rebellion? Thankfully, the Bible offers encouragement.

Even God, the Perfect Parent, suffers heartbreak over his rebellious children—and not for lack of wisdom. Think about the very first boundary on earth: As a perfectly wise and loving Father, he provides the ideal home for his first son and daughter. And as good parents do, he communicates boundaries to help his children clearly understand what is expected of them—what constitutes right behavior. He also explains the repercussion for crossing over the boundary saying, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die” (Gen. 2:16–17 NLT).

Then God does something that has puzzled people ever since—he gives his children . . . *choice*. Now equipped with “free will,” Adam and Eve can stay within their Father's boundaries and receive a reward (the ability to live with him in Paradise for all eternity). Or they can violate his boundary and reap numerous repercussions (eviction from their home, loss of intimacy with their Father, and painful hardship in their lives—not to mention death).

At the moment Adam and Eve willfully choose to disobey, the very first parental boundary is crossed. And, soon, the first repercussion is enacted. Ever since then, effective parents have been using boundaries (with rewards and repercussions) to bring up their children “with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord” (Eph. 6:4 NLT).

And that, my friend, is precisely the point of this book. Created to be the “prequel” to *Bonding with Your Teen through Boundaries*, this companion volume combines *biblical hope* and *practical help* for parents of grade-school children, including tweens (ages nine through twelve), and even children as young as two or three.

In fact, this book was conceived as a direct response to parents who, after reading our *Teen* book, said, “June, we desperately needed a book like this when our kids were younger!”

As with the *Teen* book, section 1 explains the essential role of boundaries, gives general principles for implementing the best boundaries, and answers the most frequently asked questions about boundaries. The thirty-six short chapters in section 2 provide practical, parent-tested “how-to” steps for making boundaries work in *your* family, with *your* child. Many of the scenarios come from real parents with real challenges—parents who have called my live two-hour call-in counseling broadcast, *HOPE IN THE NIGHT*, desperate to know *God’s Truth for Today’s Problems*.

Featured in each of these thirty-six chapters is a real-life scenario, followed by practical “What You Could Do” and “What You Could Say” sections to help take much of the guesswork out of implementing boundaries. Each chapter ends with a related verse from the Bible to encourage your heart and impart Scripture to your children.

The parent-child relationship rests on the careful balance of loving affirmation and loving discipline. All the affection in the world cannot substitute for godly discipline. Nor can discipline be a substitute for tender affection. Don’t confuse one with the other. Kids depend on their parents to supply both, just as we look to our heavenly Father to supply both.

Parenting is the most demanding, rewarding, faith-building job most people will ever undertake. I sincerely thank you for the privilege of coming alongside you on a journey designed to improve the life of your child . . . and also a journey that could very well change *your* life.

My sincere prayer is that you lovingly bond with the Lord through the boundaries laid out in his Word so that you will gain the wisdom needed to *bond with your child through boundaries*.

Yours in the Lord’s hope,



P.S. As I did in the *Teen* book, I sometimes use the word *kids* to refer to children. Years ago when I was a youth director, I often talked about “my kids” as a term of endearment. For those strict grammarians to whom *kid* will only mean “young goat,” I hope you will indulge me. (No kidding!)

Section 1

What Are Boundaries All About?

“We hope that your faith will grow so that the boundaries of our work among you will be extended.”

(2 Cor. 10:5 NLT)

More than Ever, Your Child Needs Boundaries

Parenting has always been one of life's toughest jobs. But in recent years, the task has grown even more challenging. Gone are the days when most families gather for church *together*, then share Sunday dinner *together*; when parents always know where their children are; when parents aren't worried about their kids because everyone looks out for each other's kids.

Today's children are being hijacked by a culture that hurls them into adulthood prematurely. From media to mainstream, the message is "Grow up!" Afternoons spent playing hopscotch and hide-and-seek have been replaced with countless extracurricular activities and media mania. Schools that once served as positive laboratories for learning are increasingly filled with negative first-hand learning . . . about drugs, gangs, and sexual experimentation.

Therefore, equipping kids to be deeply self-disciplined (and consistently respectful) and to prioritize principle over passion requires enormous wisdom, motivation, and commitment—as well as faith and hard work. In order to help you help them, never has it been more important to nurture a close relationship with your child, a one-on-one relationship of respect and two-way trust through *boundaries*.

What Are Boundaries?

Boundaries are *established limits*—lines not to be crossed.¹ Even very young children understand boundaries. Bathrooms have doors. Cribs have sides. Streets have curbs.

In most areas of life, when a boundary is exceeded, the result is a *repercussion*. And most often, when a boundary is maintained, the result is a *reward*.

Picture an Olympic arena with all the white lines on the race-track. Hear the blast of the start gun. See the runners burst out of the blocks. Watch as one sprinter darts into another runner's lane and hear the crowd gasp. The *repercussion* is instant—immediate disqualification. What a horrible way to lose! Yet, as long as the others stay inside their own lanes, the *reward* of finishing is theirs—along with the possibility of winning.

Realize, almost every sport has boundaries. They are absolutely necessary. And if those boundary lines were removed, what you would see is a free-for-all!

Behaviors have boundaries too. Whether boundaries are ethical, moral, legal, or biblical, they all distinguish *right from wrong*. Sometimes legal boundaries overlap with moral, ethical, and biblical boundaries, as in the case of theft. In the Ten Commandments, God states, “You shall not steal” (Ex. 20:15). Stealing is wrong on every level. Thus, those who are caught can expect hefty repercussions.

Why Do Kids Need Boundaries?

External boundaries are designed to develop internal character. Read these words again. This statement is the most important concept in this book. Boundaries are not about *you* getting your kids to do what *you* want them to do.

Kids who live without boundaries—without right repercussions and rewards—feel frustrated, insecure, and confused by the inevitable lack of order in their lives. Ultimately, parents who let their kids keep getting away with wrong are *training* them to *do wrong*.

Conversely, when kids consistently experience appropriate repercussions for breaking a boundary, those negative consequences provide *predictable pain*. In turn, that pain motivates kids to develop discipline in order to prevent future pain.

Realize, *doing right* eventually *feels right*. Kids with character do the right things—not to impress the world, but because they’ve been transformed by a powerful process described in Romans 12:2: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

President Franklin Roosevelt said, “We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.”² To face that future, children need to master numerous milestones, including being able to accept delayed gratification, motivate themselves, persist against frustration, empathize with others, and control their impulses.³ Beneficial boundaries equip kids to succeed in these areas.

Boundaries also help stem the tide of *self-centered entitlement* that threatens to engulf our culture—a tide that urges children to worship at the altar of *New—More—Now*. They feel entitled to have what they want. “I *deserve* new! I *deserve* more! I *deserve* now!” Child psychologist Dr. James Dobson correctly reveals that few things inhibit a “sense of appreciation more than for a child to feel he is entitled to whatever he wants, whenever he wants it.”⁴

As caring adults, we also establish boundaries to address our children’s three basic inner needs: love, significance, and security.⁵ While only Christ can meet these needs completely, parents lay the spiritual and emotional groundwork by maintaining healthy boundaries at home. These boundaries will provide stability for what otherwise would be an unstable foundation and will create a family “culture of accountability.”⁶

Consider the findings of a fascinating sociological study where young children played in a large, open field. With no fences or boundaries, the children huddled rather closely together, playing

fearfully. Conversely, when the children were observed in a large field bounded by tall fencing on all sides, they wandered to the far corners of the field and played with greater confidence.⁷

This experiment illustrates a timeless truth: children instinctively *search* to locate their limits. Adults often misinterpret this search as a dislike for limits, whereas exactly the opposite is true. Kids keep pushing their parents—testing their limits—until they find boundaries that do not change. Once they discover fair, unchangeable limits, they *feel secure* within those limits. They feel safe and can relax . . . and ultimately, *so can you*.

Many boundaries come equipped with built-in repercussions and rewards—consequences that impart memorable lessons. “*If you forget to take your homework to school, you’ll get a zero.*” “*It’s freezing outside! If you refuse to wear your coat at the game, you’ll feel bitterly cold.*” It’s important to allow your child to experience *natural outcomes* whenever possible. These painful lessons can retrain the brain and build Christlike character.

Allow children to *practice making choices* and to experience natural rewards or repercussions. These consequences will prepare them for the adult world, which is ordered by boundaries . . . from making payments on time (to avoid financial penalties) to meeting deadlines on time (to avoid being fired).

How Are Boundaries Best Implemented?

Implement boundaries in *reverse proportion* to your children’s maturity. When they are youngest and most defenseless, kids need parental boundaries at every turn. When you base these boundaries on biblical principles, you train your children to respect God’s authority in their lives, along with the boundaries.

The more children mature, the fewer parent-imposed boundaries they need. Then when they enter adulthood, you fully release them, praying the biblical boundaries they learned at home will serve them for a lifetime.

Boundaries presented in positive terms are effective teaching

tools to help your child avoid frustration, failure, and danger. Especially when dealing with young children, express boundaries in terms of what *to* do and what *is* expected, rather than what *not* to do and what will *not* be tolerated.

Instead of saying, “Don’t open the door without knocking,” give positive instruction, such as, “When a door is closed, knock before entering.” Change “Don’t tip back in your chair,” to “Keep all four legs of your chair on the floor.”

As you establish boundaries, do you want your kids’ respect? Consider this significant statement: “With children, more is *caught* than *taught*.” Do *you* always:

- Tell the truth when it’s inconvenient?
- Observe the speed limit?
- Spend your money wisely?
- Control your temper? Your weight?
- Ask forgiveness when you’re wrong?

Children have a built-in antenna for authenticity. As a positive, proactive parent, it’s vital to model staying within the boundaries—not only for your children’s sake, but also as a matter of integrity before God.

Be assured: You will either respect boundaries yourself and train your kids to respect them too, or your kids will train you when they realize that *they* will decide whether to obey you or not.

Count on them to test your resolve: Will you accept excuses for bad behavior? Turn a blind eye or a deaf ear? Talk tough, but fail to act?

Initially, it’s not evil or wrong for your kids to test boundaries. That’s normal! That’s their job. (Testing is different from rebellious defiance.) Children learn by testing boundaries to ensure they are secure. But when they test, your job is to *be ready* and lovingly *hold firm*. This book will help you do both.

Your unwillingness to excuse poor behavior communicates confidence in your child. It says, “I believe you are capable of doing

what is right. You have it in you to display self-control. And I love you enough to accept nothing less.”

When children are secure in who they are—and *whose* they are—they are better equipped to make good decisions. The Bible says, “Discipline your children, and they will give you peace of mind and will make your heart glad” (Prov. 29:17 NLT). In short, *boundaries can be a parent’s most powerful parenting tool.*

Checkpoint

Is your child enjoying life and laughing regularly? Are you? A natural consequence of establishing boundaries is reduced stress. Boundaries create space for joy between you and your child.

Children need boundaries in order to flourish.

In *Bonding with Your Child through Boundaries*, biblical counselor June Hunt, along with PeggySue Wells, combines biblical hope and practical help to motivate parents to understand and practice appropriate boundaries with their children. Discover the essential role of boundaries, how they contribute to the development of a child's character, and how they equip kids for a lifetime of learning. Practical "how-to" chapters illustrate how to make boundaries work—guiding parents as they cultivate happy homes and build healthy relationships with their children.

"This book is brimming with solid, biblical advice on the situations parents face day to day. Whether you're struggling with your kids over temper tantrums or dishonesty or bullying, or even if you're just looking for ways to structure chores around the house, this book has something for you."

JIM DALY, President, Focus on the Family

"Every parent who holds biblical principles sacred must read this book. Not only is this practical book grounded in God's Word, it's born out of real-life struggles. Don't miss out on this immensely practical message."

LES and LESLIE PARROTT, Founders, Center for Relationship Development, #1 *New York Times* best-selling authors, *The Parent You Want to Be*

"Parents today face an increasingly complex task in raising children in a fast-paced world full of digital distractions while immersed in a counter-Christian culture. This book will serve as a wonderful resource for parents to strengthen their bond with their child through boundaries."

DAN EGELER, President, Association of Christian Schools International

JUNE HUNT is the founder of the international ministry HOPE FOR THE HEART. She is the author of numerous books, including *Counseling through Your Bible Handbook*, *Seeing Yourself through God's Eyes*, *Bonding with Your Teen through Boundaries*, and *How to Forgive When You Don't Feel Like It*.

PEGGYSUE WELLS is an insightful speaker and an author and coauthor of many books, including *Rediscovering Your Happily Ever After*, *What to Do When You Don't Want to Go to Church*, and *The Slave Across the Street*.

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