

CoDA for Parents

12 Steps to Setting Boundaries with Adult Children

1. Sometimes, with our children, the transition to healthy independence does not happen easily. Children growing up in a stressful environment may fear or resist independence.
2. By setting boundaries, you are helping both yourself and your grown children continue to develop into responsible individuals who honor each other.
3. Boundaries help to define who is responsible for what and to establish what resources are available (and which are not).
4. Setting boundaries with grown children can be a challenge. Adult kids may still see you as fully available to them. If you are codependent you may even want to be the same responsible, responsive parent you have always been.
5. Although they will always be your children, you cannot treat them as children when they become adults. If you do, you may inadvertently create pitfalls that ultimately interfere with their emerging independence.
6. By setting boundaries your adult children will learn essential skills such as how to complete their own applications, how to make calls to inquire about a job, how to budget their money, how to plan their day, or how to schedule various appointments. Emotionally, they will

develop confidence in their abilities to take care of things for themselves and feel better about themselves.

7. When setting boundaries, you need to set clear expectations that foster respect for each other and the relationship you share.
8. In setting boundaries consider your own needs and preferences. Your grown kids may ask you for any number of things: money, guidance on significant purchases such as cars and houses, to move back home, etc. The parent in you likely wants to say “yes” and accommodate their needs/requests. But you need to resist this impulse and instead say, “Let me think about that, and I’ll get back with you.” By taking time to think it over, you can consider what they are asking of you and figure out if you can realistically meet their requests. Do you have the money to share? Is there space in your home for them to return? If so, how long is good for you (and them)?
9. Be clear in expressing your needs and preferences. Once you know what you can realistically offer to your grown child’s requests, you can respond to them and clearly state what you can realistically provide. You need to be mindful not to over explain reasons or resources, become defensive, or look for their total approval. You are trying to relay a supportive message of what works for you as you respond to what they need.
10. Address your guilt. When you cannot meet your grown child’s complete needs or requests, you may contend with guilt. How can I go out with my friends as planned and not watch my own grandchildren? How can I have funds in my savings account and say no to my adult child's request for money again? As guilt shows up, remind yourself of your decision-making process and your reasons for the boundaries you are setting, while also considering what may happen and how you may feel if you don’t set these boundaries.

11. After you state your boundaries to your grown child, you will hear any number of responses, ranging from: “Sure, I get it. Thanks” to “What?! But how could you do this?” Staying centered as they speak about the new boundary is important. You must listen to them and let them know you hear them and understand their point-of-view. And while you may also share with them how you considered your needs with their request, you should resist the temptation to over explain. You thoughtfully and responsibly made your decision.

12. Explain what is possible. The good news about boundaries is that they not only set limits, they also help everyone see what is possible. Boundaries are not necessarily a total “no”; they are an essential clarification of what is and is not feasible for you to do or give. You may not be able to keep the grandchildren on Wednesday night, but anytime over the weekend could work. You do not have more money to give, but you will help them with their budget. You cannot let them move back in, but you will help them look for a place.