

# Navigating Boundaries with Confidence and Care



### *Why Boundaries Matter*

Boundaries help create a Playspace where children feel safe, respected, and in control of their experiences. They are an essential part of trauma-informed experience in the Playspace.

#### **Boundaries help children learn to:**

- Trust that adults will keep them safe
- Understand and respect personal space
- Build confidence and a sense of control
- Experience consistent and predictable relationships

**Maintaining clear boundaries is part of every volunteer's role.**

### *What This Looks Like in the Playspace*

In a Playspace, boundaries are supported when volunteers:

- Respect personal space — no hugging, carrying, lap-sitting for children over the age of 2.
- No rough play, wrestling or tickling
- Use non-contact greetings (high fives, waves, smiles, fist pumps or happy dance)
- Redirect physical play that crosses boundaries
- Keep interactions within scheduled shift times and inside the Playspace
- Offer empathy without giving advice or trying to solve problems
- Keep personal beliefs and experiences private

**Even small, consistent boundary-setting moments help children feel safe and respected.**

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## *Your Role as a PAL*

As a Playspace volunteer, you are here to:

- Create a calm, joyful space where children can play safely
- Model respect for personal space and autonomy
- Support consistent boundaries
- Protect your own well-being and emotional boundaries

**Physical contact beyond high fives, waves, or side-by-side play is not allowed. This is not flexible—boundaries protect everyone.**

## *Why We Don't Make Exceptions*

You might notice that we do not allow hugging or rough play, even if a child seems to want it. Here's why:

- Many children in shelter have experienced trauma.
- Physical closeness may feel confusing, overwhelming, or unsafe even if they initiate it.
- Consistency in boundaries helps all children feel protected and respected.
- Safe boundaries also protect volunteers and the integrity of the program.

Instead of making exceptions, we model consistency, respect, and predictability—helping children learn what safe relationships look like.

## TRY IT YOURSELF

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Every moment of play is a chance to model safe, respectful boundaries.

No hugs. No lap-sitting. No rough play. No carrying children. No contact outside the Playspace.

WHAT YOU CAN DO	WHY IT HELPS
Gently redirect physical play: <i>"I can't let you climb on me. Let's find another fun game!"</i>	Models safe, respectful boundaries
Use non-contact greetings: waves, high fives, thumbs-up	Builds connection while keeping interactions safe
Reflect feelings: <i>"It looks like you're full of energy! Let's use it in a safe way."</i>	Helps children feel seen and guides appropriate play
Acknowledge feelings during transitions: <i>"It's hard to stop when you're having fun. We'll play again next time."</i>	Supports emotional regulation and predictability
Listen calmly when children share: <i>"That sounds really hard. Thank you for telling me."</i>	Offers empathy while maintaining professional boundaries
Redirect questions about personal beliefs: <i>"Everyone believes different things – and that's okay."</i>	Maintains inclusive, child-centered focus

You don't have to do it perfectly—just be consistent, kind, and clear. That's what helps every child feel safe, valued, and empowered in the Playspace.