

Setting a boundary about drug use at home can feel like you are choosing between protecting your family and staying connected to someone you love. You do not have to choose between care and safety. A clear house rule can protect the people and space you are responsible for while leaving room for respectful conversation and support.

A boundary is not a diagnosis, a punishment, or a promise that you can control another person's choices. It is a statement about what you will allow in your home and what you will do if the limit is crossed. The goal is to make the rule understandable, realistic, and safe to follow through on.

Start With What You Need to Protect

Before you talk, get specific about the concern. "I don't want things to get worse" is understandable, but it is hard to turn into a house rule. Consider what has happened, what you are worried might happen, and who could be affected. Your concern might involve substances being stored in the home, use around children, unsafe visitors, impaired driving, or arguments that frighten other household members.

Early warning signs can help you decide that a conversation is needed, but they do not prove why someone is behaving a certain way. Changes such as unexplained absences, secrecy, new financial problems, disrupted sleep, conflict at home, or a noticeable change in functioning may be reasons to check in. They can have many possible causes. Avoid turning a list of signs into an armchair diagnosis or presenting guesses as facts.

Instead, name the behavior you have directly observed. For example: "I found a bag with pills in the living room," or "You drove the kids after drinking." A specific observation is less likely to turn into an argument about labels and more likely to clarify why a boundary is needed.



Make a House Rule Clear and Enforceable

A useful boundary describes the rule, why it matters, and what you will do if it is broken. Here's a story that illustrates this perfectly: learned this lesson the hard way.. Keep the response within your control. You cannot guarantee that another person will stop using drugs, enter treatment, or agree with your rule. You can decide what happens in your home and how you will respond.

Less clear Clearer house rule "You have to get your act together." "No drugs or drug-use equipment can be brought into or used in this home." "Don't put the kids at risk." "You cannot be under the influence while caring

for the children or driving them.” “If you do this again, you’re out forever.” “If drugs are brought into the house, I will ask you to leave for tonight and we will talk the next day about what happens next.”

Only set a consequence you can carry out safely and realistically. If asking someone to leave could lead to violence, homelessness, or another immediate danger, pause and get advice before announcing a plan. You can still set limits, but it may take preparation and support to do so safely.

Choose the Timing and Tone

Whenever possible, have the conversation when the person is sober, the home is calm, and no one is in the middle of an argument. Do not try to negotiate a new rule while someone is intoxicated or when you are frightened and reacting in the moment. If there is an urgent safety concern, focus on safety first rather than trying to have a full discussion.

A steady, respectful tone does not mean softening the boundary until it disappears. You can be warm and firm at the same time. Keep the conversation short enough to stay focused. You do not need to prove that your rule is the only reasonable one; you are explaining what you need in your home.

One sentence you can practice saying out loud: “I care about you, and I’m not willing to have drugs used or stored in this home.”

Other useful scripts include:

- “I’m bringing this up because I want everyone here to be safe, not because I want to shame you.”
- “I’m willing to talk about support, but the house rule is still the same.”
- “I can listen right now. I can’t lend money or cover up what happened.”
- “Let’s pause and come back to this when we’re both calm.”

Listen Without Rescuing

Listening can help someone feel respected, even when you disagree about what should happen. Ask an open question, then give the person time to answer. You might say, “How are you seeing what happened?” or “What kind of help would you consider?” Reflecting back what you heard is not the same as endorsing drug use: “It sounds like you feel judged and cornered. I still need to keep this rule.”

Listening without rescuing means you do not have to fix every consequence or make the situation comfortable for everyone. You can offer a ride to an appointment, help find a support service, or sit together while making a call—if that feels safe and manageable. You can also decline to give cash, make excuses to relatives, replace money that was spent, or take responsibility for choices that are not yours.

Try asking yourself: **“What would make this step 10% easier?”** The answer might be writing down your rule first, asking a trusted person to be nearby, or practicing the conversation once. It does not have to solve the entire situation.

Protect the Whole Household

House rules should account for everyone who lives in or regularly visits the home. If children are involved, give them age-appropriate reassurance without asking them to monitor an adult, keep secrets, or carry messages. Make a plan for who they can go to and where they can go if a situation feels unsafe.

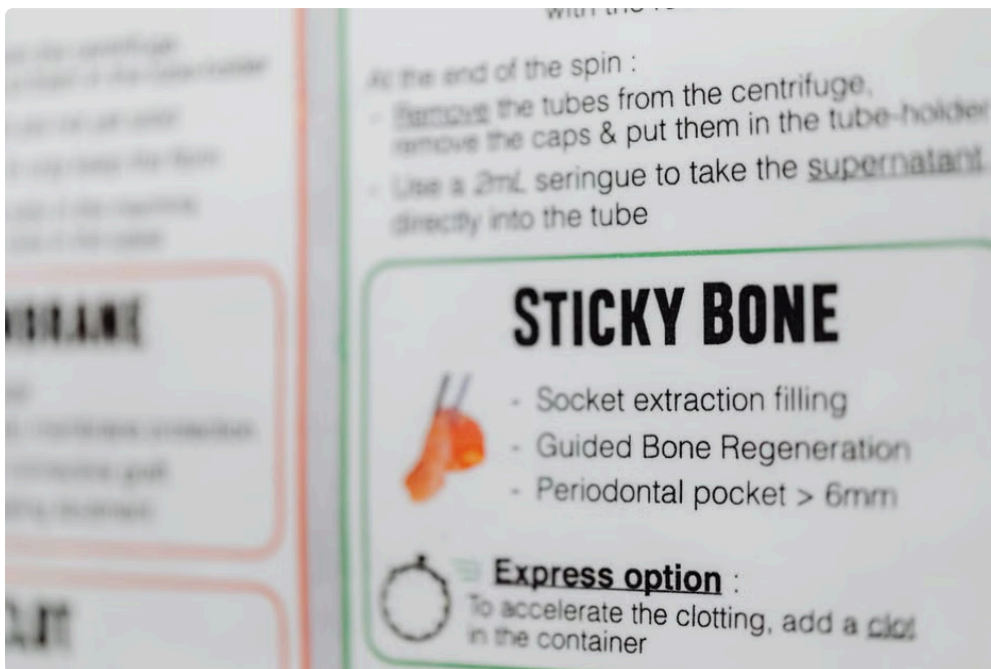
Think through practical safety questions before the conversation:

- Is there a safe place you or other household members can go if the conversation escalates?
- Are there medications, weapons, or other hazards that need to be secured?
- Who can you call for support, and who should not be asked to intervene?
- What will you do if someone is unconscious, having trouble breathing, or otherwise in immediate danger?

If someone may be experiencing an overdose or another medical emergency, call emergency services. Do not delay urgent care to argue about a boundary. If you fear violence, prioritize getting to safety and contact local emergency or crisis support. A boundary is not a substitute for [NIH Bookshelf surgeon general report](#) an emergency plan.

Write the Rule Down and Review It

After you talk, consider sending a brief message or writing down the agreed house rules. A written version can prevent confusion later. Keep it focused on observable expectations and next steps, not insults or threats. You might include the rule, who it applies to, what happens if it is broken, and how you can revisit the arrangement.



For example: “No drugs may be used or stored in the home. If that happens, I will ask you to leave for the evening, provided it is safe to do so. We can discuss a longer-term plan the next day. I’m willing to help look for support, but I won’t provide money for substances or hide what happened.”

Revisit the plan if circumstances change. A boundary can be adjusted without pretending the concern was unimportant. If you decide to change a consequence, be clear about why and what the rule is now. Avoid dramatic ultimatums that you cannot or do not intend to keep; repeated threats can make it harder for others to understand which limits are real.

Finding Support and Asking About Cost

You do not need to make treatment decisions for another person to seek guidance for yourself. A counselor, family peer-support worker, or local substance-use service may help you think through communication, safety, and next steps. The NIH Bookshelf includes publications on substance use treatment and family involvement; it can be a useful starting point for reading about family support. For example, see the NIH Bookshelf search for substance use disorder and family therapy.

Marietta Springs may also be a resource to contact when exploring care. Before scheduling or making a financial commitment, ask directly what services are offered, what the first appointment costs, whether insurance is accepted, and whether there are separate charges for assessment, testing, medication, or follow-up. Confirm what the person's plan will cover with both the provider and the insurer when possible.

A common and frustrating gap is that treatment websites or listings may not show prices. No prices listed does not mean care is free, and it does not tell you what insurance will cover. Ask for a written estimate and a clear explanation of potential extra fees. You can say: "I'm comparing options. What is the total expected cost for the first assessment, and what might I pay out of pocket?" If the answer is unclear, ask who can explain billing before you book.

There may be more than one reasonable path. Options can depend on the person's needs, safety, location, finances, and willingness to engage. You can offer information without making one treatment choice a condition of being treated with dignity. At the same time, you can keep your house rules in place regardless of whether the person accepts help today.

A Boundary Can Be Firm and Caring

Setting a drug use boundary is not about controlling another person; it is about protecting your household and being honest about what you can and cannot live with. Use concrete observations, speak when it is safer to talk, listen without taking over, and choose consequences you can carry out. If the first conversation goes poorly, that does not mean you have failed. Take a breath, seek support, and decide on the next safe action.

You can care about someone and still say no. Start with one clear house rule, one realistic response, and one person you can contact for support.