

Visual Supports: Visual Boundaries

What are visual boundaries?

Visual boundaries use materials such as tape or furniture to create structure, predictability, and expectations in different areas of a person's environment (Rutherford et al., 2020).

Why use visual boundaries?

- They clearly show areas that may be dangerous.
- They increase bodily awareness.
- They help a person understand expectations about a physical space so that they can be more independent.

Examples of visual boundaries

- Cover objects that are off-limits with a towel or sheet.
- Use tape on floors to mark different areas of a room.
- Move furniture or use gates to create boundaries.
- Color code areas of a room based on their purpose.



Definition	Example
Define boundaries Identify specific areas or objects where boundaries need to be set. Use clear and simple words to explain the reason and the rules for each boundary.	"This tape is on the floor by the stove to remind to keep your body behind it. You can only cross this tape if you ask permission from a parent."
Use visual cues Use colors, tape, signs, or physical objects to create visual markers for the boundary.	Place brightly colored tape on the floor around the stove to create boundary.
Reinforce Use positive reinforcement, such as praise, when the person follows the rule for the boundary.	"I noticed that you walked around the tape when you put your dish in the sink - great job following the rule!"
Be consistent People learn through repetition and routine. Be consistent in enforcing the rule.	"Oops. I noticed you walked through the green box. Remember, we are supposed to walk around the green box. Can you show me what that looks like?"
Involve the person Have the person help set up the visual boundaries to increase their responsibility.	"Let's measure and put the tape on the floor together. What color tape do you want to use?"
Adapt as needed As the person becomes more independent or situations change, adapt the boundaries.	As the person follows the rules, change the tape to a more neutral color or remove the tape.

Additional resource guides at <https://www.delawareautismnetwork.org/>.

Reference: Rutherford, M., Baxter, J., Grayson, Z., Johnston, L., & O'Hare, A. (2020). Visual supports at home and in the community for individuals with autism spectrum disorders: A scoping review. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*, 24(2), 447–469. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361319871756>

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