



Setting and Maintaining Boundaries

Boundaries are essential to maintaining healthy relationships and leading a healthy life. Like healthy communication, it is a skill that takes practice and does not always come easy. Having healthy physical and emotional boundaries means knowing, understanding and communicating what your limits are. Limits and boundaries have a lot to do with respect - respect for yourself and respect for other people.

Examples of Our Rights

First, let's discuss what rights we have as individuals. Every person has the rights listed below.

- I have the right to...ask for what I want.
- I have the right to...have my needs be as important as others' needs.
- I have the right to...ask for emotional support and help.
- I have the right to...change my mind.
- I have the right to....be angry.
- I have the right to...all my feelings.
- I have the right to...make mistakes.
- I have the right to...say "no" without feeling guilty.
- I have the right to...be treated with kindness and respect.
- I have the right to...make my own decisions.
- I have the right to...protest unfair treatment or criticism.
- I have the right to...use my own judgment.
- I have the right to...disagree with others.
- I have the right to...love myself unconditionally.

Setting Boundaries

Remaining direct, honest and respectful is key to setting healthy boundaries. It will allow you to feel safe in your environment and serves as a way to exhibit self-respect, thereby increasing the respect shown to you by others. The seven steps below outline different approaches to using assertive communication to set boundaries with others.

- Inform:** "I feel _____ when _____."
- Request:** "I would appreciate if you would not do (or say) _____"
- Instruct:** "Please do not do (or say) _____ to me."
- Warn:** "I will not tolerate when you do (or say) _____."
- Take a stand:** "I insist that you stop _____ right now."
- Time out:** "Doing (or saying _____) is unacceptable to me. I am open to working this out and will only do so we can communicate in a respectful way. I am taking space so the situation can cool down."
- Extended time out:** "I am going to distance myself from you to protect myself until you can do/say _____ or stop doing/saying _____."



Boundary Violations

Boundary violations occur most often when you have not communicate your boundaries. To identify when your boundaries are being crossed, it's important to stay tuned into your feelings. Warning signs that your boundaries are being crossed include discomfort, resentment, stress, anxiety, guilt and fear. Below are some examples of boundary violations.

Physical

- eavesdropping
- exposing others to illness
- hitting
- not allowing privacy
- reading others' mail or journals
- smoking
- standing too close
- touching without permission

Internal

- belittling
- discounting another's reality
- giving unsolicited advice
- interrupting
- joking about or laughing at
- sarcasm
- shaming
- violating a confidence

Signs of Damaged Boundaries

Boundaries are your own invisible protection that you are responsible for maintaining. Most of us have a difficult time setting consistent healthy boundaries. It may feel selfish or contradict what you have learned. In fact, setting healthy boundaries allows you to be who you are and allows others to be who they are. Signs of damaged boundaries help you to be more aware of when your boundaries are being crossed and follow appropriate steps to re-establish them. Below are some signs of damaged boundaries.

Physical

- accepting gifts you don't want
- allowing someone to stand in your face
- allowing yourself to be abused
- going against your values to please someone else
- inability to say "no" to physical contact
- not noticing or ignoring boundary violations
- projecting your own desires onto someone else
- self-abuse
- touching someone without asking

Internal

- accepting authority without question
- accepting blame for others' feelings
- allowing others to direct your life and/or define your reality
- answering for another person
- assuming you can read what someone is thinking
- believing anyone and everyone
- expecting others to anticipate or to fill your needs
- needing to explain your behavior
- telling all, right away



Reflection Questions

Now that you've learned what boundaries and limits are, steps to setting boundaries and signs of boundary violations, it's time to reflect. Answer the questions below to identify areas in your life where you can set healthy boundaries with yourself and others.

1. What struggles or fears do I have in setting personal boundaries?

2. What are two specific boundaries I want to set and with whom? How can I begin to set these?

3. What would this look like for me?

4. What can I do to help me keep my boundaries?
