

Setting and Maintaining Boundaries

Boundaries are about staying connected to people while also maintaining your own needs and limits. Creating boundaries helps balance your needs with the needs of the other person in the relationship. It enables you to have healthy relationships without losing yourself or becoming too dependent. Establishing boundaries is necessary for:

- Self-care
- Maintaining self-respect and feelings of empowerment
- Positive self-esteem
- Feeling satisfaction in your relationships
- Balancing your needs with the needs of others
- Getting your needs and wants met.
- Having power over your life
- Overall happiness

BREAKING DOWN THE TYPES OF BOUNDARIES

- **Emotional:** This is all about your feelings and their ability to be leveraged and manipulated. This includes how much you take on from others emotionally and decisions around sharing your feelings.
- **Psychological:** This is related to information about yourself, your thoughts, beliefs, and values. Included in this is anything that occupies your mental space, things like conversations and sharing information about your life, thoughts, and beliefs.
- **Physical:** This is your personal space as it relates to your body, physical intimacy, and sexual practices. Included in this would be things around who is allowed to touch us, where and how, and the types of things we put into our body (i.e. food and drink).
- **General:** This is about what differentiates you from others. This includes anything that does not fall into the other 3 categories and what you do to maintain healthy and safe interpersonal relationships.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO SETTING BOUNDARIES

1. **Identify what your barriers are.** Get clear about what is standing in your way of advocating for yourself. Think about what feelings and myths are coming into play.
2. **Evaluate what makes you think these myths are true.** Think about what in your life has led you to believe in these myths. Consider your life experiences and feedback from other people that

have impacted your view on boundary setting. Were you told these myths directly or indirectly from people in your life? Did you experience negative outcomes in the past when trying to set boundaries? Is an overall low self-esteem present that makes it hard to be proactive in getting your needs met?

3. **Challenge Myths:** Remind yourself of the truth rather than the myths. For example, instead of telling yourself you don't deserve to get what you want, tell yourself that you do! It can be helpful to review your myth challenges daily, until you truly believe them. Then remind yourself of the challenges when you are thinking about setting a boundary.
4. **Stop Catastrophizing.** The feared consequence of setting a boundary is generally worse than what the actual outcome is. Even if you don't get what you want, it is easy to catastrophize what that actually means and how you can handle it. Get clear on what your fear is (i.e. confrontation, conflict, the person getting mad). Ask yourself how likely that outcome really is. Then ask if it did happen, how bad would it be and how can I handle it. This will remind you that you can get what you want without conflict and that even when things don't go your way, you are resilient enough to handle it.

HOW TO SET BOUNDARIES

- **Be aware of self:** Make sure to be mindful of your behaviors in each situation. Observe and describe what you are doing and sharing. Ask yourself if your behaviors fit the situation and the relationship at hand. Notice if your behavior feels comfortable and if your boundaries are too closed or open for the situation and the relationship.
- **Observe others and the situation:** Boundaries involve two people, so it is equally important to be mindful of others. Observe and describe what is happening in the situation and what others are doing. Assess the level of interest and the information shared. Ask yourself if what other people are doing and sharing feels respectful of you and healthy for your needs.
- **Understand your and others' limits:** this goes back to step one of creating boundaries. Be mindful of your boundaries and remember that other people have boundaries as well. Keep in mind the context of the relationship and how that informs your boundaries. Make sure to also be mindful of respecting boundaries that others set.
- **Negotiate sometimes:** We all have deal breakers when it comes to setting healthy boundaries. However, there are things that are open for discussion and will not sacrifice our self-respect. Relationships require compromise. Therefore, it is important to be open to negotiating. Do not compromise on your values and needs. Avoid negotiating in relationships that are not important to you or just to be liked and not upset someone. When negotiating, it's about the specific relationship and issue at hand. You negotiate when a compromise will benefit you in some way and not be detrimental to your wellbeing.

- **Differences exist:** Setting healthy boundaries in way that works for your relationships is not only about negotiating. We are all entitled to set limits. However, it is important to do so in a way that is respectful of individual differences. These differences can be related to personality, values, personal history, culture, etc. You want to make sure you maintain your boundaries in a way that respects these differences and how others feel and will be impacted.
- **Remember your values:** Boundaries are rooted in your values. Deciding what boundaries to set and where to negotiate needs to be considered based off your priorities, goals, and values. Making sure you are prioritizing your needs and self respect while being respectful and understanding to others can be difficult. Values are your guide to setting healthy boundaries in this balanced way.
- **Your safety comes first:** Do not compromise your boundaries to be liked or just to fit in. This can be harmful to your emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. When setting healthy boundaries consider the impact on your well-being in all these areas.