



Setting Healthy Boundaries

What are your boundaries?

Think about these categories and what they mean in terms of your relationship.

Physical

Are you okay with public displays of affection? Does affection make you uncomfortable? Do you hate it or love it when your partner tickles you? Do you need a lot of alone time?

Emotional

Are you able to share what you are feeling right away, or do you need some time to think about it? Do you need your partner to be available anytime you have a crisis? When are you ready to say I love you?

Sexual

Do you need to get to know your partner before engaging in any kind of sexual activity, or are you okay getting physical right away? What sexual activity are you okay with?

Digital

Are you posting your relationship status? Is it okay if your partner uses your phone? Do you want to share passwords?

Material

Do you like sharing your stuff? Are you okay paying for your partner or vice versa?

Spiritual

Do you like to practice your religion with a partner or alone? Does your partner need to have the same beliefs as you, or can they be different as long as yours are respected? Are you waiting until marriage before you have sex?

Letting your partner know what your boundaries are.

You don't have to sit down with your partner with a checklist of all of the things that make you uncomfortable, but you do have to be open and honest. Some of these things might come up early in the relationship, like if you are a virgin and don't want to have sex until you're ready. Some of these things may not come up for a while, like if your partner wants to share passwords after dating for six months.

When your needs are different than your partner's, have a conversation; you don't need to give an explanation. It may be awkward, but having the tough conversations is a part of having a healthy relationship. When your partner listens to you and respects you, it builds trust.

Recognizing when the line has been crossed.

Sometimes, boundaries get crossed even after you've talked with your partner; this is where trusting yourself comes in. You may be sad, anxious, or angry, or you may not know exactly what you are feeling. Always trust your gut. If something doesn't feel right to you, it probably isn't.

Responding.

If a boundary has been crossed by your partner who didn't know where your line was drawn, have an honest conversation. It could be something as simple as saying, *Hey, I really don't like it when you _____.* *This makes me really uncomfortable. Do you think next time you can _____ instead?* This might take some back and forth before coming to an agreement that meets both of your needs, but your relationship will be stronger because of it.

If a boundary has been crossed even though you had already been clear about your boundaries, this might be abuse. Crossing a line might be obvious, like if you say no to having sex, but your partner uses physical force to make you do something you don't want to do. But it can also be more subtle, like if your partner guilties you into something, begs you until you give in, or threatens to break up with you unless you do what they want. The exercises below are intended to assist you in understanding your partnership boundaries.

1. What type of relationship is this?
2. Who initiates contact?
3. What is the time frame for this relationship?
4. Is sharing equal in this relationship?
5. Are there things that you would like to say in this relationship but don't or can't?
What are they?
6. Do you feel that your own boundaries are respected in this relationship?

Explain:

7. What changes would you like to make in this relationship?

Understanding Boundaries

The best statement I ever heard describing healthy relationship boundaries is this:

I have to be willing to be in a relationship, and I have to be willing to not be in a relationship.

- Willing to be IN means:
- Willing to be OUT means:

Ironically, it is only the willingness to be in the relationship that allows me to feel safe enough to be fully involved in the relationship.

1. Change the locus of trust from others to oneself.

Love yourself enough to create your own safety. Other people are not the providers of your security. As an adult, you're not looking for someone you can trust absolutely. You acknowledge the margins of human failing and let go of expecting security. Trust yourself to be able to receive love and handle hurt, to receive trustworthiness and handle betrayal, to receive intimacy and handle rejection.

2. Ask directly for what you need.

Connect with your preferences and tell people what they are. If you don't tell them, how will they know? Declare your identity.

3. Observe others' behavior toward you. Take it as information without getting caught in their drama.

Stand in a self-proclaimed place in which you are separated from the influence of another's seductive or aggressive power. Then, you can open yourself to that intuitive sense that lets you know when a relationship has become hurtful, abusive, or invasive.

4. Maintain a bottom line.

You get to decide how much you will accept of what someone offers you or fires at you. Limit how many times you allow someone to say no, lie, disappoint, or betray you before you will admit the painful reality and move on. Confront futureless relationships in which you continue to look for happiness where there is only hurt.

Boundaries vs. Control

1. Control is about what you want the other person to do or not to do. A boundary is about what you will do to take care of yourself.
2. The difference between attempting to control another and setting a boundary is whether the focus is on you (control) or on me (boundary).
3. A boundary is not a threat. It is taking a clear stand that which you are willing, able, and determined to follow through on, if need be.
4. Fundamental to the idea of boundaries is the concept that we all have choices. If the other person chooses not to respect your boundaries, you will need to state how you plan to respond (boundary action).
5. Setting a boundary has consequences for you as well as for the other party. When you set a boundary, you have a responsibility to do what you say you will do if that boundary is violated.

Control vs. Boundary Statements

Control Statement

- *I want you to stop getting drunk.*

Boundary Statement

- *I will not tolerate you being intoxicated around me or in our home.*

Boundary Action Statement

- *If you decide to drink, do not come home until you have sobered up.*
- *If you come to my house after drinking, I will ask you to leave.*

Control Statement

- *I want you to stop drinking and driving.*

Boundary Statement

- *I will not ride in the car with you if you have been drinking.*

Boundary Action Statement

- *If you are arrested for DUI, I will not pay your bail or legal bills.*

Control Statement

- *I want you to stop shouting at me.*

Boundary Statement

- *I will not tolerate verbal abuse.*

Boundary Action Statement

- *If you speak to me or act in a manner that feels threatening to me, I will you to leave, or I will go home.*

Control Statement

- *I want you to stop sleeping with other men (women).*
Boundary Statement
- *I choose to be in a monogamous relationship.*
Boundary Action Statement
- *If I have a reason to believe that you are sexual with other people, I will end the relationship.*

Seven Simple Ways to Say “No”

1. *I can't commit to this as I have other priorities at the moment.*
2. *Now's not a good time as I'm in the middle of something. How about we reconnect at X time?*
3. *I'd love to do this, but ...*
4. *Let me think about it first and I'll get back to you.*
5. *This doesn't meet my needs now, but I'll be sure to keep you in mind.*
6. *I'm not the best person to help on this. Why don't you try X?*
7. *No, I can't.*