

Personal Boundaries

4 easy steps to successfully communicating them

Personal boundaries are essential to healthy relationships and to having a happy life. Beyond maintaining a sense of self, boundaries help signal to others how we want to be treated, and prevent us from feeling used, spread too thin, or in desperate need of defending ourselves.

You know the drill... 'half of our team is away for the next 6 weeks, but the rest of us can carry the extra workload' (yeah right, let's drive ourselves into the ground, and not see family again until next month), or 'we're going to Aunt Flo's for lunch, you are expected to be there' (...but mum, I'm forty years old, why do I still have to go?), or 'I don't care that you are in the middle of a team meeting, I'm going to interrupt with my trivial issue so I can make you look like a daft in public' (OK, so that's not exactly what is said, but you know exactly what they meant to do. Awkward!).

On the flip side, some people have boundaries that are way strong and wonder why others avoid them.

Understanding and communicating our boundaries is a skill that unfortunately many of us are not taught, so it can feel challenging and self-indulgent when we start. Here are four easy steps to help you.

1. Know your boundaries

You can't set good boundaries if you're unsure of what they are. Consider what you can tolerate and accept versus what makes you feel uncomfortable or stressed.

Often, if people are like you in their communication styles, views, personalities and general approach to life, you'll have a similar approach to your boundaries. Others have a different personality or cultural background, so you will likely have different boundaries.

Take some time to think about what your boundaries are.

2. Tune into your feelings.

There are two key feelings that surface when our boundaries are crossed – resentment and discomfort.

Feelings of resentment generally occur if we feel we're being taken advantage of, not appreciated, or someone else is imposing their expectations, views or values on us.

If someone does something that has you feeling uncomfortable, squirming, or seething, that's a pretty strong clue that they may be violating or crossing a boundary.

At the same time, we might feel guilty because we want to be a good son/daughter, husband/wife, mother/father, friend, co-worker, etc.

Take some time to tune in to yourself and understand how you feel. Then, for those that make you feel resentful, uncomfortable or stressed, think about when it occurs, how you currently react, and how you would like to respond in the future. Do you need to be stronger with your boundaries, or do you need to relax a little?

3. **Communicate your boundaries**

People aren't mind readers, so it's important to communicate your boundaries to others in an assertive and direct way.

Like any new skill, assertively communicating your boundaries takes practice. People often feel they are being confrontational, so you might find it easier to start with something small and gradually moving towards more challenging boundary conversations.

If a boundary has been violated, say so at the first appropriate opportunity, in a way that communicates your feelings that is non-blaming and addresses what you hope will be different in future situations.

Don't be apologetic for having and communicating boundaries. They aren't just a sign of a healthy relationship; boundaries are a sign of self-respect. And you know what? Many people will be grateful you told them because they want to have a good relationship with you too. Plus, they may not have even realised the impact of their behaviour.

If someone feels confronted or hurt, chances are they have their own issues they need to work through.

4. **Give yourself permission**

Give yourself permission to put yourself first and you will have energy, peace of mind and a positive outlook that'll help you be more present with others. When we're in a better place, only then can we be a better wife, mother, husband, co-worker or friend.

If you notice yourself slipping and not sustaining your boundaries, take some time to consider:

- What's changed?
- What is the (new) situation that's making you resentful or uncomfortable?
- What are you going to do about the situation?
- What do you have control over?"

Setting boundaries takes courage and practice. Importantly it's a skill everyone can master.

Show the world who you really are.

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Understanding and successfully communicating boundaries. You got this!

Types of boundaries	Name it	It happens when...?	It makes me feel...?	Why I feel that way ...?	I react by...?	My new response
Physical						
Emotional						
Spiritual						