

CLARIFYING THE DIFFERENCES: BOUNDARIES, STANDARDS, EXPECTATIONS, RULES

Boundary	<p>A line you set to protect your emotional, physical, or mental well-being.</p> <p>Focus: What you will or won't allow. Example: <i>"I will not answer work calls after 7pm."</i></p>
Personal Standard	<p>A guideline you hold for yourself — how you want to live, behave, and show up.</p> <p>Focus: How you act. Example: <i>"I keep my promises to myself and others."</i></p>
Expectation	<p>A belief or assumption about how others should act or how situations should turn out.</p> <p>Focus: What you want others to do. Example: <i>"My friend should remember my birthday."</i></p>
Rule	<p>A directive or requirement you place on others to follow in order to stay in relationship, home, or space.</p> <p>Focus: Control of others' behavior. Example: <i>"In my house, everyone must take their shoes off at the door."</i></p>

Sorting Practice

For each example, label it as a Boundary (B), Standard (S), Expectation (E), or Rule (R).

1. I need at least 8 hours of sleep each night. _____
2. My partner shouldn't raise their voice at me. _____
3. I always try to be on time. _____
4. I don't loan money to friends. _____
5. My coworkers should notice how hard I work. _____
6. Everyone in this house must wash their own dishes. _____
7. I will not check my phone during family dinner. _____
8. I believe my boss should appreciate my extra effort. _____
9. I commit to exercising three times per week. _____
10. I will not allow people to speak disrespectfully to me. _____
11. My friend should invite me to events so I don't feel left out. _____

- 12. I choose to eat mostly whole, unprocessed foods. _____
- 13. I won't respond to texts after 10pm. _____
- 14. I expect my partner to read my mind when I'm upset. _____
- 15. I make it a point to say 'thank you' often. _____
- 16. My sibling should call me regularly without me asking. _____
- 17. In my house, everyone must take their shoes off at the door. _____

Self-Reflection Prompts

1) Where in your life do you have strong personal standards that guide you?

2) What are 2–3 boundaries you need to set (or strengthen) to protect your peace?

3) What expectations do you hold that often leave you disappointed or frustrated?

4) What rules do you set for others in your home, workplace, or relationships? Do they create clarity or conflict?

5) How might you shift one expectation or rule into a boundary or a personal standard?

Application Exercise

Step 1: Write down one area where you feel let down by others.

Step 2: Ask yourself — is this about a boundary, a standard, an expectation, or a rule?

Step 3: Reframe it into a healthier boundary or standard if appropriate.

Example:

Rule: "My partner must never go out without telling me."

→ Reframe (Boundary): "I will not stay in a relationship where I feel unsafe or deceived."

→ Reframe (Standard): "I will communicate openly when I make plans."

