

## Clarifying the Differences: Boundaries, Standards, Rules, Expectations

### Definitions

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

### 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.”

## Weekly Practice

Notice when you feel resentment or disappointment. Ask: “Is this because I had an unclear boundary, a broken personal standard, an unmet expectation, or a rigid rule?” Write down one insight each day.

Goal: By the end of the week, you’ll be able to clearly identify and separate boundaries, personal standards, expectations, and rules — and use them more effectively in your relationships.