

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

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## 1. Definitions

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

## 2. Sorting Practice (Expanded)

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. \_\_\_\_\_

### **3. Self-Reflection Prompts**

- Where in your life do you have strong personal standards that guide you?
- What are 2–3 boundaries you need to set (or strengthen) to protect your peace?
- What expectations do you hold that often leave you disappointed or frustrated?
- What rules do you set for others in your home, workplace, or relationships? Do they create clarity or conflict?
- How might you shift one expectation or rule into a boundary or a personal standard?

### **4. 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.”

### **5. 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.

# Clinician's Answer Key – Sorting Practice

To accompany 'Clarifying the Differences: Boundaries, Standards, Rules, Expectations'

Below are the suggested answers for each sorting practice item. Use this as guidance when reviewing client work. Discuss nuances where clients may interpret items differently.

1. I need at least 8 hours of sleep each night. — Standard (S)
2. My partner shouldn't raise their voice at me. — Expectation (E)
3. I always try to be on time. — Standard (S)
4. I don't loan money to friends. — Boundary (B)
5. My coworkers should notice how hard I work. — Expectation (E)
6. Everyone in this house must wash their own dishes. — Rule (R)
7. I will not check my phone during family dinner. — Boundary (B)
8. I believe my boss should appreciate my extra effort. — Expectation (E)
9. I commit to exercising three times per week. — Standard (S)
10. I will not allow people to speak disrespectfully to me. — Boundary (B)
11. My friend should invite me to events so I don't feel left out. — Expectation (E)
12. I choose to eat mostly whole, unprocessed foods. — Standard (S)
13. I won't respond to texts after 10pm. — Boundary (B)
14. I expect my partner to read my mind when I'm upset. — Expectation (E)
15. I make it a point to say 'thank you' often. — Standard (S)
16. My sibling should call me regularly without me asking. — Expectation (E)
17. In my house, everyone must take their shoes off at the door. — Rule (R)

*Note: Some items can be reframed into a healthier boundary or standard if clients identify them as rigid rules or unrealistic expectations.*