



Boundaries



REFERENCES

Boundaries are what happens when we voice our limits and express our wants and needs clearly.

You can think of your boundaries as an invisible bubble: inside of that bubble are all the things you are willing to tolerate or enjoy, and outside of it are all the things you are not willing to tolerate. The bubble is invisible because others can't see its limits on their own, and sometimes they need your help to see them. Therefore, boundaries are created when you align your words and your actions to establish what you will and will not tolerate from others.

Boundaries are also an act of care and love, for both yourself and the person with whom you are setting the boundary. According to author Prentis Hemphill, "boundaries are the distance at which I can love you and me simultaneously." By setting a boundary, you are showing yourself love in that you care enough about yourself to get your needs met, and you are showing love for the other person in that you care enough about the relationship between you to express your needs and develop the relationship further.

You can set boundaries in several different domains in your life, including:



Your personal space



Your sexuality



Your emotions and thoughts



Your possessions



Your time



Your energy

Benefits of setting boundaries

Setting boundaries is a critical element of self-care, and as such there are several benefits to setting clear boundaries in your life:

1. Improved relationships with others and yourself

There is a common misconception that boundaries separate people, when in fact boundaries provide healthy rules for navigating relationships, and therefore they bring people together. Having boundaries also allows us to make ourselves a priority, improving self-esteem.

2. Self-preservation and conservation of emotional energy

When we don't set clear boundaries in our relationships, we can begin to develop resentment towards others, and that can take up a lot of emotional energy. Boundaries allow us to save that energy by advocating for ourselves.

3. More independence and agency

Establishing clear boundaries in our relationships allows us the freedom to move flexibly and comfortably within those boundaries, thus providing us with the agency to practice making safe choices for ourselves.

How to set a boundary

1 Identify your existing boundaries

The first step to setting boundaries is examining the boundaries that might already exist (or not) in your current relationships. If you have rigid boundaries, you might find that you keep others at a distance and avoid close relationships. If you have loose or open boundaries, you might find that you get too involved in others' problems, or perhaps find it difficult to say "no" to others' requests. From this point, you can decide what type of boundaries you would like to set with friends, family, coworkers, and strangers.

2 Define the new boundary

Figure out what it is you do or do not want in the relationship. This step is for yourself, so make sure you are first naming your boundary clearly in your own head. It may help to write it down in a journal.

3 Communicate your needs

Let the person know about the boundary. Make sure to be as clear as possible and keep the focus on yourself. For example: "I don't want to be called lazy."

4 Keep it simple

There is no need to over-explain your boundary, make sure not to fall into the trap of justifying yourself. You have a right to decide what you do and do not want.

5 Set consequences

It is critical to let the other person know what will happen if they cross your boundary. One way to do this is by using the format "if (behaviour) then (consequence)." For example: "If you say I am lazy, then I will hang out with you less frequently."

6 Follow through

Once you have set your boundary, you next need to enforce it, which means following through on any consequences you set if the person does not respect your boundary. This also means having an awareness of when your boundary is being crossed. Similarly to a security alarm system that rings when physical boundaries are crossed, you need to rely on your own internal alert system to identify when your emotional and psychological boundaries are being crossed.

Respecting others' boundaries

It is also important to learn to respect the boundaries that others set in their relationships with you. This means listening carefully to their words and making sure your actions align with their needs and wishes. Sometimes boundaries will conflict and they will have to be negotiated. This is okay as well, and is simply a part of being a human and compromising with others. Compromise does not mean sacrifice, where you forego your own needs for the sake of avoiding conflict, but rather coming together to find a solution that works for all parties.

Respecting others' boundaries is often about asking when you aren't sure whether a person will be okay with something, especially when boundaries differ culturally. You can also look out for non-verbal boundary-setting signals, such as someone taking a step back, stiffening their posture, or engaging in limited conversational responses.

