

A Guide To

PROTECTING YOUR PEACE

By Setting Boundaries

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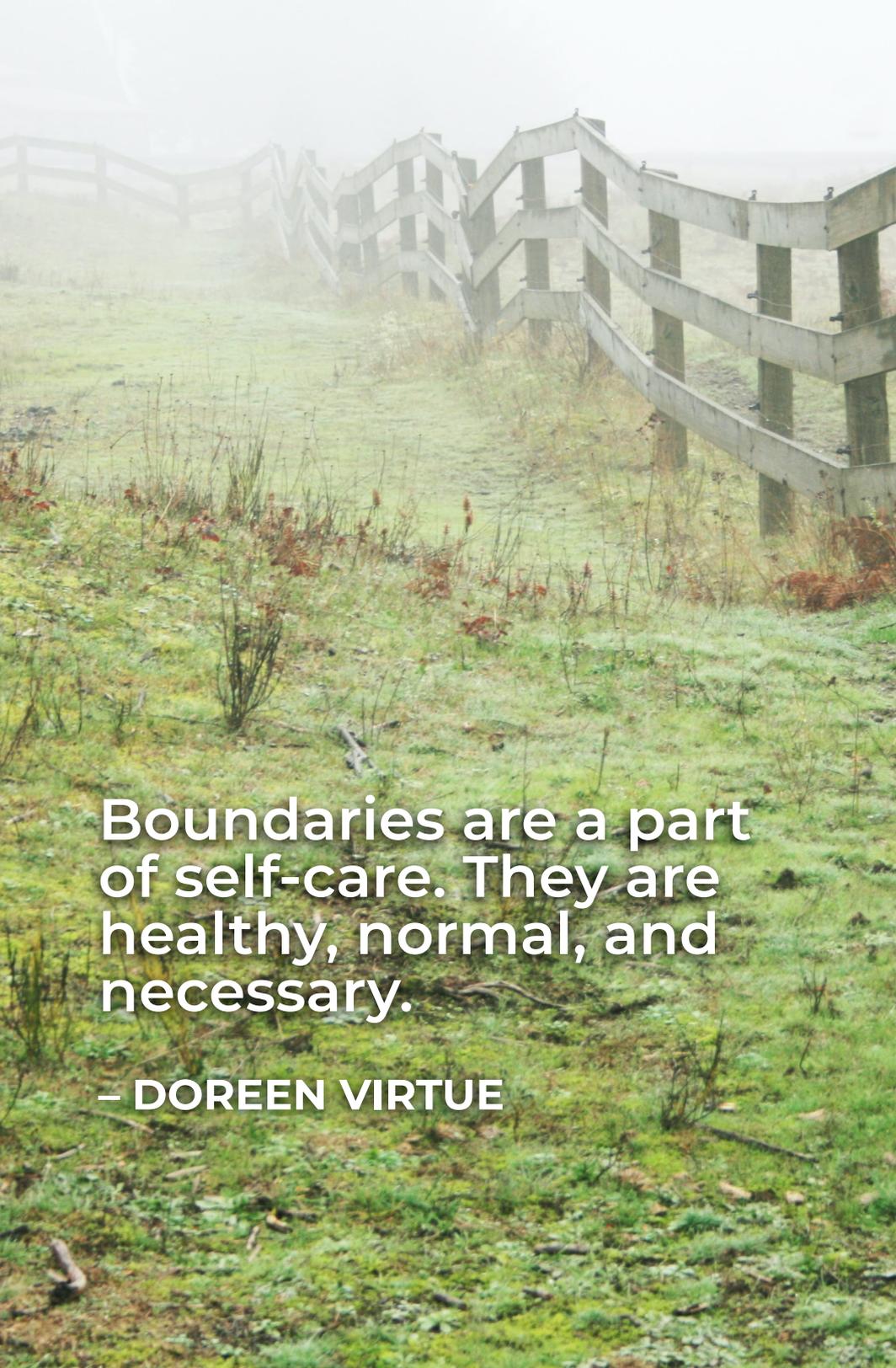
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**Boundaries are a part
of self-care. They are
healthy, normal, and
necessary.**

– DOREEN VIRTUE

Introduction

Healthy boundaries is a term that you may have heard about but you're not sure what it really means. At times the phrase may be overused, but at its core **setting healthy boundaries means making decisions about what you will allow into your life.**

Personal boundaries encompass a wide range of things like physical contact, personal space, verbal interactions, and emotional wellbeing. It can also mean ensuring that you have time to take care of yourself and your personal needs.

You may not realize it, but each day you have the opportunity to create and maintain boundaries.

For example:

- If you tell your child they can't scream when they want breakfast,

you're setting a boundary.

- If you tell your spouse you'd like help with the chores because you can't accomplish all the tasks yourself, you're establishing a boundary.
- If you tell your boss that you can't come in on Saturday, you're again setting a personal boundary.

In this eBook, you will learn what it means to establish healthy boundaries, why they're so important, and how to use healthy boundaries in different relationships in your life.

Let's get started!

What Are Personal Boundaries?

Personal boundaries are the limits people set in place in relationships. These boundaries show where one person ends and the other begins. This may sound ambiguous, but it basically means that people have separate and distinct needs.

Without boundaries, it's difficult to distinguish between someone else's needs and your own. You may feel that it's your sole purpose to meet everyone else's needs while ignoring your own.

You use personal boundaries each day of your life, but there are times when fear of letting someone else down, guilt, anxiety, or low self-esteem can get in the way of establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries.

People who are highly empathetic can also struggle to keep proper boundaries

because their need to help others can be overwhelming.

It's also possible to have boundaries that are too rigid. People who have been hurt in the past or those who are afraid of letting go of control may establish firm and inflexible boundaries. This can lead to isolation or trouble forming deeper relationships with others.

Those with rigid boundaries often have trouble trusting others or may not listen to other people's thoughts or ideas. This closed-off type of personal boundaries can also keep people from caring about or helping others.

Personal boundaries are used in a variety of areas of life and come up far more than you may realize. Below are some of the main types of boundaries and where you may experience them in your day-to-day life.

Main Types of Boundaries

Physical Boundaries

Physical boundaries relate to anything to do with your physical body. **It encompasses things like personal space, physical needs, intimacy, and privacy.**

Those with weak personal boundaries may struggle to tell someone when they've received an unwanted touch.

They may also fail to speak up when their physical needs aren't being met. For instance, they may not tell others when they're feeling hungry or when they need rest for fear that they would be an inconvenience or let someone else down.

Examples of healthy physical boundaries include:

- “I’m not a big fan of hugs. I’d prefer a handshake.”
- “I don’t like to be touched that way.”
- “I’m starting to get hungry. Would you like to get something to eat with me?”
- “I need some time to myself, but I will be able to talk again later.”

Mental or Intellectual Boundaries

Mental and boundaries have to do with thoughts, opinions, and feelings.

People can sometimes become forceful when it comes to their own thoughts and opinions, expecting others to have the same thoughts and opinions. When people don’t share them, they may become angry or upset.

Each person has a right to their personal beliefs and opinions. In cases where someone else becomes forceful or angry in their viewpoint, it can be healthy to shut down those conversations and establish a boundary.

Examples of healthy mental boundaries include:

- “I don’t think we can discuss this topic without becoming heated. Let’s choose something else to talk about.”
- “It’s okay that we have different opinions. We don’t have to agree about everything.”
- “I’m not comfortable with this topic.”
- “This isn’t the right time to talk about this, but we can discuss it another time.”

Spiritual or Religious Boundaries

Spiritual or religious boundaries are similar to mental boundaries in the sense that people have deeply held personal beliefs. **Establishing spiritual or religious boundaries means having the freedom to worship or observe a religion the way that you think is correct.**

Although religion is often built on community, and it's common to receive instruction from a religious leader, each person has to establish their own personal beliefs and ethics.

Examples of healthy spiritual boundaries include:

- “I can’t participate in this activity as it goes against my personal beliefs.”
- “I pray before I eat a meal, you can join me if you’d like.”

- “I don’t agree with your interpretation of that, but it doesn’t have to come between us.”

Emotional Boundaries

Having emotional boundaries means recognizing that all people have their own thoughts and feelings. When establishing healthy boundaries, you realize that your feelings are separate from others, and you aren’t solely responsible for their feelings.

While it’s essential to respect other people’s feelings, it’s not your job to ensure that everyone is happy all the time. It’s okay to disagree about things and it’s okay to make your emotional needs known.

On the flip side, those with rigid personal boundaries may struggle to take into account the feelings and emotional needs of others. They may be very closed off and refuse to share their feelings or

ask about someone else's. They may not be okay with someone else having different thoughts or feelings than their own.

Examples of healthy emotional boundaries include:

- “Even if it’s not your intention, when you say things like that it hurts my feelings.”
- “I would love to talk with you about these personal issues in your life, but at the moment I don’t have the emotional energy. Can we pick it up again tomorrow?”
- “When you speak to me in that way it feels like you’re putting me down. I don’t like feeling that way. Can you try talking to me in a different way?”
- “I’m having a really hard day and I need someone to talk with. Would you be available to listen?”

Time and Energy Boundaries

Another type of personal boundary is time and energy. **This type of personal boundary is easy to breach, especially for someone who doesn't want to let other people down.**

Imagine a scenario where an employee is continually asked to take on extra responsibility at work without extra compensation. Someone with loose personal boundaries may continue accepting the workload without saying anything.

Time and energy personal boundaries may also be put to the test when it comes to family. Family members may expect you to willingly give up your time to babysit their children, help do work around their house, or get ready for events.

It's common and good to aid family, but not when it gets in the way of taking care of personal needs.

On the other hand, someone who has rigid boundaries may be completely closed off to helping others or may be very strict with offering time or energy to others. They may say no to every opportunity to volunteer and refuse to help with family functions or additional work in the workplace.

Examples of healthy time or energy boundaries include:

- “I would love to help watch your kids so you can go on a date, but I’m not available this weekend. Let’s sit down and look at our schedules to plan a time when the kids can come over.”
- “Over the past months, I have been given many new responsibilities at work. Thank you for teaching me so much about the business through

hands-on experience. I'm interested in hearing about any promotional opportunities that may be available. Would now be a good time to talk about this?"

- "I'm spending time with my family this weekend, so I won't be available to work."

Material or Financial Boundaries

Material goods or finances are another area that requires personal boundaries. Growing up with siblings or living with a roommate you may experience times when someone uses your belongings without permission. You may also have a friend or family member who is always asking for money or expecting you to pay for things.

It's good to be generous, but there are times when people will take advantage of someone's kindness. They may also

borrow things and return them in bad repair, or they may continually ask for money.

Financial boundaries may also be necessary for relationships in which money is shared. For example, one spouse may be freer with spending than another. This will require clear communication from both parties so each person can feel comfortable with the household spending.

Examples of healthy material or financial boundaries include:

- “I’m happy for you to borrow my car, but it’s important to me that you return it in the shape it was given to you when you borrowed it.”
- “I won’t be able to contribute financially at this time, but I’d be happy to help in other ways.”
- “I wish I could come on that trip this weekend, but it doesn’t fit into my budget. Please let me know the next time you’d like to do something like this.”

When we fail to set
boundaries and hold
people accountable,
we feel used and
mistreated.

– BRENE BROWN



Why Are Healthy Boundaries Important?

Healthy boundaries help maintain healthy relationships and promote stronger mental health and security in life. In this section, we'll take a look at some of the main reasons why it's important to set good personal boundaries.

Healthy Boundaries Encourage Healthy Self-Care Practices

One of the first reasons healthy boundaries are so important is that they're an essential part of self-care. Sometimes self-care gets a reputation of being self-centered, and those that are naturally empathetic or helpful may feel like they should be spending that energy helping others.

There's no doubt that taking care of other people is a worthy goal, but the saying "you can't pour from an empty cup" is appropriate here.

Those who continually spend all their emotional, physical, and financial resources on others will feel depleted, stressed, and frustrated. They may begin experiencing feelings like anger or depression which may make them react in ways that hurt others -- the exact opposite of what they want to do.

Self-care is more than going to the spa or buying luxury items. **Self-care means looking after your mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.** It means having limits in place and listening to your mind and body when you're pushing yourself too far, especially when it comes to taking care of other people's needs.

Healthy Boundaries Allow You to Be Open to the World

On the other end of the spectrum are those whose boundaries are very rigid and resolute. People who have overly strict boundaries can also create personal challenges.

People with rigid boundaries often want to maintain a high level of control in their life. They don't want to be managed by others, and they may be wary of allowing people into their inner circle.

A person with rigid boundaries may have experienced past trauma or a form of abuse. They may feel those firm personal boundaries will protect them from future trauma. It's a natural inclination to want to shut others out after being hurt, but it can also hold a person back from living the life they want to live.

In addition, those who create walls between themselves and others have trouble forming deep and meaningful relationships with others. These relationships often remain shallow and unsatisfying, and others may interpret the barriers to mean that the person is uncaring or disinterested.

Finding ways to maintain personal boundaries while still allowing others in emotionally, physically, and mentally is an important step for those who are very strict with their boundaries.

The Main Reasons People Don't Have Healthy Boundaries

As discussed earlier in the book, there are those with loose boundaries and there are those with rigid boundaries. There are also those who sway between the two, being overly strict with some boundaries and extremely loose and unchecked with others.

When setting boundaries, it's also important to be flexible sometimes.

There are times when the answer is an unequivocal no. For instance, if someone asks you to do something that goes against your moral values.

Other times you may have set boundaries that have a little give to them. An example of this may be that you prefer that your children don't eat candy, but you allow them to for special holidays.

You may find that it's time to reevaluate some of your personal boundaries. Are you too strict with some, and too loose with others? During this time, it will also be beneficial to explore *why* you might struggle to set healthy boundaries. What are some of the main reasons that your boundaries aren't what you want them to be?

Here you can read through some of the common reasons why you might have boundaries that are too weak or too strong. Think about which ones might apply to you, and how that could affect your life and relationships with others.

Common Reasons People Have Weak Personal Boundaries

Weak boundaries, sometimes referred to as porous boundaries, may stem from a variety of reasons.

Here are some of the most common:

1. **They're people pleasers.** People with porous boundaries are often consumed with ensuring that everyone else's needs are met. Their main focus is pleasing others, and it would upset them to know that someone was disappointed or upset with them.
 - **The need to please others supersedes the need for self-care.**
2. **They have low self-esteem.** People with low self-esteem may not feel that they have the right to set boundaries. They may feel like their self-worth is so little that they can't stand up for themselves and tell others no.
3. **They're workaholics.** Some people have loose boundaries because

they're workaholics. People like this may be perfectionists or may feel that things will fall apart without them. When this is the case, they're likely to volunteer for extra shifts and struggle to separate work and personal life.

4. **They're empathaths or highly sensitive people.** People who are naturally empathetic or sensitive often have a hard time blocking out other people's needs. **For these people, other people's pain or needs can feel as real as their own,** as though they, too, were experiencing the same problems.

- Empaths looking to develop healthy boundaries will have to work on taking breaks and actively shutting out other people's feelings and practice focusing on their own.

5. **They have a misconception that saying no means you're not nice.**

Many people are taught from a young age to be nice to others. That means sharing toys, taking turns, and thinking about how other people feel. This is a critical part of childhood development and learning how to live in a community.

- Unfortunately, some adults feel that if they say no to someone that they're no longer a nice person. This may fill them with shame and guilt, and they may feel that they've let others down.
- **Fortunately, there are many ways to still help others and show that you care without saying yes every time someone asks you to do something.**

6. **They have a fear of confrontation.** Some people become anxious or upset in the face of confrontation.

They may find themselves agreeing to something simply because they can't face the repercussions of saying no.

- People with this fear will benefit from learning that they aren't responsible for someone else's reaction. If you're unable to help someone and it makes them angry, it isn't your problem to fix. It's their job to control and handle their own emotions.

7. **They feel overwhelmed by the problems of the world and feel the need to fix them.** People who are highly aware of the problems in the world coupled with workaholic tendencies may find themselves lacking proper boundaries.

- These individuals will sacrifice themselves to help those who are in need but will often push until they reach some

kind of breaking point.

8. **They think they should have the same limits as other people.**

Another reason people may struggle to set healthy boundaries is that they compare themselves to others.

- Imagine for a moment an employee that spends all their time at the office, is first to volunteer for every assignment, and generally takes on all the extra workload.
- There may be a lot going on here, but just because someone else can take on the extra work doesn't necessarily mean it can fit into your life.
 - You may have children at home, and they may be single.

- They may require less of a personal life while you may feel a more fulfilling personal life is essential to your wellbeing.
- You may need more time to reset before the next day than your fellow employee.
- Keep in mind that others may also struggle to set healthy boundaries, and what you're seeing might eventually lead to burnout for that worker as well.
- **The bottom line is your threshold and boundaries will not automatically match someone else's.**

That doesn't mean they can't inspire you to be a better employee, but you can't expect to be the same as

everyone else. **Your personal boundaries are unique to you.**

Common Reasons People Have Rigid Personal Boundaries

Rigid boundaries also have a variety of triggers.

Some of these include:

1. **They're seeking control.** People with rigid boundaries may not feel comfortable unless they have extreme control over their lives.

For instance, it may greatly upset them when someone volunteers them for an activity or does something without their express permission.

2. **They have past trauma. Past trauma is one of the biggest reasons that people have deep and unrelenting boundaries.**

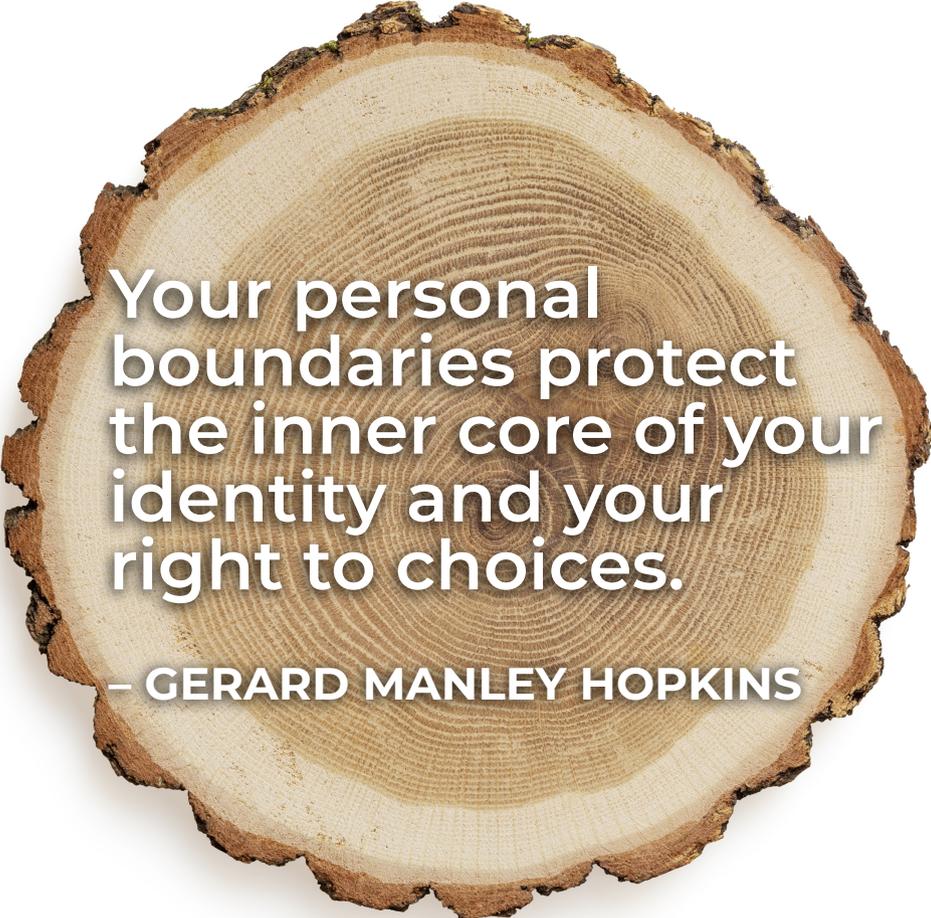
- People who have been abused or those who have lived through a traumatic event will often do everything they can to protect themselves from it happening again.

They will do so even if that means shutting out things, people, or experiences they may otherwise be interested in.

3. **They have a fear of change or trying new things.** Someone with strict boundaries may have an innate fear of change or new experiences. It may make them more comfortable to stick with an established routine and never part from it.

4. **They come from a family that has established rigid boundaries.**

Some people have rigid boundaries because they were taught to have them in childhood. For example, this may be evident in homes that adhere to traditional or strict religious value systems.



Your personal
boundaries protect
the inner core of your
identity and your
right to choices.

– GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

How to Set Healthy Boundaries in Any Type of Relationship

You've spent some time evaluating your boundary tendencies and you may have determined that yours are either too rigid, too weak, or a mix of both.

But how do you take this knowledge and apply it to your real life? How can you start establishing healthy boundaries with your friends, family, co-workers, children, roommates, partners, and so on?

Each person's experience is going to be unique. You have the best understanding of your relationships and which ones could use stronger or looser boundaries.

For example, if you have a toxic friend or relative in your life, you may need to establish very strict boundaries. For others, it may be as simple as learning to say no when you're not up for something.

In this chapter, you'll be provided some tips for healthy boundaries in some of the most common types of relationships.

Take the tips that benefit you and your relationships and disregard the parts that don't apply to you.

Setting Healthy Boundaries With Your Parents

As you become an adult, you will find that your relationship with your parents will evolve. At one point in your life, they were there to care for you and give you direction in almost all categories. Once you've reached adulthood, their role should diminish, giving you the opportunity to make your own choices.

For some families, this process of separation can be quite difficult and can even be painful for parents.

One thing to know is that setting these boundaries will take time and communication. It could take many conversations before coming to an understanding about what you want your relationship to look like with your parents.

Some tips for setting healthy boundaries with your parents are:

1. **Letting them know when you're available.** Most parents expect children to help out around the house and to come to every family event. As you age, your availability will look quite different.
 - You may still want to help your parents out from time to time, but you will acquire your own responsibilities. You will also find that you may not be able to attend every family gathering, especially as

you start a family of your own.

- **Let your parents know times when you're available and try to give them notice ahead of time.** If you know you're going to be missing a favorite holiday, give them time to process this information.

2. **Use kindness in all things.** There's nothing wrong with being clear and concise with your parents about your boundaries, but things will go much more smoothly if you do it with kindness and appreciation.

- Your parents have spent your life caring for you. Approaching this topic with respect and compassion will go a long way in making them feel appreciated and loved.

3. **Think about your limits.** Give yourself some time to think about how much you would like your parents to be in your life and let them know any limits you set.

Setting Healthy Boundaries With Your Children

Flipping things to the opposite side of the spectrum is setting healthy boundaries with your children. As a parent, it's your job to give your children a clear set of guidelines and boundaries so they know what's expected of them in life.

Children are made to push boundaries, but they also prefer to have them. Not only that, but without proper boundaries they won't have a good idea of how to interact with others. Simple things like telling them not to hit or teaching them to share are examples of setting boundaries.

Some ideas for setting healthy boundaries with your children include:

1. **Be clear and concise about what the boundaries are.** Nothing is more confusing to a child than shifting boundaries. If they get in trouble for a behavior one day, but another day it's permissible, it can be very difficult for them to understand how they are to behave.
 - Similarly, if you have a severe consequence for an action one day and a small consequence for another, they may get the impression that it's okay to do the behavior *sometimes*.
2. **Choose negative and positive consequences.** Consequences can be positive or negative, and it's helpful to use both when setting boundaries. For instance, your child

may lose a privilege for doing the wrong thing, or they might gain a privilege for doing the right thing.

3. **Be on the same page as your co-parent.** You and your co-parent may not always agree on the best way to parent. Find times when you can discuss your differences apart from the children.

- **Do your best to find a way to compromise on differences in parenting so you can present a united front to your children.**

4. **Explain why you have boundaries when it makes sense to.** As your children age, they may question your boundaries. Why do we have a bedtime? Why can't we eat candy every day? Why can't we play video games all day?

- Take this opportunity to explain to them your

reasoning. You need a bedtime, so you aren't tired and cranky the next day. Too much candy isn't healthy for your body, and neither is playing video games all day.

- They may continue to push these boundaries, but it's then your responsibility to continue to enforce them even when they argue about them.

5. **Reevaluate your boundaries from time to time.** Your boundaries for your children should be consistent, but **they may change over time.** You may find that you're holding on to boundaries from your childhood that actually aren't important to you.

- In addition, your children will age out of certain boundaries. For example, as they get older, you'll be likely to give

them later bedtimes or may feel they're responsible enough to set their own bedtime.

Setting Healthy Boundaries in Romantic Relationships

At the beginning of a romantic relationship, it can be easy to blur healthy boundaries. Your romantic connection with the person may cause you to forget or ignore things that cross your boundary lines.

Even though emotions may be high in a romantic relationship, **it's still important to establish healthy boundaries early on so both partners understand where the other person is coming from.**

If you didn't set healthy boundaries early in a relationship, there's still time, but it

may take more time and communication to establish later.

Some things to consider when setting healthy boundaries in a romantic relationship are:

1. **Think about what you want from the relationship.** Sit down and really consider what you hope to get from your romantic relationship. What things are important to you, and what things are deal breakers.
2. **Tell your romantic partner what you want from the relationship.** As you get to know your partner, let them know the things that you want from the relationship.
 - For example, if you want to take things slow and get to know them better, let them

know that's where you are. If you're hoping to get married and have children someday, let them know as the relationship becomes more serious.

3. **Share with your partner what your core beliefs are.** This is something that likely won't change (or at the very least won't change easily). If you and your romantic partner have widely different core beliefs it will be a challenge to reconcile.
 - **The most important thing is to be open about your core beliefs so this doesn't come as a surprise later in the relationship.**
4. **Understand that you're different people with different opinions and thoughts.** It's impossible to find someone who will think exactly the way you do in every scenario. In

fact, being in a relationship with someone who thinks differently is often a good way to grow.

- Allowing your partner to have different thoughts and opinions, and them allowing you the same, is a good way of establishing that you're separate people that are free to be different

5. **Communicate your physical boundaries clearly.** Intimacy and physical touch is a large part of a romantic relationship, but not everyone has the same needs or boundaries.

- If something makes you uncomfortable, don't hide that from your partner because you're afraid to hurt their feelings. Kindly let them know when you don't like something.

6. **Talk about money.** Finances can be a catalyst for arguments. One of you might be spendy while another is thrifty. Communicate with each other about your expectations for finances.

7. **Explain your emotional boundaries.** There are certain things that might hurt your feelings or upset you. You may try to hide these things from your partner, but it's better to let them know when something affects you. In almost all romantic relationship issues, **communication is key.**

Setting Healthy Boundaries at Work

The workplace is an easy place to create unhealthy boundaries, especially for those who are naturally inclined to be workaholics. It's also an easy place to have loose boundaries when you're working for someone else because you may be

concerned that you'll lose your job or miss out on promotion opportunities if you're not going above and beyond.

Employers want to see those standout employees, but **there is a limit to how much time and effort you should put into your job.**

When it largely interferes with your personal life, leaves you highly stressed, or if you're spending most of your time working, it may be time to reevaluate your boundaries.

Understand that there are a lot of different jobs that require a lot of different types of time commitment. For example, an on-call doctor doesn't have the luxury of ignoring an emergency call. If you need a lot of time to yourself during non-work hours, you may want to find a profession that ends once you clock out.

The tips shared here may not apply to your specific work environment but try to think about how it could work for you.

Consider these boundaries:

1. **Understand what your work expectations are.** When you get hired or get a promotion, it's a good idea to have your employer lay out exactly what the work expectations are. That way you and your employer both have a clear idea of what your job description entails.
 - For example, you may know upon being hired that your job requires "light travel." If you find yourself traveling every weekend, you can revisit this expectation and explain to your employer that you're traveling more than you expected.
2. **Set limits on your time commitment.** With today's technology, it's possible for people to contact you at any point. You can

receive work emails during the night or phone calls during dinner with your family.

- If your place of employment is non-emergency related, have certain times of the day when you won't look at emails or receive phone calls.

Let fellow employees or employers know certain hours when you won't be available.

3. **Use paid time off when you need to.** If you're sick, bereaving, or simply need a vacation, don't be afraid to take time off. If you have paid time off, it's there for you to use and you shouldn't feel guilty using the allotted time off for the intended purpose.
4. **Have confidence in your boundaries.** If you know that you're working hard at work and putting in your best effort, don't feel

ashamed or guilty for not taking on extra work or volunteering for everything.

- In fact, the more you apologize and act like you're doing something wrong, the more your employer and fellow employees will think you're not pulling your weight.
- **Be judicious about your workload.** If you're being lazy, now is a good time to step up and help out more. If you know you're already doing more than you can handle, don't apologize or act ashamed when the answer is no.

How Will You Start Establishing Healthy Boundaries?

This may be a lot to absorb if you haven't given much thought to healthy boundaries or this is your first time trying to consciously establish them.

As a first step, think through what you want from your relationships with others.

What's working right now, and what's not working? How would you like to strengthen your boundaries or in what areas are your boundaries too strict?

As you set up your boundaries, it's probably most beneficial to start with the ones that are closest to you. You won't wake up one day and suddenly have perfect boundaries with everyone around you. Think of one relationship to start with and begin working on that one.

Don't be discouraged when you're met with pushback. It's very normal for

someone to be surprised or frustrated when you start presenting new boundaries they're not used to. This is part of the process. Do your best to be patient and kind as people around you get used to these changes.

Be patient and kind with yourself as well. You may be tempted to feel defeated when someone crosses a boundary that you've put in place, but **it will take time and effort to effectively set healthy personal boundaries.** Not only that, but there are times when flexibility in your boundaries will be a positive thing.

Take it one step at a time, and soon you'll enjoy stronger relationships along with less stress and more peace of mind.

Resources

- <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/set-boundaries>
- <https://psychcentral.com/lib/10-way-to-build-and-preserve-better-boundaries>
- https://www.uky.edu/hr/sites/www.uky.edu.hr/files/wellness/images/Conf14_Boundaries.pdf
- <https://roadtogrowthcounseling.com/importance-boundaries-relationships/>
- <https://blog.heartmunity.com/learning-how-to-set-healthy-boundaries-with-family>
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- <https://www.walkingthroughtransitions.com/2019/06/21/boundaries-for-empaths-how-to-stop-the-suffering-build-strong-barriers-and-stop-being-so-nice/>
- <https://lonewolf.com/personal-boundaries/>
- <https://www.mindbodygreen.com/articles/six-types-of-boundaries-and-what-healthy-boundaries-look-like-for-each>
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- <https://www.snhu.edu/about-us/newsroom/2019/04/what-is-self-care>
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- <https://www.lifespan.org/lifespan-living/social-media-good-bad-and-ugly>