

Setting Boundaries

Personal or emotional boundaries are the limits and rules we set for ourselves within relationships. A person with healthy boundaries can say 'no' to others when they want to but they are also comfortable opening themselves up to intimacy and close relationships.

Know Your Boundaries

Boundaries should be based on your values or the things that are important to you. For example, if you value spending time with family, set firm boundaries about working late.

Your boundaries are yours and yours alone. Many of your boundaries might align with those who are close to you, but others will be unique.

Know your boundaries before entering a situation. This will make it less likely you'll do something you're not comfortable with.

What To Say

You always have the right to say 'no'. When doing so, express yourself clearly and without ambiguity so there is no doubt about what you want.

"I'm not comfortable with this." "Please don't do that." "I don't want to do that."

"I can't do that for you." "This doesn't work for me." "This is not acceptable."

"I've decided not to." "Not at this time." "I'm drawing the line at _____."

What To Do

- **Use confident body language.** Face the other person, make eye contact and use a steady tone of voice at the appropriate volume.
- **Be respectful.** Avoid yelling, insults or giving the silent treatment. It's ok to be firm but your message will be better received if you are respectful.
- **Plan ahead.** Think about what you want to say and how you will say it before entering a difficult conversation. This will help you feel more confident.
- **Compromise.** When appropriate, listen and consider the needs of the other person. You never have to compromise but give and take is part of any healthy relationship.



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Instructions: Respond to the following practice questions as if you were really in each situation. Think about the language you would use to firmly state your boundary.

Examples

Situation: You notice that your roommate has been eating your food in the fridge. You never discussed plans to share food and don't want them eating what you bought.

Response: "I'd like to keep our food separate. If there's something of mine that you want, please ask me before taking it."

Situation: Your friend calls you at 11pm to discuss issues that she is having with her boyfriend. You need to wake up at 6am.

Response: "I can tell you're upset. I want to talk to you, but I need to go to bed. Maybe we can talk tomorrow afternoon."

Practice

Situation: You invited a friend over for the evening, but now it's getting late. You would like to get ready for bed, but your friend seems unaware of how late it is.

Response:

Situation: A good friend asks you out on a date. You are not interested in being more than friends and would like to let them down clearly but gently.

Response:



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Situation: You missed several days of work due to a medical condition. When you get back, a coworker asks what happened. You feel the information is personal and don't want to share.

Response:

Situation: Your brother asks if you could watch his two young children Saturday morning, however you already have plans.

Response:

Situation: Your coworker is upset about their recent performance review. They start yelling and slamming their fist on their desk which is making you very uncomfortable.

Response:

Situation: A salesperson comes to your door during dinner. You try to politely show disinterest but they continue to give their sales pitch. You want to get back to your dinner.

Response:

