

Boundaries



Boundaries are limits people set in order to create a healthy sense of personal space. Boundaries can be physical or emotional in nature, and they help distinguish the desires, needs, and preferences of one person from another.

UNDERSTANDING BOUNDARIES

Interpersonal relationships can be difficult to navigate, as everyone has different perspectives, opinions, and ways of being in the world. Boundaries provide a way for each individual to maintain their own identity and personal space within professional and personal relationships. In essence, boundaries are the guidelines a person determines for themselves that dictate how they want to be treated and what types of interactions they are willing to accept from others.

The boundaries a person sets may be largely influenced by their upbringing, [culture](#), and other factors. For example, people whose parents did not set healthy boundaries may have difficulty setting healthy boundaries for themselves because they never learned how to do so. Some cultures are individualistic in nature and place a high value on personal space and individual liberties. Other cultures, however, are more collectivist and may not emphasize personal boundaries to the same extent.

WHY ARE BOUNDARIES IMPORTANT?

Healthy boundaries serve the important function of allowing people to take responsibility for themselves and their actions while helping them avoid being in a position where they unfairly or inappropriately take responsibility for the emotions and needs of others. Having well-developed boundaries in place can lead to healthier relationships and help a person to avoid feeling manipulated, violated, or otherwise mistreated by other people.

An individual's boundaries can help them to determine who to let into their lives and to what extent. Boundaries also serve to help an individual establish and maintain their own [identity](#) by creating a clear

distinction between the [self](#) and others. When a person has weak boundaries, it may be more difficult to separate their own feelings from those of others.

HOW CAN WEAK BOUNDARIES IMPACT WELL-BEING?

Weak interpersonal boundaries often result in an individual feeling emotionally drained, used, or even violated. For example, if an individual feels responsible for helping a friend regardless of what that friend asks of them and when they ask for it, that person may feel [manipulated](#) and even resentful over time. Weak boundaries may mean an individual is more susceptible to being taken advantage of by others.

Examples of weak boundaries might include feeling incomplete without another person, feeling unable to express one's own wishes and preferences, engaging in acts of [physical intimacy](#) even when they are uncomfortable or don't feel right, accepting physical touch such as pats or hugs when unwanted, lacking needed or desired personal space, and feeling the need to save others from their own problems.

Boundaries help protect people from intrusions from others. When an individual feels overwhelmed by the needs and requests of others, they may eventually come to feel as if their life has become chaotic and/or disorganized. That individual may have difficulty dealing with their own issues because they have come to feel responsible for helping others before themselves.

ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES

A first important step in the process of setting healthy boundaries is generally identifying what behaviors from others are acceptable and what behaviors from others might lead to discomfort or distress. Feeling drained, [stressed](#), or [resentful](#) after an interaction with another individual is often an indication that setting a boundary within that relationship may be a good idea. Any boundaries a person determines for themselves should be assertively and openly communicated to others in a clear way.

Setting a boundary does not necessarily imply that other people will immediately respect the boundary. For that reason, maintaining boundaries is crucial to healthy relationships. Sometimes, it is necessary to continue to communicate one's boundaries to others and to make others aware when the boundary has been crossed. Maintaining boundaries also requires a person to establish consequences that are followed through when those boundaries are violated. For example, a person may say to their partner, "I will not date someone who lies to me." Following through would mean ending the relationship upon discovering their partner told a lie.

Boundaries are not threats or ultimatums and should not be taken as such. If an individual refuses to respect a boundary despite repeated attempts to set it, it may be useful to take a break, or period of

time away from the friendship or relationship. In some cases, a person may choose to end the relationship.

Some individuals, especially those who grew up in situations where their boundaries were violated or their caregivers did not set healthy boundaries, may find it difficult to set and maintain boundaries. They may feel guilty when doing so, as if they are being selfish. In reality, [mental health professionals](#) see boundaries as a crucial component of healthy relationships. Having clear boundaries in all relationships allows people to care for themselves psychologically, which is not selfish, but an essential aspect of well-being.

References:

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