



Boundary Setting

Boundary setting is a vital skill that ensures healthy relationships. We are often never taught how to set boundaries, or even told that they are important. However, without effective boundaries, unhealthy or toxic relationships can develop, which can severely impact our mental health and wellbeing.

Effective boundary-setting is linked to happier relationships with others, better self-esteem, reduced symptoms of mental health issues and a happier, more fulfilled life. By building our ability to set boundaries, we can maintain effective self-care and see benefits in every sphere of life, including our work, family, health, and romantic relationships.

What are Boundaries?

Boundaries can be defined as the limits and rules we set for ourselves within a relationship. They are the space between you and the other person, which ensures there is separation, independence, and support for each person in the relationship.

The purpose of boundaries is to protect our values and what is important to us. Boundaries support our values by ensuring we consciously limit how we spend resources, such as time, energy, and emotions, on what matters to us. Our values are unique to ourselves, meaning so are boundaries.

Boundaries are about setting appropriate limits; however, the appropriateness may depend on the setting or context.

For example, a joke that may be appropriate with friends may be inappropriate at work. Boundaries may also be affected by cultural expectations, such as appropriate public displays of affection.

Types of Boundaries

Rigid Boundaries:

People with rigid boundaries keep others at a distance. They often experience loneliness, depression, and a lack of social connection. They likely avoid intimacy or closeness with others, have few close relationships or friendships, struggle to open up to others, and are private and protective of personal information.

Porous Boundaries:

People with porous boundaries are overly involved and enmeshed with others. They often are highly dependent on other people and struggle with feelings of anxiety, burnout, and the need to please others. They likely struggle to say no, become dependent on others' opinions, accept abuse or neglect, overshare, and are scared of rejection.

Healthy Boundaries:

People with healthy boundaries can set limits in relationships and protect what is important to them. They likely know their personal needs and values and can communicate these to others. They are assertive, value their own opinions, will not accept abuse or neglect from others, and know how to share personal information appropriately.



Why are Boundaries So Important?

Boundaries are vital for a variety of reasons. They help build healthy and autonomous relationships. They are a vital part of self-care, ensuring you can put limits on how you spend your time, energy, or emotions on others and yourself.

Boundaries also enable us to connect to our sense of identity. When we set boundaries, we are choosing how we spend our resources, prioritising and taking responsibility for our happiness.

Setting boundaries is an essential tool in taking control of your mental health and wellbeing. Boundaries can reduce stress levels and burnout, increase self-esteem, and protect ourselves from accepting abuse from others.

How to Set Boundaries

1. Know Your Boundaries: boundaries should be based on your values. If you don't know what you are trying to protect, there is very little motivation to set boundaries. Ask yourself what is important to you, what you need from certain relationships, or what you want to protect. Also, consider what roles you are willing to play in a relationship.

2. Plan Boundaries: when you communicate a boundary with someone else, you are more likely to succeed if you plan what you will say.

Ask yourself what message you want to get across and what are you willing to accept. Consider what has previously stopped you from placing boundaries.

3. Communicate your Boundaries: ensure you are clear and concise about what is bothering you and your limits. You do not need to explain why a boundary is important to you, but it can others understand your perspective. Use confident body language, a respectful attitude, and a firm tone.

4. Continue to Set Boundaries: it may take time for them to interact with you in this new way. Remind them each time they cross the boundary.

5. Know your Limits: if someone repeatedly ignores your boundary setting, it is important to know when to draw the line. You are in control of your exposure to this person. Consider how long you are willing to try to set the boundary. Remember, without boundaries, your values, the relationships you have with others, and your mental health, are all at risk.

Tips for Boundary Setting

- Tune into your feelings: our feelings are an essential means of getting in touch with our values and if we need boundaries
- Be flexible: your boundaries may change over time. Be willing to alter them as necessary
- Be specific: vague boundaries make it impossible to know when our boundaries have been crossed
- Thank others: when people respect your boundaries, thank them and tell them what it means to you. They are more likely to do it again if you've acknowledged it
- Respect the boundaries of others: make sure you take the time to understand and follow others around you.