Setting healthy boundaries

Directorate: Counselling and Career Development
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Define tomorrow.

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What are boundaries?

- Healthy boundaries communicate to others what you will and will not tolerate.

- Healthy boundaries are the limits you place around your time, emotions, body, and mental health to stay resilient, solid, and content with who you are.

- These empowering borders protect you from being used, drained, or manipulated by others.

What are boundaries?

- Boundaries are rooted in clear communication

- Boundaries empower you to take charge of your life

- Boundaries can be set with:
  - Family
  - Friends
  - Romantic relationships
  - Coworkers
  - Strangers
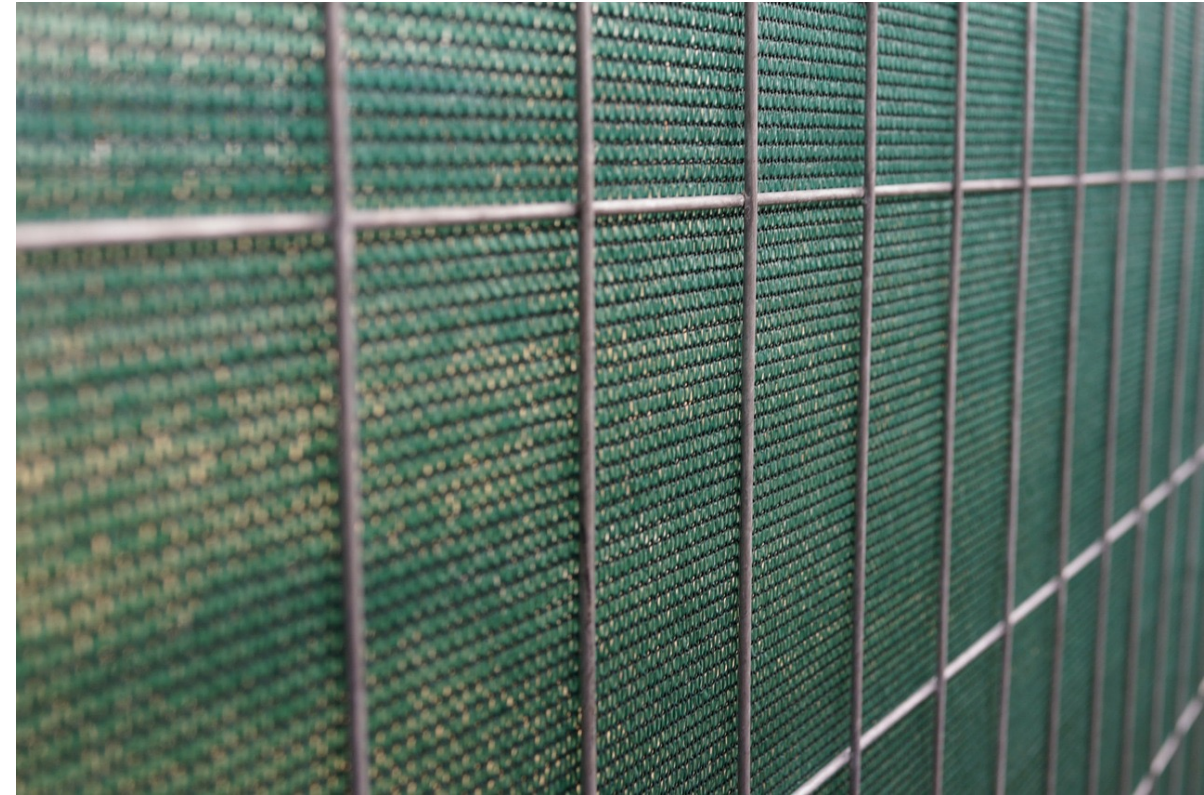
Why do we need boundaries?

- Defining the "rules" of your relationships can liberate you from people-pleasing and overcommitting.
- The more precise you can express your boundaries, the more likely your boundaries will be respected.
- Protect your mental, physical, and emotional well-being.
- Personal boundaries are at the root of a fulfilled, balanced life. Without them, people can quickly lose themselves in their work, relationships, familial obligations, or service to others. They can even wind up being exploited or taken advantage of by people who do not respect them.
- These borders help define what you are willing to say "yes" to and what you decide to say "no" to. They give you a sense of agency and sovereignty over your decisions.
- Good boundaries free you to live life on your terms.

Healthy vs Unhealthy boundaries

Healthy boundaries

- Tend to have lower levels of stress and higher self-esteem because they prioritize their well-being.
- Protect yourself from getting taken advantage of.
- High self-esteem and self-respect.
- Prioritise time for yourself.
- You only take on responsibilities you can handle
- Authentically say "no" if you don't have the energy or capacity to do something.
- Set limits for others without feeling bad.
- Strong sense of identity and direction.
- Take care of your own problems and understand that you cannot heal other people's issues for them.
- You clearly communicate your needs and wants; you prioritise your self-care.

Unhealthy boundaries

- May inadvertently let others take advantage of them.
- They may lack self-confidence, a sense of purpose, or a clear identity to guide them through life. poor boundaries lead to resentment, anger, and burnout."
- Can be easily persuaded into things they don't want to do because they may be acting out of guilt or obligation rather than self-love.
- Vulnerable to being "used" or taken advantage of.
- Over-commit your time to others and leave little time for yourself.
- Lower self-esteem and critical inner dialogue.
- Give a lot of their time to other people.
- Feeling exhausted or burnt out by overwhelming commitments and responsibilities.
- Have a hard time saying "no".
- Change yourself to fit in with different people.
- Take on other people's problems as your own.
- You put other people's needs and wants before your own.

5 effective ways to set healthy boundaries

1. Visualise and name your limits
2. Openly communicate your boundaries
3. Reiterate and uphold your boundaries
4. Don't be afraid to say NO
5. Take time for yourself
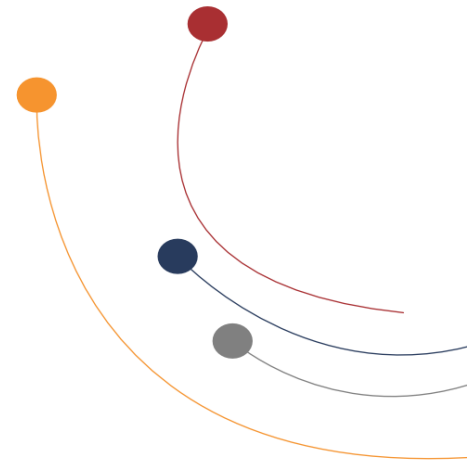
Visualise and name your limits

- The first and most important step to defining your boundaries is to **make them concrete**. Boundaries are often confusing and abstract because they feel invisible in our daily lives.

- However, by visualising your boundaries and **writing them down**, you can get much more clarity on where you want to draw the line between you and other people.

- Set aside some time to **reflect** on the state of your life.

- **Ask yourself:**
  - What is causing me unnecessary stress or discomfort?
  - What do I look forward to each day versus what do I dread?
  - Who or what gives me energy?
  - What areas of my life do I feel exhausted by?
  - What makes me feel safe, supported, and valued?

- **Draw** a large circle on a blank piece of paper. Inside the circle, write everything that makes you feel safe and stress-free.

Openly communicate your boundaries

One of the biggest mistakes people make is setting boundaries in their minds but not openly sharing them with the people in their life.

Sometimes people assume that you should know their boundaries.

But if they didn't clearly communicate where they've drawn the line, how will you know when you've overstepped it?

How to clearly communicate boundaries

Time Boundary: "I can only stay for an hour" or "If you're going to be late, please let me know ahead of time."

Energy Boundary: "I don't have the energy to help you with [their request] right now, but maybe [this resource] can help."

Emotional Dumping: "I understand you're having a hard time and I want to be there for you, but I don't have the emotional capacity to listen right now."

Personal Space Boundary: "It makes me feel uncomfortable when you [touch or action]. If you can't respect my space, I'll have to leave."

Conversational Boundary: "This is not a topic I'm willing to discuss right now."

Comment Boundary: "I don't find those types of comments funny."

Mental Boundary: "I understand we see things differently and I respect your opinion, but please don't force it on me."

Material Boundary: "Please ask me first before borrowing my [possession]" or "I would appreciate it if you didn't touch my [material thing]."

**Social Media Boundary:** "I don't feel comfortable with you posting that on Instagram."
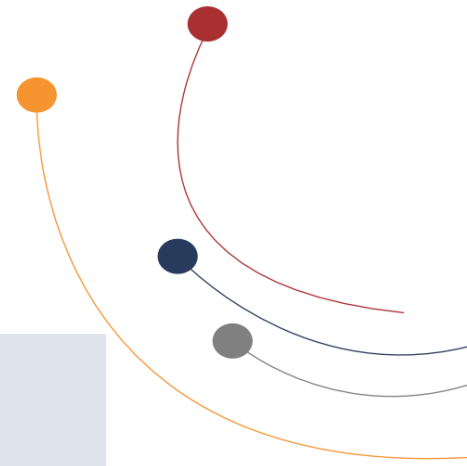
Reiterate and Uphold Your Boundaries

- Not everyone will understand or respect your boundaries the first time. It's essential to stand firm in your decision while kindly **reminding them of your needs** when necessary.

- If someone doesn't initially respect your boundary, remind them, but **stay consistent** with your original decision.

- **Avoid shifting your boundaries** for somebody else's comfort. If you said, "I don't feel comfortable with you contacting me about work after hours," you probably don't want to send the message that "sometimes it's OK for you to text me late at night." While it may be awkward or uncomfortable initially, a person who truly wants to be in your life will respect your decision.

Don't be afraid to say NO
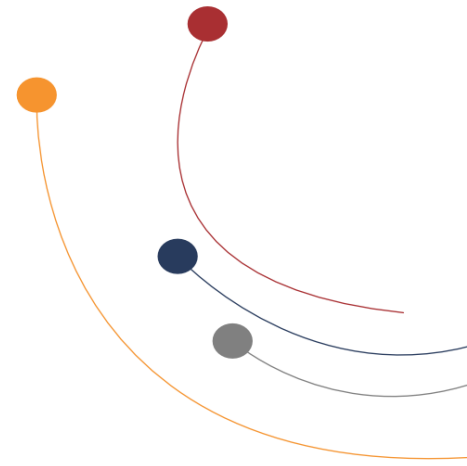
NO is a powerful word

- To say "no" is to draw a line in the sand. It is an expression of courage, self-love, and sovereignty over your daily decisions.

- You have the power to choose how you will spend your time and energy. If something doesn't feel right in your gut, you probably shouldn't do it. The word "no" is essential for healthy boundaries.

- Saying "no" doesn't have to be rude, but it also doesn't require an apology or an explanation. Notice where in your life you say "I'm sorry, I can't" or "maybe, let me get back to you" when you just mean "no."

- Pay attention to how you can shift these simple conversations to more clearly draw a boundary instead of leaving another person waiting for a clear answer. The clarity of your communication will ultimately benefit all parties involved.

Take time for yourself

Self-care can feel selfish or even frivolous. But the science of self-care is clear: taking alone time for yourself is linked to more confidence, greater creativity, more emotional intelligence, and more emotional stability in challenging situations. It can even help prevent burnout.

What does self-care have to do with boundaries?

- Solitude allows you to reflect on your life and your values. The time you set aside for self-care can help bring more clarity into your relationships with other people, ultimately helping you define your boundaries.

- To many, this may seem selfish. Modern society's tendency toward self-sacrifice and workaholism has led a large majority of people to dismiss their boundaries or sacrifice their well-being to please other people. Ironically, this can often have the opposite effect than they'd like.

- Self-care and healthy boundaries are **not selfish**; they are a form of self-love that leads to deeper relationships and more fulfilling experiences.

- As the saying goes: **you cannot pour from an empty cup**. Healthy boundaries are a way to fill your cup so that you can offer more joy and help to the world.

3 most common romantic areas that are lacking in boundaries include:

1   How Much Time You Spend Together

Relationship counsellor Garrett Coan advises the "70/30" rule as a general guideline: the happiest, most harmonious marriages spend about 70% of their time together and 30% apart. This may be more skewed toward 50/50 or 40/60 depending on the stage of your relationship, but the moral of the story is that nobody should take up all of your time.

Time with a romantic partner needs to be balanced with time for friends, family, and yourself

3 most common romantic areas that are lacking in boundaries include:

2   Setting Physical and Sexual Boundaries

Physical boundaries are essential at every stage of a relationship.

There needs to be conversations around how comfortable each person is with things like publicly displaying affection, holding hands, or any other form of physical boundary.

3 most common romantic areas that are lacking in boundaries include:

3   Respecting Emotional Boundaries

How you and your partner express your feelings to each other.

How do you talk to each other? Do you listen intently to your partner's needs or only focus on yourself? What topics do you avoid discussing? What tones of voice do you use? How do you apologise and resolve the situation when you get into arguments?

How to create work/life boundaries

Ways to set boundaries as a workaholic

Set precise work hours (such as 9 to 5 with a 1-hour lunch break)

Follow a morning routine centered around self-care

Avoid checking your phone while with family and friends

Tell your coworkers or employees that you are not available during certain times

Define a space in your home that is only for work (avoid working on your bed or from your couch)

Delegate tasks or hire new employees to help reduce your stress levels

Try a new hobby that is unrelated to your work

Keep separate sets of "work clothes" and "lounge clothes" to allow you to shift between boundaries mentally

When you close your laptop, mentally allow yourself to "clock out" for the day

Workaholism is a real problem resulting from a lack of boundaries around time and energy.

How to set boundaries with friends

Boundaries with friends

Set aside time specifically for yourself

Let your friends know when they can expect a response from you (set this boundary, so people don't get upset if you don't respond to their text or call right away)

Clearly express when you feel overwhelmed, ignored, or unheard.

If you're afraid to say "no," start saying "I'll get back to you" and think about things before you provide an answer

Let your friends know that you have personal goals and dreams you are working towards

Only offer to help friends with things that you genuinely have the capacity for. Otherwise, suggest alternative ways they can get help with the situation.

Communicate that you are there for them, yet you are also prioritising yourself at this time in your life.

Summary

Set boundaries	If you want to reclaim your energy, time, and power, setting boundaries is crucial for your growth journey.
While	While it may seem daunting, setting boundaries doesn't need to be complicated:
Define	Define your limits (what supports you versus what detracts from your well-being)
Communicate	Openly communicate your boundaries to people in your life
Remind	Remind people if needed (but always stick to your boundaries)
No	Don't be afraid to say "no" to things that don't serve you
Time	Take time for yourself

The bounds of your life will shape your growth and relationships with people around you.

You only have so much time, energy, and emotional capacity. If you don't protect your well-being, nobody else will.

Contact us

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