

Boundary Setting

Setting Healthy Boundaries

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When you name a consequence you can't enforce, your boundary becomes a suggestion people learn to ignore

- Christabel Mintah-Galloway



What is a Boundary

Boundaries define what you are comfortable with and how you would like to be treated. They express what you are okay with, and what you are not okay with.



Boundaries are not

Boundaries are not a way to control others' behaviour, taking responsibility for someone else's emotions, and healthy boundaries do not demand that someone else takes responsibility for your emotions. We can only control our own behaviour, and we still have to be accountable for our own reactions and choices.



Healthy boundaries

Healthy boundaries are firm but kind, support your needs, align with your values, and protect you from being mistreated. They are relational and allow for some flexibility, while still honouring your own needs. They are neither too loose nor too rigid.



Boundaries that don't work

When boundaries are too loose, you might feel like you're walked all over. When boundaries are too rigid, they may lack care or consideration for the relationship and can cause conflict and additional distress.



Rupture and Repair

Part of what makes boundary setting so difficult is our cultural aversion to rupture. In many Western and white families, rupture is not taught, and instead, conflict is ignored or actively avoided. This aversion leaks into our adult relationships, where many of us avoid conflict at essentially all costs. This behaviour weakens our relationships and makes speaking up for our needs even more difficult. Healthy relationships include rupture followed by repair. One cannot repair what has not been openly addressed.



Holding a Boundary

Holding a boundary after setting it can be the most challenging part of boundary setting. If your boundary is crossed, what happens next matters. You always have the option to restate the boundary, or to disengage. Sometimes, taking some time to cool off is the choice that protects the relationship most, but sometimes allowing the rupture to be explored fully is a better choice. You need to assess who you are dealing with, and what their capacity for the process is. Again, remember that a boundary is about what you will tolerate and how you will respond. Someone else can continue the behaviour, but the boundary is upheld when you respond in the way you said you would.



The WIN Model

To consistently respond in the way you have outlined, consider stating boundaries using the WIN model. The WIN model sounds like

When you _____

I feel _____

I Need _____

*Otherwise...

When you hit the otherwise step, which is optional, you can state your planned action. You may say something like “otherwise, I will have to leave.” or “otherwise we will not have you babysit again”. The WIN model can be particularly helpful when a boundary has been crossed and needs to be restated.

Try it!

When you _____

I feel _____

I need _____

Otherwise _____



Focusing on your Values

Remember why you are in relationship- typically people tolerate the difficulties of relationship dynamics because they value one another. Remember that maintaining relationships is a choice, even if it feels challenging. Reflecting on the choice you have can be empowering and remind you of the positives. Think about the things that feel good to do together. Incorporate more of these activities into your time together, and remember that approaching conflict allows for rupture and repair. Valued relationships deserve this effort.

Examples

There are several types of boundaries. Here are a few examples in the categories of Physical boundaries, Time boundaries, Emotional Boundaries, Intellectual Boundaries , Material Boundaries

Physical Boundary It's illness season, we'll do hugs but no kisses

Physical Boundary We would love you to meet our baby, but we won't be having others holding them

Time Boundary We would love to come for Christmas dinner, but we'll be doing Christmas morning at home

Time Boundary We will be in town for 8 days, and we will stay at your place for 3 nights and get our own place for the rest of the visit

Emotional Boundary Thanks for asking, but I don't want to talk about that right now

Emotional Boundary When you say "just think positive" I feel dismissed. Can we try that again?

Intellectual Boundary I recognize we have different views on this, let's not have this conversation at the dinner table

Intellectual Boundary When you dismiss my knowledge it makes me feel that you don't respect my expertise

Material Boundary The kids already have a lot of toys, we would love to exchange “experience” gifts this year

Material Boundary We worry about the environment, we would appreciate receiving used items or consumable gifts