

Boundary Setting

Setting Boundaries over the Holidays

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Daring to set boundaries is about having the courage to love ourselves even when we risk disappointing others

-Brene Brown



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...

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



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.



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. 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 there- typically people tolerate the difficulties of family dynamics because they value the time together. Remember that family time is a choice, even if it feels imposed. Reflecting on the choice around attending can be empowering and remind you of the positives. Think about the things that feel good to do all together, like playing a board game or cooking a family recipe together. Incorporate more of these activities into your time together



Injecting Self Care

If you have a long stay with family, remember to take care of yourself. Schedule in walks on your own, plan activities for just your own nuclear family, and remember the basics like feeding yourself and hydrating. Different eating schedules during family time can lead to being off your own schedule of needs. We all have less tolerance when we are depleted.



Practice Presence

If you feel constantly interrupted from whatever you were reading or watching, you may feel irritable. Notice if you feel less irritable if you put your phone down. See what happens when you practice being present with those around you without using the soothing escape of your phone. Practicing presence can give us back a sense of control. Work to simply notice the dynamics around you without judgment. What might you see differently?



The hack we all need

Sometimes the most effective strategy is the simplest. Bring a book- people generally leave readers alone. This can create a little break and downtime that is considered socially acceptable, vs sitting on your own scrolling or sitting in silence. Sometimes, a book is just the boundary we need

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