

Boundary Setting Worksheet

Lots of factors go into what boundaries we need and feel comfortable establishing such as our family dynamics, our life experiences, our personalities, where we live, and our heritage. For example, some families hug everyone who enters their shared space, while others are very formal or prefer to avoid physical affection. Some cultures do not wear shoes in the house and require all who enter their homes to remove their shoes as well. These differences may lead to awkward interactions, but setting and enforcing firm boundaries does not have to be awkward.

In order to begin setting boundaries in a relationship, it is important to acknowledge and honor the rights you have within that relationship. According to Judith Belmont, author and licensed psychotherapist, these rights may include:

- I have a right to say “no” without feeling guilty and without explanation.
- I have a right to be treated with respect.
- I have a right to make my own needs as important as those of others.
- I have a right to be accepting of my mistakes and failures and offer myself grace.
- I have a right not to meet others’ unreasonable expectations of me.

When assessing whether a boundary (defined or not) has been violated, pay attention to how you feel. Do a quick body scan and notice if you feel uncomfortable, if you are sweating, if your heart is racing, if your stomach or throat hurts or feels tight, if your muscles are tense. If so, it may be time to address the issue by setting an explicit boundary.

Setting Boundaries

1. Be assertive: Set your boundaries firmly but kindly. Assertive language does not offer room for negotiation and does not blame or threaten the person who is being confronted. Using effective communication strategies such as “I” statements, active listening, eye contact, and consistent non-verbal cues will improve the interaction.

Using “I” Statements

“I feel _____ when _____ because _____.”
What I need is _____.”

2. Learn to say “No.”: It can feel rude, and it may be received that way (though using step one may lessen that); however, no can be liberating. It is not necessary to offer a lot of (or any) explanation for why you are saying no. You may feel uncomfortable, and that is something that can be dealt with after some practice.

What are times you may need to say no? _____

3. Protect your spaces (physical and emotional): Depending on your living situation, you may feel completely secure in your space or worry that someone may go through your things without permission. If you need to protect physical items such as valuables, technology, money, etc., don’t hesitate to do so regardless of what your family or others who have access to your space (i.e., medical staff, cleaning service, etc.) think about your increased security. Using a safe or other lockable cabinet, locking devices with passcodes, or installing a home security system are just a few ways you may increase your feelings of security if you worry about physical items.

Additionally, protecting your physical self from unwanted touching including seemingly innocuous things like pats and hugs can improve your feelings of independence and self-confidence. Emotional boundaries may include limiting time spent with someone who is draining emotionally or actively withdrawing from conversations that are against your values such as gossip or negative talk.

Protect your time by setting cutoff times for phone calls or conversations that could step into time you have allotted for something else.

If you have difficulty recognizing a need for or setting firm boundaries, reaching out to a helping professional such as a counselor can be very beneficial.

NOTE: Boundaries for those who have experienced trauma and/or abuse may be difficult to set but vital for healthy relationships. Especially if abuse or trauma was physical in nature, setting boundaries related to physical touching or behavior may be especially important.

4. Show respect for the boundaries of others: When others in your life set boundaries, show respect for their wishes even if they go against your own preferences. This may include a grandchild who doesn’t like to be kissed on the lips or only wants to be hugged if they start the hug. It may be an adult child with a family who needs to skip a dinner in order to do something with their in-laws. It may be a club officer who has hit the limit of time they have set aside for club duties. If someone sets a boundary for their own body, time, space, property, etc., it is your duty in the relationship to follow their wishes.

Adapted from “...Guide to Protecting Your Emotional Space”

<https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/set-boundaries>