

Begin to Set Personal Boundaries

Creating and maintaining personal boundaries is one way we can improve our lives. This section will show you how to stand up for yourself, set personal boundaries, and free yourself from the “disease to please” with these 3 Steps.

Step 1: Self Awareness

The first step to set boundaries is self-awareness. Pay attention to the situations when you are low on energy, feel butterflies in your stomach, or want to cry. Identifying where you need more space, self-respect, energy or personal power is the first step.

Another way to identify your boundaries is by completing these following sentences with at least 10 examples. Feel free to use another page if you need more space.

1. People may not _____.

Examples: ...Humiliate me in front of others; Criticize me; go through my personal things.

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1) | 6) |
| 2) | 7) |
| 3) | 8) |
| 4) | 9) |
| 5) | 10) |

2. I have the right to ask for _____.

Examples: ...Privacy; More information about medication before taking it; Support.

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1) | 6) |
| 2) | 7) |
| 3) | 8) |
| 4) | 9) |
| 5) | 10) |

3. To protect my time and energy, it is ok to _____.

Examples: ...Change my mind; Turn the ringer off on my phone; Say No.

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1) | 6) |
| 2) | 7) |
| 3) | 8) |
| 4) | 9) |
| 5) | 10) |

Step 2: Setting Your Boundaries

Start setting simple but firm boundaries with a graceful or neutral tone. This will feel uncomfortable at first, but as you take care of yourself, the personal power you gain will make it easier.

1. Be sure to have support in place before and after each conversation. If you cannot find support from a friend or family member, you may be able to find a friend online or call a local distress centre.
2. Vent any strong emotions with your partner or other supports *before* having your boundary conversation.
3. Use simple and direct language.
Examples:
 - *To set a boundary with an angry person:*
"You may not yell at me. If you continue, I'll have to leave the room."
 - *To set a boundary with personal phone calls at work:*
"I've decided to take all personal calls in the evening in order to get my work done. I will need to call you later."
 - *To say no to extra commitments:*
"Although this organization is important to me, I need to decline your request for volunteer help in order to honor my family's needs."
 - *To set a boundary with someone who is critical:*
"It's not okay with me that you comment on my weight. I'd like to ask you to stop."
 - *To buy yourself time when making tough decisions:*
"I'll have to sleep on it; I have a policy of not making decisions right away."
 - *To back out of a commitment:*
"I know I agreed to head up our fundraising efforts, but after reviewing my schedule, I now realize that I won't be able to give it my best attention. I'd like to help find a replacement by the end of next week."
 - *To set a boundary with an adult child who borrows money:*
"I won't be lending you money anymore. I love you and you need to take responsibility for yourself."
4. When setting boundaries, there is no need to defend, debate, or over-explain your feelings. Be firm, gracious and direct. When faced with resistance, repeat your statement or request.
5. Back up your boundary with action. Stay strong. If you give in, you invite people to ignore your needs

Step 3: Strengthen Your Internal Boundaries

One of the reasons that people take things personally is because they may need to strengthen their "internal boundaries." An internal boundary is like an invisible shield that prevents you from taking in a comment without checking it out first. For example, when someone accuses you of being arrogant, stop and consider the statement *before* taking it in.

When you use this internal shield, especially with difficult people like an ex-spouse or critical parent, it gives you time to ask yourself the following three questions:

- How much of this is true about me?
- How much of this is about the other person?
- What do I need to do (if anything) to regain my personal power or stand up for myself?

This last question is very important. Too often people neglect to stand up for themselves by avoiding confrontation and end up weakening their internal shield, making it harder to set boundaries at all. So, if someone offends you, it may be necessary to let them know in order to protect and strengthen your internal boundaries.

(Source: http://www.oprah.com/spirit/Begin-to-Set-Personal-Boundaries_1/1)

Practicing Boundary Setting

For each situation below, practice what you would say to assertively set a new boundary or to enforce an existing one. You may choose to cut the scenarios out and have each person choose one at random.

Remember, treating others with respect will earn you more respect in return.

- You have a friend who shows up at your apartment without being invited. She always assumes that you have time and want to spend an evening with her watching TV. Tonight, you do not want her around.
- Your friend goes right for your refrigerator whenever he comes to your place. He takes anything he wants and starts eating it. You are on a tight budget and cannot afford to always feed your friends. You really wish he would ask before helping himself to your food.
- Your support worker really wants you to go to a group that is being held in the community. You are unsure about what the group is about and want more information before deciding, but you feel you are being pressured into attending the group.
- Your friend regularly calls you late at night when you are already in bed. You want them to stop calling so late.
- Your landlord frequently shows up at your apartment without notice with a task she feels needs to be done immediately. You know that she needs to give 24 hours notice, and you know that your rights deserve to be respected.
- One of your friends keeps using the word "schizo" to talk about odd behaviors of his cat. You are offended by this word and want him to stop using it.
- You are at the doctor's office. He/she informs you that they would like you to try a new medication for your mental health issue. You do not think you need a different medication.
- You are out to lunch with a friend. At the end, your friend says "Oh, sorry, but I'm broke. You can pay for my lunch, right?" You do not want to pay for their lunch and are angry that he/she assumed you would.
- You are unable to get a hold of your ODSP worker. You have some serious questions to ask in regards to receiving an inheritance and you are having difficulty getting an answer. What do you say to the receptionist on the other end of the phone?
- You are on the bus and the stranger next to you is asking you some very personal questions you do not want to answer.
- You are feeling very depressed and overwhelmed lately, and your friend is also. Your friend keeps talking about how much worse his/her depression is than yours and does not give you a chance to share your concerns. You feel hurt by this.