

Boundaries in Relationships

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

It's essential to have personal boundaries in order to have healthy relationships. Personal Boundaries are important because they set the basic guidelines of how you want to be treated.

Boundaries are basic guidelines that people create to establish how others are able to behave around them. For example, they may involve what behavior is okay and what is not and how to respond if someone passes those limits. Setting boundaries can ensure that relationships can be mutually respectful, appropriate, and caring. However, at some point in your life, I am sure you have felt your boundaries being violated.

Let's have a look at how this plays out in real time.

You may think or feel a person is “strange” because of the way they behave towards you. They may deny that they said or told you something and you question your sanity. It may be a stranger that is standing too close to you or touching you (physical boundary) or asking you very personal questions (emotional). Perhaps you have been a target of emotional abuse or bullying in school or the workplace (psychological). All are examples of boundary violations.

Often, we assume that people will respect our boundaries because we were brought up and taught what is acceptable by our family and/or culture. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Although we can choose who we interact with in our personal life such as choosing close friends, this is not always the case in other environments such as work, family, community, etc.

We can feel uncomfortable or even violated if we interact with those who have poor boundaries. In fact, it may be more problematic with people who have mental health issues. Often, we know that our boundaries have been violated by the way we feel. Feelings of confusion, anxiety, or feeling drained around a person can all be signs that our boundaries have been violated. “narcissists” are notorious for violating boundaries and this behavior appears to be increasing in our culture. Therefore, we have to know how to establish healthy emotional, psychological, and physical boundaries in relationships so we can feel respected and safe.

How? The first step is knowing your rights for a healthy relationship.

Do you know your rights in a relationship?

- To feel safe in a relationship
- To have your privacy and boundaries you have created be respected
- To be heard and listened to
- To feel validated
- To be appreciated and valued
- To respect that the answer “no” means “no”
- To have your needs met
- To be treated respectfully- absence of emotional, physical, or verbal abuse

Identifying your limits in relationships is the first step in maintaining healthy boundaries. What is acceptable behavior within a relationship? For example, if you meet a new friend and tell them that you are busy but they continue to call and text you, you may find they are not accepting no for an answer. A person who continually does not take “no” for an answer is violating your boundaries. The second step is to stick to those boundaries and to have a plan if someone crosses those limits. For example, if a person passes these limits, establishing consequences is vital. If you need help establishing healthy boundaries and practicing assertiveness counseling can help. I use a variety of approaches including psychoeducation and even more importantly, assertiveness counseling and training. Often, those who lack assertiveness skills who “don’t want to be mean” may be at risk for boundary violations because they don’t want to hurt someone’s feelings and put their needs on the back-burner. Additionally, clients may need help when their boundaries have been violated (i.e., victims of physical assault, sexual assault, bullying) and may be experiencing emotional trauma like depression or anxiety as a result of their experience.