

Understanding Your Boundaries

Objective: To identify your boundary issues and learn strategies for feeling more empowered by setting limits, protecting yourself when you are vulnerable, and taking safe risks.

You Should Know

In order to heal and grow, you should be aware of your boundary issues and work on them. Good mental health depends on understanding your interpersonal boundaries with everyone in your life.

Boundaries are like a semipermeable membrane of your identity. You create them around you as you grow up by the limits you set. You have to set limits around people and time, that is, limits around who you let into your life and limits around what activities that you let take up your attention and your time. Good boundaries mean that you spend your time and energy wisely. You say no to things and people you don't want in your life, and you say yes to the ones you do. Sometimes you might be ambivalent or confused, but having a clear yes and no are crucial. You are in charge by choosing what you let inside your life or by sharing your privacy with others. After trauma, boundaries might change some of their functions.

What to Do

Boundaries might become too loose, so everything goes in and out. You might become suggestible, feel an impulse to share private aspects of your life with everybody all the time. Are you aware of some looseness in your boundaries?

They might become too rigid, so nothing goes in or out. You might become isolated and cut off from the world. Are you aware of some rigidity in your boundaries?

They might have a lesion or wound. If suddenly in a quiet conversation you freak out, feel some strong feelings, have a flashback, or start acting out, somebody touched your lesion. Describe such an event.

Boundaries are essential for resilience. Don't go straight to creating a barrier; this is resistance not resilience. Be proactive in setting your boundaries. Boundaries exist to protect life, not to limit life. Appropriate boundaries create integrity. Healthy boundaries can be flexible when needed. They are fluid, able to adjust to change and unexpected events. Being inflexible with our own boundaries may not support us.

Here are some other tips and strategies regarding boundaries

- Learn ways to say NO.
- Learn ways to say YES.
- When it is MAYBE, perhaps take some time to consider your thoughts and feelings before you respond.
- Know how you expect to be treated.
- Learn that the timing of your responses is important.
- Say, in different ways, "You cannot treat me this way."
- Be clear about it to others.
- Be upfront with how you prefer to be treated.
- Be realistic in your expectations.
- Be respectful, thoughtful, and responsible when setting boundaries and set them.
- You don't have to be rude about it.
- You can say, "I don't want to talk about it," "I don't need your feedback," "I need time for myself," or "I would prefer not to go out after work for a drink."
- Respect other people's boundaries, even if you don't agree with them.
- If your boundaries happen to be incompatible with others you are close with, find a compromise.