

# 10 Ways to Set and Keep Better Boundaries

## 1. Name your limits.

Name your physical, emotional, mental and spiritual limits. Be aware that limits can change over time and may be different depending on the situation (for example, what is going on in the relationship, what is going on in your life, how rested you are, etc.).

## 2. Tune into your feelings.

**Discomfort** and **resentment** are 2 **key feelings** that warn us that we are letting go of our boundaries. Think of these feelings as a range from 1-10, where 1 is a low level of discomfort or resentment and 10 is a high level. If you are at the higher end (6-10), ask yourself:

- › What is causing these feelings?
- › What is it about **this interaction** that is making me feel this way?
- › Is it **the person's expectation** that is bothering me?

When you feel uncomfortable about the way someone is acting, this tells you that they may be violating or crossing a boundary.

## 3. Be direct when you need to.

A direct conversation is not always needed to keep healthy boundaries. For example, people with similar communication styles, views, personalities and approaches to life may be able to recognize and respect your boundaries.

At other times, you may need to have a direct conversation to let someone know your boundaries. For example, romantic partners may need to talk about how much time they will spend on their own and together.

## 4. Practice self-awareness.

**Boundaries are about focusing on and honouring your feelings.** If you notice that you are losing your boundaries, ask yourself:

- › “What’s changed?”
- › “What am I doing?” or “What is the other person doing?”
- › “What’s making me feel resentful or stressed?”

**Think about your options and ask yourself:**

- › “What am I going to do about the situation?”
- › “What do I have control over?”

## 5. Let yourself feel your feelings.

You may fear the other person's response. You may feel guilty about speaking up. You may feel that you should be able to cope because others expect that you can. You may doubt that you deserve to have boundaries. It's OK to give yourself time to feel and think about your feelings.

## 6. Consider your past and present.

You may have trouble setting and keeping boundaries because of **how you were raised** and **your role in the family**. For example, if you were a caretaker in your family, you may have learned to focus on others and let yourself be drained emotionally and physically. Ignoring your own needs may be normal for you. **Ask yourself:**

- › “Are my relationships reciprocal and fair?”
- › “Is there a healthy give and take between me and other people?”

Remember to look beyond your relationships to your environment. For example, are your personal and work lives balanced?

## 7. Make self-care a priority.

Let yourself put your needs first. This will help your motivation to set boundaries get stronger. Self-care means recognizing and honouring your feelings and needs. Taking care of yourself gives you the energy, peace of mind and positive outlook to be more present for others.

## 8. Find support.

If setting boundaries is hard for you, find informal or formal support. You may want to practice setting boundaries with family and friends, then hold each other accountable.

## 9. Be assertive.

Once we set boundaries, we must also follow through on them. We can't expect other people to be mind readers and know what will hurt us or how we feel. We must tell them when a boundary has been crossed. In a respectful way, tell the person what bothers you and that you would like to work together to address it.

## 10. Start small.

Being assertive takes practice. Start with a boundary that is not threatening to you, then move on to more challenging boundaries.

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