



## Boundaries

Boundaries are sets of rules and/or limitations we form and apply to recognise sensible, acceptable, and safe ways of our interactions (receiving and giving) with others. Boundaries are based on our beliefs, values, attitudes, experiences, personality, learning, likes, dislikes, and more. We are not born with boundaries; they are formed by our parents, schools, friends, media, and so on. We need to be shown healthy boundaries that respect our rights, needs, care, roles, power, education, growth, and autonomy; otherwise, unhealthy boundaries develop, manifesting in various ways, e.g., co-dependence, abuse, control, manipulation, self-harm, irresponsibility, hyper-responsibility, insecurity, naivety or mistrust, shame, self-disrespect, and/or poor self-identity.

Boundaries (spiritual, psychological (thoughts, opinions), physical (space, touch), emotional (feelings)) require skill to maintain and to continually develop to preserve our own well-being whilst interacting with families, society, friendships, colleagues, etc. Boundaries can be categorised in the following ways:

1. **Soft:** one merges with others' boundaries; finds emotions "contagious"; overly involved in others problems; confused by what's ok and what's not; unclear definition of self and others; says "no" when mean "yes" and vice versa; feel guilty when not complying; vulnerable; can invade others boundaries; can be manipulated by others; go against own values and integrity; unassertive; accepting mistreatment.
2. **Flexible:** one exercises personal autonomy; resists emotional contagion; can say "no" and "yes" depending; more meaningful relationship; clear idea of self and others; firm but respectful of needs, rights, and opinions of self and others; responsible for self; assertive; can negotiate and compromise.
3. **Rigid:** closed off to others; hard to get to know; less meaningful relationships; defensive; aggressive; withdrawn; can invade others boundaries; hard to connect with or comply with others.

Establishing healthy personal boundaries can be threatening and hard but with perseverance it can be rewarding and empowering; the new authentic and confident you will more likely attract people who will respect your boundaries. Consider the following if you wish to change to healthy boundaries:

<b>Mind (Un) Set</b>	<b>Start by accepting that healthy personal boundaries are OK; indeed they are necessary for healthy relationships with others and oneself, to boost self-worth and confidence, and to form self-identity.</b>
<b>Consider and list</b>	<b>Record (a) how others have disrespected your boundaries and how you have allowed that, (b) how others may no longer disrespect your boundaries (by what they say and do to you or in front of you), (c) how you need physical and emotional space, (d) your values, beliefs, and way to live.</b>
<b>Assert and Anticipate</b>	<b>Respectfully tell the people who disrespect your boundaries what they did and are doing and how this is no longer acceptable to you; tell them what is now acceptable to you. This will be hard for you; your values, emotions, beliefs will be challenged. Some people might find it hard to hear, some might leave, some might get angry (be safe); who among these people do you need in life?</b>
<b>Maintain and Endure</b>	<b>Keeping healthy boundaries requires repeated effort to train oneself and others, to be taken seriously by oneself and others, to default to healthier responses rather than old responses. Practice plans of saying "No" to people, letting others know they're wrong, getting out of unsafe environments, keeping values, integrity, etc. No quick fix. Disengage old patterns of behaviour that preserve unhealthy boundaries. Have self-compassion for slow change, mistakes, and loss.</b>
<b>Reward and Reciprocate</b>	<b>Recognise and thank those who are supporting and respecting your boundaries. Consider how you can respect other people's boundaries.</b>
<b>Flexibility and Belief</b>	<b>Don't become rigid. It's not about being selfish or controlling; sometimes you need to yield to others. Trust your instincts and feelings about what you do and don't want in your life. Practice self-compassion until it feels natural.</b>