



Relationships | *Tip sheet*

Setting Boundaries in Relationships

What are boundaries and why do we need them?

Relationship boundaries help us distinguish ourselves from other people and define who we are and what we need in a relationship. When boundaries are violated by another person, we can end up feeling disrespected, used, or even abused. Sometimes setting a boundary is easy, other times setting limits is not easy and can be scary. It may mean being willing to lose the relationship with hopes of saving the relationship.

The hard work is worth it. Imagine being more assertive, less angry or resentful, more compassionate, having your needs met, feeling safer and more peaceful, and having more room in your life for the things that feed your soul.

Why is setting limits with others so hard?

Boundary setting is a skill that takes practice and consistency. At first, it may feel like we are tripping over our feet. A person who grows up in a family that models good boundary setting skills and respects the boundaries of others will find it easier. However, most of us learn the skill as adults when we get into relationships that feel intrusive or abusive. This is a skill you can learn.

Examples of boundary violations:

Physical boundaries:

- Sexual and physical abuse
- Entering a bedroom without knocking (depending on the relationship)

Emotional/mental boundaries:

- Listening in on phone calls or looking at private information on a cell phone
- Refusing to take 'no' for an answer

Other types of boundaries

- Interrupting when others are speaking
- Continuing to pursuing a relationship or friendship when the other person has been clear they are not interested.

How to set boundaries with others: the formula and possible challenges.

There really is a very basic formula for setting boundaries with others. The difficulty comes when setting boundaries with someone causes conflict. This chips away at our commitment to be consistent in the process. The following scenario outlines the steps to setting boundaries.

The scenario: Your friend (Fred) routinely calls you at home as late as 1:00 a.m. and talks for a very long time. This is disrupting your sleep and interfering with your ability to be productive at work.

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The Formula:

Step 1: The first time a reasonable boundary is ignored make sure your needs are clearly communicated. "Fred, I really enjoy our talks on the phone. However, I am going to need for you to call me prior to 9:00 p.m. and make sure that we are finished talking no later than 9:30 p.m. Any later than that makes it too difficult for me to wake up in the morning."

Step 2: If no effort is made by the person to respect your boundary, re-state the need and set a consequence such as by saying, "Do you remember, Fred, when I explained that if you are going to call me, I need you to call prior to 9:00 p.m.? Since you called me again later at night, I am going to have to screen your calls. I will not be answering the phone if you call after 9:00 p.m. Thanks for understanding."

Step 3: If your request continues to be ignored, follow through with the consequences. Do not answer the phone after 9:00 p.m. if Fred calls. Be consistent, otherwise you will be sending Fred mixed messages about what you really want and need to happen.

Step 4: With continued violation of the requested boundary, it may become necessary to escalate the consequences, regardless of how much you care about Fred. "Fred, I have tried to work out a reasonable solution to the problem of you calling me too late in the evening. Unfortunately, screening your calls has not resulted in what I need in this area and the ringing phone is disruptive to my sleep. As a result, I will be blocking your calls."

After continued reinforcement of your boundaries, often, a person will recognize that the boundary you are setting is something they will need to respect if they want to have a relationship with you. However, in some cases, a person can chronically violate your boundaries regardless of how diligently you stick to the consequences, and they may even retaliate by violating more boundaries. At times, the situation gets worse before it gets better. Other times, it doesn't get better. If someone consistently violates your boundaries, it may mean they don't value your health and happiness. At this point, you have a decision to make about whether or not this is a relationship you should pursue. You deserve to have a voice in every relationship and to have your wants and needs respected.

For further information, check out these resources:

boundariesbooks.com

Where to Draw the Line: How to Set Healthy Boundaries Every Day
and **Boundaries: Where You End and I Begin** both by Anne Katherine

Bold Love by Dan Allender (This book is faith based)



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