Understanding boundaries

What boundaries are, the main kinds and how to state one.

A boundary is a limit you set to look after yourself: what you are willing to do, give, accept and share. A boundary is not meant to shut people out or to punish them. Clear limits make it easier to be close to people.

Kinds of boundaries

Time and energy
How much you give to work, family, friends, favours.

Emotional
How much of other people's feelings and problems you take on. What you share about yourself.

Physical
Personal space, touch, privacy.

Material and digital
Money, belongings, your home. When you are reachable, and what gets shared online.

Too loose

- Saying yes when I mean no
- Taking responsibility for others' feelings
- Oversharing, or letting others overshare
- Feeling drained and resentful
- Being taken for granted

Too rigid

- Keeping everyone at a distance
- Never asking for help
- Not sharing anything personal
- Cutting people off quickly
- Feeling lonely and unknown

Healthy boundaries

- Are clear and stated calmly.
- Are about what you will do, not about controlling the other person.
- Can flex with the person and the situation.
- Are followed through.

How to word it

"If (this happens), I will (do this)."

> *"If the shouting starts, I will leave the room and we can talk when things are calmer."*

Expect some pushback
People who benefited from your lack of boundaries may not like the new ones. Their discomfort does not mean you are doing something wrong.

Where in my life is a boundary most needed?

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Setting a boundary

Plan one boundary: the wording, how they may react and how you will stick to it.

Name _____ Date _____

The situation. What keeps happening that is not OK for me?

How it affects me

What I need instead

My boundary, in one or two sentences. ("I am not willing to..." "From now on I will..." "If... then I will...")

How they might react

How I will respond

Stay calm. Repeat it. No need to justify, argue or over-explain.

What I will do if the boundary is not respected

What might tempt me to back down, and what I will remind myself

After I said it: what happened, and how do I feel?

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