



Boundaries: What Is Mine, What Is Yours, and What Happens Next?

Information first: what a boundary is, what it is not, and what it protects

A boundary is a limit I set around my own participation, availability, body, time, money, space, communication, or behavior. It helps me decide what I will allow, what I will not participate in, and what I will do when a limit is crossed.

A Boundary Is About My Side of the Line

A BOUNDARY CAN BE

- A limit around what I will do or participate in.
- A way to protect safety, time, recovery, values, privacy, or emotional well-being.
- A statement of what I need in order to remain in a situation.
- A decision about what I will do if a limit is crossed.
- Flexible when circumstances change, without becoming meaningless.

A BOUNDARY IS NOT

- A way to make another person think, feel, or behave the way I want.
- A punishment for disappointing me.
- A guarantee that the other person will agree.
- A threat I have no intention of following through on.
- Proof that my preference is more important than someone else's autonomy.

The simplest test is: "Is this about what I will do, or is it mainly an attempt to make you do something?" A healthy boundary may affect another person, but its enforcement stays on my side of the line.

What Boundaries Protect

- | | | | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|----------|-----------------|--------------------|
| ● Safety | ● Sobriety / recovery | ● Time | ● Money | ● Privacy |
| ● Physical space | ● Emotional energy | ● Values | ● Relationships | ● Responsibilities |

A boundary does not require another person's permission in order to be valid.



Boundaries: What Is Mine, What Is Yours, and What Happens Next?

Information first: separating boundaries from requests, rules, ultimatums, and control

Many conflicts around boundaries come from using the same word for very different things. A request, rule, boundary, ultimatum, and attempt to control someone can overlap, but they are not identical. Knowing the difference makes communication clearer and follow-through more honest.

What Am I Actually Doing?

TYPE	FOCUS	EXAMPLE	KEY QUESTION
REQUEST	What I am asking you to do.	"Please do not call me after 10 p.m."	Can you say no?
RULE	A condition governing a shared setting or responsibility.	"No smoking inside the house."	Who has authority to set this rule?
BOUNDARY	What I will do to protect my limit.	"If calls continue after 10, I will silence my phone until morning."	Is the action mine to take?
ULTIMATUM	A high-stakes demand tied to a consequence.	"Do this or the relationship ends."	Is this necessary for safety or mainly pressure?
CONTROL	Trying to manage another person's choices, feelings, or behavior.	"You are not allowed to be friends with that person."	Am I trying to run their side of the line?

About ultimatums

An ultimatum is not automatically unhealthy. In situations involving safety, repeated serious harm, legal risk, or a relationship that cannot continue under certain conditions, a firm final limit may be appropriate. The difference is whether I am honestly stating what I will do or using consequences mainly to force compliance.

A request asks, a rule governs, a boundary defines my action, and control tries to run yours.



Boundaries: What Is Mine, What Is Yours, and What Happens Next?

Information first: responsibility, follow-through, and what happens when a limit is crossed

Boundaries become clearer when I separate what belongs to me from what belongs to another person. I am responsible for my choices, words, behavior, limits, and follow-through. I am not responsible for making another adult agree with me, approve of my boundary, feel calm about it, or choose differently.

What Is Mine and What Is Theirs?

MINE

- My feelings and needs
- My choices and behavior
- My body, time, money, space, and participation
- What I say yes or no to
- What I will do if a limit is crossed
- Whether I follow through

THEIRS

- Their feelings and reactions
- Their choices and behavior
- Whether they agree with me
- Whether they are disappointed or angry
- Whether they respect the limit
- What they decide to do next

A Boundary Needs an Action I Can Actually Take

WHEN...

Describe the situation or behavior without turning it into a character judgment.

I WILL...

Name the action I will take to protect the limit.

BECAUSE...

Optional: briefly name the value or need the boundary protects.

A consequence is not supposed to punish the other person. It is the action that makes my boundary real. If I repeatedly announce a limit and do nothing when it is crossed, I am teaching both of us that the limit is optional.

The most enforceable boundary is one that does not require the other person to cooperate.



Boundaries: What Is Mine, What Is Yours, and What Happens Next?

Information first: communicating clearly, naming impact, and tolerating the other person's reaction

A boundary is easier to hold when I can say what happened, describe its impact on me, make a request, and then name what I will do if the situation continues. These are related steps, but they are not all the same thing.

The Four-Part Boundary Conversation

1. BEHAVIOR

When you _____

Describe what happened without labels, mind-reading, or character attacks.

2. IMPACT

I feel _____

Name your emotional response. This is my experience, not proof that the other person intended harm.

3. REQUEST

I would like _____

Ask clearly for what you would prefer. A request leaves room for the other person to respond.

4. BOUNDARY

If _____ continues, I will _____

Name the action I will take. This is the part I can actually enforce.

You may naturally say, "When you _____, it makes me feel _____."

A slightly more ownership-based version is, "When you _____, I feel _____." This keeps responsibility for my emotions on my side of the line.

"When you _____, I feel _____" is not the boundary. It communicates the impact. The boundary is the part that says what I will do if the behavior continues.

Say It Clearly, Then Let Them Have a Reaction

- **Be specific and brief.**
Describe the behavior without turning the conversation into a character judgment.
- **Do not require agreement.**
The other person can dislike the boundary and still understand it.
- **Follow through.**
Consistency gives the boundary meaning.
- **Stay on my side.**
I can hear their reaction without taking responsibility for managing it.

If direct boundary-setting could increase danger, prioritize safety and seek appropriate support rather than confronting the person alone.



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Worksheet: separating my responsibility from someone else's

Choose one relationship or situation where you feel confused, resentful, over-responsible, controlled, or unsure what your boundary should be.

The situation:

What Belongs to Whom?

WHAT IS MINE?

What do I feel?

What do I need or value?

What choices are mine?

What am I responsible for?

What can I actually control?

What action can I take?

WHAT IS THEIRS?

What do they feel?

What choices belong to them?

What am I trying to manage for them?

What reaction belongs to them?

What am I assuming they should do?

What do I need to let remain theirs?

Where have I been taking responsibility for something that is not mine?

Where have I been expecting someone else to take responsibility for something that is mine?

Clarity begins when I stop carrying what is theirs and start owning what is mine.



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Worksheet: identify what you need, then build a boundary you can actually follow through on

Use one real situation. First identify what kind of communication fits. Then build the boundary on your side of the line.

What Am I Actually Asking For?

☐

REQUEST

I am asking for something, and the other person is free to say no.

☐

RULE

This involves a shared setting or responsibility where a rule may legitimately apply.

☐

BOUNDARY

I need to decide what I will do if the situation continues.

☐

ULTIMATUM

The situation is serious enough that continuation depends on a final condition.

☐

CONTROL

I may be trying to manage a choice that actually belongs to the other person.

Build the Boundary

BEHAVIOR

When _____

IMPACT

I feel _____

REQUEST

I would like _____

BOUNDARY

If _____ continues, I will _____

FOLLOW-THROUGH

Am I genuinely willing and able to do that? Yes / Not yet

Reality check: Could they say no? Is my action mine to take? Am I protecting a limit, or trying to control their side of the line?



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Worksheet: holding the boundary when the other person has a reaction

The moment after a boundary is set can be where old patterns return. Use this page to prepare for discomfort, decide what belongs to you, and keep follow-through from turning into punishment.

What reaction am I afraid the other person may have?

If They React Strongly

WHAT I CAN CONTROL

- My tone
- Whether I over-explain
- Whether I argue
- Whether I follow through
- Whether I retaliate
- Whether I ask for support
- Whether I reassess if new information matters

WHAT I CANNOT CONTROL

- Whether they agree
- Whether they are angry
- Whether they call me selfish
- Whether they test the limit
- Whether they choose differently
- Whether they understand immediately
- Whether they remain in the relationship

Before I Follow Through, Check My Motive

- ☐ Am I protecting the limit I named?
- ☐ Am I adding something extra because I am angry?
- ☐ Am I hoping the consequence will make them feel bad enough to change?
- ☐ Am I backing away only because their reaction is uncomfortable?
- ☐ Do I need support to hold this boundary safely and consistently?

What will healthy follow-through look like for me?

I can care about the other person's feelings without handing them control over my limit. I can revise a boundary when new information matters without abandoning myself to avoid discomfort.

The goal is not to win the boundary conversation. The goal is to behave in a way I can respect.