

Boundaries Cheat Sheet

Facts About Boundaries

- Boundaries are limits that we create for ourselves when relating to others.
- Boundaries protect your mental and personal space.
- With healthy boundaries, you can say "no" to others while at the same time being open to closeness and intimacy.
- Boundaries are based on your personal values.
- Boundaries need to be learned; we are not born with them.
- Healthy boundaries promote self-esteem, well-being, and self-control.
- Boundaries define our emotional and physical limits with others.

Healthy Boundaries & Unhealthy Boundaries

Healthy boundaries allow you to:

- Say "no," when you feel like it, and respect others' wishes when they say "no."
- Clearly communicate your needs or wants.
- Honor your needs as well as the needs of others.
- Respect what others think or value, though you may not agree with them.
- Feel that you can share or disclose information with others when it is appropriate.
- Be flexible with your boundaries without compromising them.

Unhealthy boundaries are marked by the following:

- You cannot say "no," when you feel like it.
- You do not respect others' wishes when they say "no."
- You are not clear in communicating your wants and needs.
- You give in too easily to the wishes of others, thus compromising your values and beliefs.
- You are being manipulative or coercive toward others to get them to do what you want.
- You are overly open with your personal information.

Examples of Boundaries

The following are examples of clearly expressed boundaries:

- "I do not feel good about this."
- "Please do not do that."
- "I do not want to do this at this time."
- "I am unable to help you with that."
- "This is not working for me."
- "I have decided that I do not want to do this."
- "I do not find that acceptable."
- "I do not want to be involved with that."

The following are scenarios in which boundaries are expressed:

Scenario: Your roommate is eating your food, and there was never an agreement in sharing food.

Response: "I do not want us to share food unless we ask each other first."

Scenario: Your friend calls you late at night to discuss their relationship problems.

Response: "I understand that this is bothering you. I want to talk to you about it; however, I need to sleep. Can we talk tomorrow?"

Scenario: Your supervisor asks you for help on a project, but you struggle with your workload.

Response: "I want to help you, but I am struggling with my workload. Can we change any of my due dates?"

Setting Boundaries

The following are suggestions for how to set boundaries:

- **Know Your Outcome:** Understand what you are trying to accomplish by setting a boundary. Ask yourself, "How would setting this boundary help me feel better about myself or help me?"
- **Take Baby Steps:** Setting boundaries can make you feel uncomfortable. After all, we may not be used to looking out for ourselves. For this reason, start setting boundaries in areas of minor concern to you. Also, focus on one issue at a time.
Example: Instead of me starting to set boundaries regarding sensitive relationship areas, start with setting boundaries about less emotional issues in your relationship.
- **Set Clear Boundaries:** Clear boundaries are clearly stated, adaptable, and flexible.
- **Rehearse:** If setting boundaries sounds scary to you, rehearse it! Write out what you want to say beforehand and practice it until you feel more comfortable.
- **Make It Simple:** The best boundaries are the simplest ones. Avoid setting boundaries that are full of details. Instead, focus on the thing that is most important to you.

Communicating Your Boundaries

When communicating your boundaries, do the following:

- Be confident in your body language. You can do that by:
 - Facing the other person and making eye contact.
 - Maintain a steady tone in your voice.
 - Use an appropriate volume: Do not speak too softly or loudly.
- Be respectful.
- Take time to listen to the other person and try to understand their needs. You do not want to compromise your boundaries, but you can adjust with the other person to maintain a healthy relationship.

Instructions:

Answer the following questions as if you are in the exact scenario. Think about what you want to say to set your boundaries.

Examples

Situation: You notice your roommate has been using your art materials for her project. You never discussed plans to share art materials with her, and you don't want her using your items without consent.

Response:

"I'd like to keep our things separate. If there's something of mine that you want to borrow, please ask me before using it."

Situation: You get a call from a friend at night to discuss issues she is having with her boyfriend, and you need to wake up early the next morning.

Response:

"I can tell that you're excited and happy to discuss that with me. I want to talk to you, but I need to go to bed. Let's talk tomorrow afternoon."

Practice

Situation: One of your coworkers sends you email, text, or calls you late at night and is asking for a response promptly. She confronted you about not responding to her messages.

Response:

Situation: During dinner with your friends, one of them kept on making unnecessary jokes that made everyone, including you, feel offended.

Response:

Situation: Your manager asks you to cover your coworker's shift on the day you file your vacation leave.

Response:

Situation: It's a bad and draining day for you. When you get home, your roommate talks to you about their personal problem, but you just want to go to bed and sleep.

Response:

Situation: Every time you and your mother speak, the subject of having kids always comes up. She keeps bringing up the topic even though you've already informed her you don't want to have kids.

Response:

Situation: Your brother tends to overshare information about their romantic relationship with their significant other. You find this conversation draining and don't want to be involved in their relationship problems.

Response: