

BOUNDARY UP

A practical guide to setting healthy boundaries

WOMEN'S THERAPY CENTRE

Understanding boundaries



Boundaries Are Not Walls

A boundary identifies what you need, what you can offer, or what you will do to protect your well-being. You can care about someone and still have limits. Boundaries can make connection more sustainable. Please note that this guide is not intended to support you with relationships that are threatening, coercive or violent as direct confrontation may increase risk. Prioritize safety and seek individualized support outside of this guide.



A Request, A Boundry or Control?

When learning to set healthy boundaries, it's important to understand the difference between asking for what we need (a request), protecting our own well-being (a boundary), and trying to dictate someone else's behaviour (control).

Request: Please lower your voice.

Boundary: "If the conversation continues at this volume, I will take a break and return when we can talk calmly."

Control: "You are not allowed to be angry with me."

Before you speak: Is this about protecting my needs or making someone behave differently? Is my response proportionate? Is there room for negotiation? Is it safe to communicate directly?

Boundary Up: Practical Examples

Knowing that we need a boundary and finding the words to communicate it are two very different things. This can feel especially challenging when we're worried about disappointing someone, creating conflict, or damaging a relationship that matters to us. The following examples offer practical language to help you communicate your needs with warmth, clarity, and confidence. Use them as a starting point, adapting the words to feel authentic to you and your relationships.

Unannounced visits: "I love seeing you. Please check with me first. If you arrive unexpectedly, I may not be available."

Unwanted advice: "I know you want to help. Right now I need someone to listen, not offer solutions."

Personal questions: "I'm keeping that part of my life private."

Criticism of parenting: "I appreciate that you may have done things differently. This is what we've decided works best for our family, and I'm not looking for feedback on that decision."

Pressure to attend gatherings: "I won't make it this time. I hope you have a lovely evening."

A heated conversation: "I want to work this out. I'm going to take twenty minutes and come back so we can talk more calmly."

Boundary Up: Practical Examples

Repeated requests after a no: “I understand this matters to you. My answer is still no.”

A partner needs reassurance: “I care about how you feel, and I can listen. I can’t agree just to make the discomfort go away.”

Extra work: “I can take this on if we move another deadline. Which task should I prioritize?”

After-hours messages: “I’ll respond during my next working day unless we have an agreed urgent arrangement.”

Being the default organizer: “I can book the venue, but I need someone else to coordinate the invitations/food/decorations.”

Caregiving demands: “I can help on Saturday morning. I’m not available for the entire weekend.”

Financial requests: “I am not in a position to lend money. I hope you find another option.

Needing time to decide: “Let me check my calendar before I commit. I’ll get back to you tomorrow.”

Boundaries allow you to protect your capacity without defending your needs.

Boundary Up: Getting Intentional

Choose one manageable situation. Start small and adapt the words to your circumstances.

01 What keeps happening that leaves me depleted or resentful?

02 What do I need, and what am I realistically able to offer?

03 What request or limit could I communicate?

04 What action is within my control if the pattern continues?

05 What feelings or reactions might arise, and how can I support myself?

A Few Reminders As You Move Foward

- Name what matters to you, communicate your limit clearly, and, when needed, identify an action that is realistic and within your control.
- You can be kind and compassionate without compromising your own needs.
- Someone’s disappointment does not necessarily mean your boundary is unreasonable.
- Feeling guilty after setting a boundary doesn’t mean you’ve done something wrong. Sometimes, it simply means you’re doing something unfamiliar.
- Boundaries are not about changing other people. They are about taking responsibility for your own well-being.
- Start small. Setting and maintaining healthy boundaries is a skill that develops with practice, patience, and self-compassion.

Remember, the goal isn't to become better at saying no. It's to build relationships in which you can remain connected to others without losing connection with yourself. This resource is intended to provide education and practical support and is not a substitute for individualized psychotherapy.