

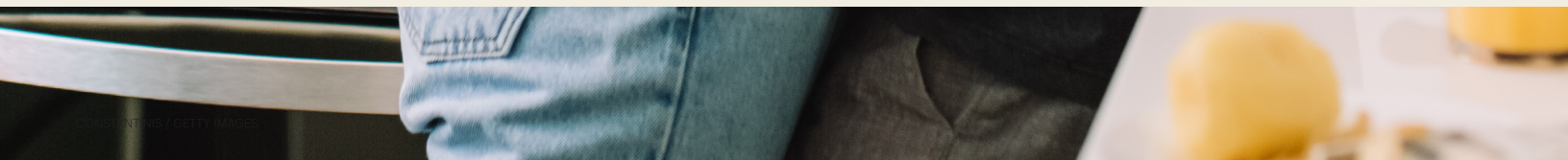


Men'sHealth

THE 2-WEEK GUIDE TO **SETTING** **HEALTHY BOUNDARIES**

This step-by-step guide from a therapist will help you say “no” when you want to, strengthen your communication skills, and take care of yourself in relationships.

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WELCOME TO YOUR 2-WEEK BOUNDARY CHALLENGE!

SETTING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES is a life skill that many of us hear about, but we don't really learn what it means or how to do it.

Many people think that boundaries are rules we make for others, but it's exactly the opposite. They're the limits we set for ourselves within relationships. Someone with healthy boundaries is comfortable saying no to others when they want to, creating relationship dynamics where there is healthy communication. It's important to hone the skills of setting and implementing boundaries to avoid losing yourself in your relationships.

What we value and prioritize can change throughout our lives, which is why boundaries need to be flexible and not rigid. Sometimes we'll have seasons of prioritizing work, and other times we want to prioritize time with family. Your boundaries are yours: yours to decide on, yours to set, and yours to enforce. For better or worse, someone else can't do these things for you.

It helps to establish your boundaries before you're in a sticky situation. Let's say one of your boundaries is that you won't do more than make out with someone on a first date. Deciding that and sharing that with your partner before the date will help ensure you don't accidentally wind up doing something you didn't want to do. That said, not all boundaries can be set ahead of time. Sometimes, we realize we need to set a boundary after we already feel violated or hurt, so we can make sure it doesn't happen again. This can be painful—and it's okay. We learn by doing.

If setting boundaries sounds uncomfortable, remember that someone who cares about you will respect your boundaries. That doesn't mean they won't push them—accidentally or on purpose—but they certainly won't intentionally cross them.

Sometimes boundaries are complex, and sometimes they're a simple "No, I can't." I hope that by the end of this two-week guide, you will feel incredibly clear on what a boundary is, why they're essential to a happy and healthy life, and how to establish and enforce your personal boundaries with the people in your life.

LET'S GET STARTED.

WEEK 1

Exercise 1:

Identifying Boundaries: What Are They?

There are six types of personal boundaries that you can set, and since we're not taught how to set boundaries, it can be hard to recognize them. So, let's talk about the six types and learn how to recognize a boundary versus something else (like an ask or a rule).

Type 1: Physical Boundaries

These refer to your personal space and physical touch. Healthy physical boundaries are contextually appropriate, meaning that different physical boundaries will appear in different situations (e.g., a kiss hello from a loved one vs. a handshake from a co-worker). A violation of physical boundaries could include someone touching you when you don't want them to or invading your personal space, including places like your room or office. Physical boundaries aren't necessarily sexual boundaries; those will be discussed below (type 4).

Type 2: Intellectual Boundaries

These refer to your thoughts and ideas. Healthy intellectual boundaries involve setting boundaries around respect for self (not being available for someone to speak to you disrespectfully), even if you disagree with each other's opinions. Additionally, intellectual boundaries involve awareness of what topics are contextually appropriate (e.g., do you bring up your last night's blow job while at dinner with your partner's grandma? Do you stay in a conversation where you're being yelled at a mini golf course?). Intellectual boundaries are violated when we or someone else dismisses or belittles another person's thoughts or ideas.

Type 3: Emotional Boundaries

These refer to your or another person's feelings. Healthy emotional boundaries include guidelines on when and how we share our feelings and when we decide we have the space and bandwidth to listen to other people's feelings. When we set emotional boundaries, we allow ourselves and others to assess how much emotional bandwidth we have. By assessing our bandwidth, we reduce the number of interactions with people who aren't able to receive your feelings. If someone can't (or you can't), respond with kindness, curiosity, empathy, and compassion (even if that is temporary). Emotional boundaries are violated when we or someone else criticizes, belittles, or invalidates another person's feelings.

Type 4: Sexual Boundaries

These refer to your emotional, intellectual, and physical aspects of sex and sexuality. Healthy sexual boundaries involve understanding and respecting your hard limits, soft limits, fantasies, and/or desires, and your sexual partners. Sexual boundaries can be violated with unwanted sexual touch, pressure to engage in sexual acts, being looked at in an unwanted way, catcalling, sexual comments, or other unwanted sexual thoughts, acts, and feelings.

Type 5: Material Boundaries

These refer to money and material possessions. Healthy material boundaries can involve setting limits on what you will share and with whom. For example, you may feel totally comfortable lending your car to one person but not to another—and that's okay. Material possessions are violated when you set boundaries around your money and material possessions, and they are disregarded (e.g., people borrowing your things and never returning them or losing them; people stealing your stuff or taking advantage of you, or using material items to manipulate and control you).

Type 6: Time Boundaries

These refer to how you or another person uses their time. Healthy time boundaries include setting guidelines and limits around how much time you (or someone else) have available for something in your life, like work, relationships, sex, hobbies, etc. Time boundaries are violated when someone demands more of someone's time than they have said is available and doesn't accept no.

Challenge Time!

NOTE: I highly recommend printing this out so you can write directly on these exercises if you can!

Now that you know the six types of boundaries, here are some examples. Some will be boundaries and some won't be; it's up to you to circle Y (if it is a boundary) or N (if it's not a boundary). When you're done, check the answer key and see what you got right, and where you can adjust your idea of what a boundary is and isn't.

Example	Is it a boundary?
1. "I'd love to come—and I can come, but I can only stay for an hour and a half."	Y / N
2. "I don't shake hands, but it's so nice to meet you" (with a big smile on your face!)	Y / N
3. "You have to get an STI test."	Y / N
4. "I think you are super disrespectful when you raise your voice at me."	Y / N
5. "I won't stay in conversations where there is racism or any other hate speech. If that happens again, I'm going to leave the room."	Y / N
6. "I am happy to lend you my car as long as it's back by 8 p.m. on Saturday. If you can't guarantee that (to the best of your ability), I can't lend you my car."	Y / N
7. "If you call me a name during conflict, I will remove myself from the conversation and come back when I'm ready."	Y / N
8. "No."	Y / N
9. "No, I don't want you to touch me like that."	Y / N
10. "I am so sorry you are having such a tough time."	Y / N

Reflections: When Could I Have Utilized a Boundary?

Now that you know what boundaries are, their types, and what they can look and sound like, it's time to reflect and ask yourself when you could have utilized a boundary. Was there a time someone asked to borrow something, and you said yes when you really wanted to say no? Perhaps someone hugged you when you didn't want to be touched or spoke to you in a way you didn't like, but you didn't say anything.

WRITE ABOUT THEM HERE:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Exercise 3

Rigid, Porous, or Healthy?

You now know the six types of boundaries and have thought about when you could have used some of them in your past. Now, let’s talk about what a healthy boundary-setter looks like.

POROUS — HEALTHY—RIGID

Like many other things in life, boundary-setters fall on a spectrum—this spectrum going from porous to healthy to rigid. Let’s look at the characteristics of each of these and then write down some examples for yourself.

POROUS BOUNDARY-SETTER CHARACTERISTICS	HEALTHY BOUNDARY-SETTER CHARACTERISTICS	RIGID BOUNDARY-SETTER CHARACTERISTICS
Dependent on the opinions of others	Values own opinions	Unlikely to ask for help
Accepts disrespect and/or abuse	Can compromise, but doesn’t compromise values for others’ comfort or convenience	Avoids intimacy and close relationships
Overshares personal information or shares in an inappropriate context	Shares personal info in appropriate contexts (or asks if it’s an appropriate context)	Very protective of personal information and rarely shares, even in appropriate contexts
Overinvolved in others’ problems, avoiding getting to know self	Knows own wants and needs and communicates	May seem detached from relationships in life (all types)
Fears rejection if they don’t comply with others or if someone says “no”	Accepts when others say “no”	Keeps others at a distance to avoid the possibility of a “no” or perceived or real rejection

Here's the thing. In addition to boundaries being a spectrum, most people have a mix of rigid, healthy, and porous boundaries going on for them. For example, someone can have general healthy boundary-setting characteristics with their partner(s), porous characteristics with their mom, rigid characteristics at work, and a mix of all three when it comes to their material possessions.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF ON THIS SPECTRUM OF CHARACTERISTICS?

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF HAVING MORE RIGID BOUNDARY-SETTING CHARACTERISTICS?

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF HAVING MORE POROUS BOUNDARY-SETTING CHARACTERISTICS?

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF HAVING MORE HEALTHY BOUNDARY-SETTING CHARACTERISTICS?

WEEK 2

Exercise #1

Time to Decide on Your Own Boundaries

It's time to take all of the lessons in week one and put them into action. You're going to write down a list of people you want to set a boundary with, what the boundary is, what type it is, and why you want to set it. The "who" and "what" may sound like obvious requirements for the exercise, but why am I having you write the "why"? Well, when we don't know why we're doing something, it can be a lot harder to follow through, especially when there is resistance within or outside of us. When we're clear on our "why," we can remind ourselves in and out of the challenging moments why we're doing the hard thing.

LET'S DO THIS. YOU'VE GOT THIS.

(continued III→)

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Exercise #2**Set 2 of Your Boundaries**

It's time to take all of this learning and turn it into action. Here's what you're going to do. Look at the list you created in exercise one and ask yourself which two feel most important or the most comfortable/easiest to set. Then, check your calendar and see when you're available to chat with the person you want to talk to. Send them a message, or call them and let them know you want to talk about something related to [insert topic of your boundary here] and ask when a good time would be. Give them a couple of time slots that could work for you. I recommend having the boundary conversation either on the phone, via video chat, or in person, but scheduling the time to talk can be done through any medium.

HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES OF TEXTS YOU COULD SEND:

- “Hey, I wanted to chat with you about some boundaries I’m realizing I need to set around my time. When would be a good time? I’m available Wednesday or Friday all afternoon.”
- “Helllooooo! I wanna talk to you about borrowing my car. I’m available anytime today or after 5 p.m. tomorrow. When could work for you?”
- “Hi, love. I was hoping we could set aside some time to talk this week. I’m realizing I need to talk about some boundaries around my physical space at home. I’m available after 8 p.m. anytime this week and next. When is best for you?”

Once you schedule the chat, practice setting your boundary. You can even think about some challenges that may occur; things the other person may ask; and what you're available to engage with. For example, if there has been an issue with this person raising their voice at you and you're setting a boundary around not being available for conversations where voices are raised, are you prepared to walk away for a few minutes if voices raise? Would you take a few minutes, or leave altogether? Thinking through some of these things ahead of time can help you feel more confident and comfortable in the moment.

A Final Word on Boundaries

BEFORE WE CONCLUDE this challenge, I want to make one more thing clear: You will probably need to reinforce your boundaries over and over and over again. The longer you've gone without having a boundary, the more time is needed for you and the other person to adjust to the new reality. Only you can decide how many times you're willing to re-enforce it. You can do this in a kind and assertive way, reminding the other person about your boundary.

Please, please, please remember that learning about ourselves is an ongoing process, which in turn means that our boundaries and how we set and enforce them are constantly changing. Be gentle with yourself, allow yourself to change your mind, and try to give both you and the people in your life some compassion and patience as you set and navigate new boundaries.

YOU'VE GOT THIS.