

**A boundary is a limit, a line of distinction that defines where one thing ends & another thing begins.**

## BOUNDARY SETTING EXERCISE

Keep in mind  
- boundaries  
between  
people are  
**dynamic** and  
**can change** as  
circumstances  
change.

Boundaries are important in all relationships: with partners, friends, family members and coworkers. They draw a clear line between everything that is you: your space, your thoughts and feelings, your needs and choices, and someone else. They put a clear message out to others about what you need and expect. The only way other people can know our boundaries is if we state them clearly.

We often think of boundaries as defining what we do not want, and we associate boundaries with the word “no.” *No* is an important aspect of boundaries, but boundaries are also about defining what we do want. We can call these “yes” boundaries. “No” boundaries often contain a “yes” boundary behind them. For example, when we look closely at the boundary “I don’t like it when you wait two weeks to call me back,” what underlies it may be the boundary “I would like to hear from you more frequently” or “I would like to get a call back within a few days after I call you.” We need to let people know what we do want, as well as what we don’t want.

When we ask someone for help, or offer to help a friend or family member, we are most likely to have a good experience if we make our boundaries very clear.

## HOW TO DO IT:

The first step in setting a boundary is to figure out for yourself what you want/need, and whether that is realistic. Once you are clear about that, the next step is thinking through how to express this boundary to another person. Getting started can be hard. Our own feelings, including anxiety about the other person’s response, self-doubt, anger and fear can get in the way. Or we may not know how to do it. Or we may have some personal myths about boundaries that get in the way, like: my good friends should always just know what I need.

**TRY IT. PRACTICE IT.  
& REASSURE YOURSELF THAT YOU CAN DO IT!**

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**BOUNDARY SETTING EXERCISE**

**THE CHALLENGE:** Think of a specific situation with a friend or family member for which you need to set a boundary. Describe the challenge.

*Example: My best friend, Alex, has invited me to talk to him any time, but whenever I start talking about my relationship, he goes into a tirade about my partner.*

The challenge is:

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**WHAT DO YOU WANT / NEED?**

*Example: I want him to listen to me without criticizing my partner.*

I want/ need:

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**NAME IT:** Describe the problem to the person. Use “I” statements, not “you,” statements. Avoid criticizing, blaming, or making general statements about the other person’s character.

*Example: I feel overwhelmed when you ask me how things are going and then when I tell you about my relationship, you go off on my partner.*

I feel:

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..when:

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**DIRECT IT:** Tell the person what you want/need.

*Example: I want you to give me some time and hear me out. Tell me how you feel about my partner another time.*

I want/need:

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**REPEAT IT:** Be a broken record. Repeat yourself and give consistent messages.

*Example: I want you to listen to me without judging. Please don't criticize my partner every time I tell you that I'm having a hard time.*

Repeat the message:

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**END IT:** If the person is not able to accept your boundary, you may need to change the situation.

*Example: I don't feel comfortable telling you about what's going on with me right now. We can hang out, but I can't talk about personal things with you.*

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