



# Setting Personal Boundaries

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We live in a world with boundaries. If we did not have boundaries to demarcate where property begins and ends or where property is private or public, then everyone could, and some would, do pretty much whatever they liked to that property. That would cause chaos. In the same way you need personal boundaries otherwise your life can end up being chaos, with everyone treating you however they want to. Some people will automatically respect you and what they think your boundaries are because some people just operate with respect for others. Then other people won't respect your personal boundaries and will do whatever they want to. You need personal boundaries around your time, your energy, your material possessions, your emotions, and your physical self. If you do not set boundaries then you will find there are some people who will take advantage of you and leave you feeling exhausted, disrespected, unhappy, and unable to pursue your goals and objectives in life.

I am going to talk about boundaries in five categories. Unless you want to be a doormat, be self-sacrificing, be permanently exhausted, and always fulfilling the needs and goals of others you want boundaries in all these areas.

## **Material Boundaries**

First, and sometimes most obvious, you want boundaries around your material possessions. This includes goods you own as well as your money. And you definitely want to be quite firm on your boundaries as the number of scams around means people get parted with their money often. A personal boundary you definitely should have is to not lend money to someone you don't know. When deciding to set boundaries around your money think about the following: Who can have access to it, and how much? Who does not get access to your money? Are you expecting to get it back? If you are a very generous and kind and giving person, then be especially sure to be firm about your personal boundaries. You probably want some boundaries around your car. Who can drive it? Under what circumstances can they drive it? Do they need to replace the petrol used? Then think about your very expensive equipment. Do you want to set conditions as to how your personal items

must be treated when others use them? Who can use them and under what conditions? Most probably this will be restricted to at most a few people.

### **Physical Boundaries**

You definitely want these and in fact some are law. No one may hit you or assault you. No one is allowed to make unwanted sexual advances to you or to harass you. You may still however, need to think through and be clear on what your boundaries are with respect to touch and unwanted comments. Just because something is the law doesn't mean people obey it. You most probably have personal space needs. People invading your personal space on a regular basis is very stressful. Decide what you want as boundaries and respond with a clear "no" when people violate them. They need to get a clear message as to what is not acceptable.

### **Time Boundaries**

Time is precious and you need to set time boundaries with people who waste your time or disrespect your time in other ways. If people are late for appointments think about what you want the consequences to be and communicate these. If they cannot help being late you most probably want them to at least let you know what is happening. At the very least, in this day and age, most people can send a message or phone if they will be late. For both work and social purposes you probably want some boundaries around when you can be contacted and how much notice you need to attend to matters that require you be present. You, yourself may have to set some boundaries around how much time you will give to people and activities.

### **Energy**

Because of the prevalence of burnout, it is necessary to safeguard your energy. This is linked to your health, and you absolutely want to protect your health. Have boundaries around what you will or will not do when you are feeling exhausted as well as when you are sick. Have boundaries around how much you will do in a day. Have boundaries around weekends and vacation leave and then stick to them. If you are burnt out, you cannot do anything well and no one benefits in the long run. Have boundaries around your self-care. Don't allow people to disrupt good eating, exercise, and sleep habits you have.

## Emotional and Mental

Don't allow people to belittle your own thoughts and feelings and values. If they try to then speak up and indicate that is not acceptable to you. And it goes without saying, I hope, that when you do express your opinions and emotions you do not harm anyone. Set boundaries to ensure people respect your right to have your own feelings and opinions. You could communicate the following: "I respect you have your own opinion, but don't force it on me." "I have a right to hold my own opinion." You need boundaries for what discussions you will be part of. Be able to express your discomfort or walk away if people start talking about topics that make you uncomfortable. You could say, "This isn't a topic I am willing to discuss". Also don't let people blame you for how they feel. You are not responsible for how another adult feels. Each adult chooses how they want to feel. You could say, "No I am not making you feel like that, you are choosing your own feelings."

Sometimes it is hard to know where to start in setting personal boundaries. In general, when setting boundaries, I like to start by asking people to list situations where they have been unhappy or uncomfortable with how things went. So, write down these situations. Because our feelings can be a good indicator of when things are wrong, remember situations when you felt disrespected. If you felt unhappy and disregarded most probably someone crossed a boundary of yours. What did that person say or do that made you unhappy? That made you feel disrespected. Think about what should have rather been said or not said? How should the person have acted or not acted? Then using this list, start setting personal boundaries for yourself.

Starting with those situations that you have already experienced helps you begin. As you get better at this, so you can start thinking of situations you have not yet encountered but you want to have boundaries for. Then you need to enforce the personal boundaries. If you are not a confident or assertive person you will need to become one. People often test you, especially new people in your life, colleagues, clients, and friends, to see how far they can push. Communicating your boundaries will make it clear you are someone who wants to be treated with respect. If someone has no intention of treating you decently, then rather know it, and deal with it there and then. Setting boundaries is good for you and others. You teach people how to treat you, and they learn you are a person who insists on being treated with decency and respect.