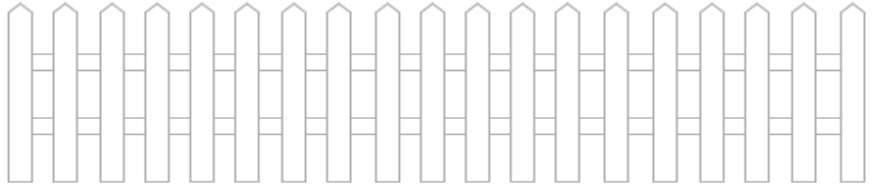


# Boundaries



*I didn't set this boundary to offend you or to please you.*

*I set boundaries to manage the priorities and goals that I have set for my life. - Unknown*

If I can't say "no", then my "yes" has no meaning. – Peter Block

Boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me. – Dr. Henry Cloud

Good boundaries protect you; they protect and preserve your goals, your time, your health and your identity.

I explore this crucial topic here with the help of several guides, including The School of Life, Mark Manson and Dr. Henry Cloud, who have written careful and thoughtful articles that illuminate tricky aspects of boundary setting.

From The School of Life: *because most of us have not been educated in this byway of emotional maturity, (our) boundaries are either non-existent or else get thrown up in a jerky and destructive manner. It takes a little self-confidence and courage to be able to notice just how bad we may be at the art of boundary-laying. We may have spent a large chunk of our lives already in an essentially passive relationship to everyday infringements by people close to us. But we aren't a piece of helpless flotsam on the river of others' wishes; we have agency, direction and – as it were – a rudder. The price to pay for affection isn't compliance. We can prove loveable and worthy of respect and at the same time, utter a warm-sounding and definitive 'no'.*

Mark Manson reminds us: taking responsibility for your own actions and not blaming others are two of the pillars in *Nathaniel Branden's Six Pillars of Self Esteem*. People with high self-esteem have strong personal boundaries. And practicing strong personal boundaries is one way to build self-esteem.

Boundaries protect and preserve our time for thinking (or not thinking) and doing for ourselves. Time that we need to work toward our own unique goals, including meeting with new people, outside our usual circles!

We also need to create healthy boundaries around our learning, our growth and our change. Once we start to make changes in our lives, we will find that some people do not support our growth and will try to convince us to stop, or to once again do what we used to do when we did not have the knowledge we have now. They are afraid of change, but we can't let their fears hold us back. We can politely let them know we respect and understand them, but we are on our own path, and we hope they can respect and understand us, too.

Boundaries liberate you to continue to become your unique, authentic self! (We are always becoming...)

Let's clarify a few words and concepts before we continue:

**Autonomy** - Humans have a deep need for autonomy. From the Stanford Philosophy website, the definition of autonomy is: to govern oneself, to be directed by considerations, desires, conditions, and characteristics that are not simply imposed externally upon one, but are part of what can somehow *be considered one's authentic self*. (plato.stanford.edu) Our AGENCY is our ability to ACT on our decisions.

**Belonging** - Humans have deep need for belonging, too. To be a part of a group, a family, to feel we contribute; in other words: the feeling of being accepted and approved of by a group or by society as a whole, according to the American Psychological Association.

**Boundaries** - Our boundaries are shaped in the balance between our need for autonomy and our need for belonging. It is up to each one of us to determine where to draw our lines. We move the line as we learn new things, reflect on our values, make decisions and create goals. Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Thompson share this description: Boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me. A boundary shows me where I end and someone else begins, leading me to a sense of ownership. Knowing what I am to own and take responsibility for gives me freedom.

Healthy personal boundaries (includes) taking responsibility for your own actions and emotions, while NOT taking responsibility for the actions or emotions of others. - Mark Manson

*Laying down a boundary involves informing those around us – colleagues, parents, children, lovers – of a set of reasonable things that we require to feel respected and happy.* - The School of Life

Your personal boundaries protect the inner core of your identity and your right to your choices.  
– Gerard Manley Hopkins

## Boundaries and Our Health



Healthy boundaries increase our mental and physical health! Boundaries are determined by our core values. If you have not taken inventory of your values lately, there's no better time than now. It's good to check in on your values now and then because we're always changing, always becoming. As we change, our perspective changes and our values change. Reflecting on our changes, and then checking on our boundaries, helps us stay clear and consistent, even during our changes.

The Health Affiliates of Maine share this on their website: *Being consistent with implementing external and internal boundaries will increase your self-esteem, conserve emotional energy, and create more independence in your life. Once you've made your boundaries known in your life, it's natural for people to test them. We all have different values and boundaries and we all deserve to have them respected. What matters most to you? What are you unwilling to compromise on? Use meditation, prayer, journaling or time outside to allow for a space of self-awareness. These realizations may not all come immediately. That's okay—have patience and continue showing up for yourself.* (www.healthaffiliatesmaine.com)

- + Look to your core values
- + Follow your instincts
- + Be assertive and consistent
- + Learn to say “no”
- + Communicate clearly

"No" is a complete sentence.  
- Annie Lamott

Build your 'courage' muscle. Brush up on the "delicate art of graceful objection"!

### Unhealthy Boundaries

“When we have unhealthy boundaries, we end up feeling like we have to hold everyone else’s feelings but our own, and that leads to resentment, anger, anxiety, depression, and stress,” says Babita Spinelli. People find it empowering to make decisions for themselves and experience their feelings rather than being told how they should feel. (www.thehealthy.com)

Boundary Maintenance: Based on your core values, reassess your boundaries as you learn new things. Pay attention to your feelings and needs so you know when to protect and when to expand. How can we support others to explore their boundaries while maintaining our own?

From MindBodyGreen: "Boundaries are about honoring your needs, not about judging other people's wants. For example: I set boundaries around phone time because I get overstimulated by tech. This boundary is to decrease my stress level and not about avoiding others' phone calls."

Clearly communicate your boundaries! Unclear proclamations will ensure greater difficulty later on.

## Our Boundaries and Others



From Mark Manson: *A person with strong boundaries is not afraid of a temper tantrum, an argument or getting hurt. A person with weak boundaries is terrified of it. A person with strong boundaries understands that a healthy relationship is not controlling one another's emotions, but rather each partner supporting each other in their growth and path to self-actualization.*

Sometimes you have to make sacrifices for the people you love. If you make a sacrifice for someone you care about, it needs to be because you want to, not because you feel obligated or because you fear the consequences of not doing it. Acts of affection are only valid if they're performed without expectations. It can be difficult for people to recognize whether they're doing something out of perceived obligation or out of voluntary sacrifice. Here's the litmus test: ask yourself, "If I stopped doing this, how would the relationship change?"

People will tell you that they applaud your boundaries while they privately, or perhaps not-so-privately, hope that you will bend your boundaries in their favor. A little extra pressure, another chance to prove your devotion to them. But everyone is important. And it is important that you are able to recharge your own battery, so you can have good energy to share in the future, in an even more supportive way.

According to the School of Life: *three powerful anxieties bedevil the boundary-less person:*

- *If I speak up, they will hate me.*
- *If I speak up, I will become a target for retribution.*
- *If I speak up, I will feel like a horrible person.*

## A Note on Co-Dependency

Mark Manson writes: *In codependent relationships "victims" and "savers" both get kind of an emotional high off one another. The victim creates problems not because there are real problems, but because they believe it will cause them to feel loved. The saver doesn't save the victim because they actually care about the problem, but because they believe if they fix the problem, they will feel loved. In both cases, the intentions are self-sabotaging.*

*If the saver really wanted to save the victim, the saver would say, "Look, you're blaming others for your own problems. Deal with them yourself."*

*The victim, if they really loved the saver, would say, "Look, this is my problem. Don't fix it for me."*

*For the victim, the hardest thing to do is to hold themselves accountable for their feelings and their life. They've spent their whole existence believing they must blame others in order to feel any intimacy or love; letting that go is terrifying.*

*For the saver, the hardest thing to do is to stop fixing other people's problems and trying to force them to be happy and satisfied. They've spent their whole lives only feeling valued and loved when they were fixing a problem or providing a use to someone; letting go of this need is terrifying to them as well.*

*People who blame others for their own emotions and actions do so because they believe that if they put the responsibility on those around them, they'll receive the love they've always wanted and needed. If they constantly paint themselves as a victim, eventually someone will come save them.*

*People who take the blame for other people's emotions and actions are always looking to save someone. They believe that if they can "fix" their partner, then they will receive the love and appreciation they've always wanted.*

Co-dependency can take other forms as well:

We find it in the relationships where each party holds something the other wants, and they use it for manipulation: sex, money, children, access, etc.

And we also find it in relationships where one person is the authority (the parent, the controller), and the other is subservient, or the follower. We see this not only in personal relationships, but also in cultures.

Erich Fromm describes this in *Escape From Freedom: Is there not also, perhaps, besides an innate desire for freedom, an instinctive wish for submission? If there is not, how can we account for the attraction which submission to a leader has for so many today? Is submission always to an overt authority, or is there also submission to internalized...anonymous authorities like public opinion?*

## Prepare for Challenges



Not everyone will appreciate your boundaries. Some will even insist that they get to plow right inside your boundaries to 'should' on you. I've seen it all aspects of my life: casual, personal and business. I tend to believe people 'should' on women more than men, but that's just my perspective...because I'm a woman! After figuring out my own unique approach to life and work, I find it very hard to not to be offended when other people want to tell me how to live according to their world view. (I share an example of this in "Sue's Anger Story" within the Managing Anger document found in this publication): Anger may be evoked as a response to a perceived provocation when

one's personal boundaries are violated; and anger may be utilized effectively by setting firm boundaries and avoiding unhealthy situations in the future. Power dynamics often add a complex level of difficulty to the situation.

**Problem:** When you show you are strong, capable, and operating with intent, people will want you to do even more for them, claiming they do not possess your abilities.

I know that my commitment to my boundaries demonstrates my dependability, tenacity and care so I get asked to manage things, run things, or follow up on things all the time. I'm grateful that others trust me. I get to help them build their own skills in those areas by politely saying 'no'. In asking me to do something, they say they cannot do that thing, so they want me to do it. I tell them "I had to learn to do it, too!" I am, first and foremost, an "Agent of Agency", so I must give them (back) the power they had hoped to give to me.

If you are thinking of starting your own business, clear, well-maintained boundaries is a must!

## *We Are All Teachers*



Teach others about healthy boundaries by enforcing yours. – Bryant McGill

We teach each other many things simply by doing them. We can teach our family and friends about boundaries. We can help them fortify their boundaries by demonstrating courage and strength as we define ours.

Wouldn't it be helpful today if we would have studied how our minds work when we were younger? Thankfully, it is never too late to reach out to the young people coming behind us. We can make sure they are not denied the education we all deserve: primarily the education about ourselves as individuals and as community members.

Do you want to help our youth make better decisions? There is no better way to teach than by showing: model boundary setting with courage and compassion. Where do we learn to build and maintain boundaries? Where do we learn to assess our values and build courage? School, television, and most adults will not model boundaries. We are encouraged to be acquiescent to authorities, professionals and experts.

"Very few of us were modeled the delicate art of "graceful objection" - School of Life

Children today deserve to learn how to protect themselves from predators of all kinds, including marketers. They need to learn how to say 'no', and how to recognize and avoid unhealthy situations and relationships. We can, and we must, show them how. Not by telling, but by doing.

Model courage! Model strength! And model the "graceful art" of saying "no".

Can you find one person, or a small group, to discuss the many challenges that arise from declaring and maintaining boundaries? Perhaps each person can research the topic, and then share what you find? Constructive learning increases our access to knowledge and widens our perspective, to ponder other viewpoints!

### *Primary References:*

Dr. Henry Cloud - Boundaries Guidance website

<https://www.boundaries.me/blog/how-freedom-and-responsibility-can-transform-a-relationship>

Dr. Henry Cloud – How to Set Boundaries (6 min video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjcPkKHZRCg>

Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend - Define Boundaries

<https://www.cloudtownsend.com/what-do-you-mean-boundaries-by-dr-henry-cloud-and-dr-john-townsend/>

Mark Manson <https://markmanson.net/boundaries>

School of Life <https://www.theschooloflife.com/thebookoflife/learning-to-lay-down-boundaries/>

