

Boundaries

What does it mean to have healthy boundaries? There are two areas of emotional health that are part of boundaries. One of these is the willingness and strength to take care of your self. Boundaries are how we protect ourselves in relationships with others. The second is the knowledge and awareness that no one is able to control another person - each of us chooses how we act, what we say, and how we treat other people. This second area not only helps you protect yourself, but also gives you the awareness to respect another person's boundaries.

Setting boundaries - Setting healthy boundaries with others means that sometimes you need to limit or define what others can and can't do in a relationship with you. This is part of how you teach others how to treat you - with compassion yet also with firmness. The process goes like this:

- You initially set a boundary by stating your need, asking, or letting another person know that "it" is important to you. "It" is the boundary and may be the way the person talks to you, not calling you at 7:00 a.m., not touching you in a way that makes you uncomfortable, not borrowing your clothes without your permission, or any number of unique needs that you have as a person. Often, this initial statement is all that will be needed in a relationship and the other person will simply respect that. If not, you may need to proceed...
- If that boundary is not respected, you may need to restate it with a consequence. The important thing to remember about a consequence is that it must be something you have control over and it must be something you are willing to do. If your teenager keeps coming in after the curfew you have set, don't say that you will ground her for a month next time she does it, if you aren't willing to actually do that.
- Sometimes you will encounter people who just simply will not abide by boundaries you have set and it may be necessary escalate the consequences, or even go so far as to end the relationship. A serious boundary violation may be a partner cheating on you - and if this continues you may eventually need to leave the relationship to protect yourself.

Each situation and relationship is different so it is important to evaluate what you can and can't control and what you are willing to do.

Boundaries are not intended to be an attempt to control or manipulate another - they are intended to protect yourself by stating what you need and to also bring your authentic self to the relationships in your life. People who don't want you to set a boundary with them may accuse you of being controlling, in order to get you to stop asking for this boundary. This is a form of manipulation and as long as you keep your focus on what you need and stay clear about what you can and cannot control, it is okay to set a boundary.

Setting boundaries can get complicated. Sometimes two people's needs conflict with each other. Get help through books or with a counselor who can help you navigate each person's needs and help you come to a solution that works best for you.