

Sunflower Counseling Center

Tips for Effective Boundary Setting



What are Boundaries and Why do I need them?

With the Holidays approaching, we are likely to see an increase in our socialization, whether it be spending time with friends or visiting family. However, it's important to acknowledge that the Holidays are not always a joyous or easy time for everyone. For some, the Holidays mean returning home to stressful home environments or finding ourselves at a gathering with an estranged family member. These situations can be challenging to navigate, but knowing your limits, and learning how to set boundaries, can help you feel more comfortable this Holiday season.

You may have heard the term “Boundary” before, but what exactly is a Boundary? A boundary is an expectation you set within your relationships that helps others understand what you are comfortable with and how you expect to be treated. You may find that you have different boundaries in each of your relationships. This is normal. Not all boundaries are created equal and one size does not fit all. Our boundaries are often a reflection of our closely held values and beliefs. For example, if I value maintaining a strong work-life balance, I may set firm boundaries about working late or not working on the weekends.

In this month's newsletter, we take a look at the different types of boundaries we may choose to set with others, explore how to communicate our boundaries effectively, and learn helpful tips for setting healthy boundaries. With these tools in your toolbox, you'll be ready to set healthy boundaries and equipped to navigate the Holiday season in a way that works best for you!

Types of Boundaries

- **Personal-** These boundaries speak to our expectations surrounding physical touch and personal space.
- **Emotional-** This refers to respecting a person's feelings. We may also set limits on how much we disclose to others and who we share personal information with.
- **Intellectual-** Showing respect for other's ideas and opinions, as well as engaging in effective and appropriate discussion with others.
- **Material-** These boundaries allow us to decide what resources (material or financial) we will share and with whom.
- **Time-** When we set time boundaries we learn to set aside time to adequately tend to each aspect of our lives.

Setting Firm Boundaries:

“Daring to set boundaries is about having the courage to love ourselves even when we risk disappointing others.”

-Brene Brown

Setting firm boundaries will make it less likely that you will do something that makes you uncomfortable. Having firm boundaries also makes it less likely that we will accept behavior we are not comfortable with.

The first step to setting a firm boundary is to reflect on your values, how you expect to be treated, and what you are willing, or not willing, to do in specific situations. It is important to know your limits.

Once we have an understanding of what our values and expectations are and where our comfort lies, it's time to communicate our boundary. Remember, you always have the right to say “No!”

Communicating effective boundaries might look like stating...

“I'm not comfortable with that.”

“That won't work for me.”

“I've chosen not to at this time.”

“I've decided to draw the line at ____.”



“Boundaries are the distance at which I can love you and me simultaneously.”

-Prentis Hemphill

An important note about setting boundaries: When we set firm boundaries with others, it is reasonable to expect that they may have a strong response to this. Some may even feel as though it is a personal attack or we are using boundaries to push them away.

We can communicate to our loved ones that having firm boundaries actually allows us to *improve* our relationships, not harm them. It is also important for us to remember that receiving a strong or negative response to our boundaries, does not mean we were wrong for setting them.

TIPS FOR SETTING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES:

- **Be confident**- Maintain eye contact and use assertive, concise language.
- **Have a plan**- Take time to think about what you want to communicate and how you want to say it before having the conversation.
- **Be respectful**- It's ok to be firm, but avoid using put-downs, insults, or offensive language. Your message is more likely to be received well if you are maintaining respect for the other person.
- **Tune in to your emotions**- If you notice feelings of discomfort, resentment, or anger, this could be a sign that you may need to set a new boundary or your existing boundaries might have been violated.

