

Managing Boundary Violations



What to Do When Your Boundaries are Violated

Objective

To identify ways to cope when someone violates your boundaries.

What to Know

Boundaries are limits you set for yourself that determine what you will and will not participate in or allow. They are more about what *you* do than getting another person to change.

Boundaries keep you physically and emotionally safe. They are the ultimate form of self-care because they help you prioritize what is best for your mental, emotional, and physical health. They allow you to advocate for yourself in relationships. Boundaries keep relationships healthy, but when others violate them, it is painful and stressful. When violations occur repeatedly, the relationship can become unhealthy and feel unsafe.

You may not be setting good boundaries if you

- frequently doubt yourself.
- easily fall into the “people-pleaser” role.
- feel like your relationships are more like obligations.
- begin to resent others.
- lose self-respect.
- may not trust yourself.
- allow others to treat you poorly, say cruel things, or otherwise abuse you.

What does a healthy boundary look like? Healthy boundaries depend on your actions and choices. You might:

- say no.
- not volunteer your time if your schedule is already overloaded.
- avoid spending time with unkind people.
- leave the room if someone is disrespectful to you.
- end a relationship with a toxic family member.

Why would someone violate your boundaries? Perhaps the person is unaware how their behavior hurts you. Some people grow up having their own boundaries violated, so they fail to recognize the importance of boundaries and lack the skills. Or sometimes people violate boundaries to gain control, manipulate, or get what they want from others. When someone violates your boundaries, it is natural to feel powerless, but there are ways to take your power back. Here are some suggestions.

1. Set strong, clear, consistent boundaries. You cannot control how people respond, nor can you force people to respect your boundaries. You can control yourself and your choices, and you can stick to your boundaries regardless of what others choose to do.



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2. Write it down. Record boundary violations and your responses to check for weaknesses in your boundaries. If you notice you fail to consistently set healthy boundaries, make adjustments. Writing down violations will help you decide what to do next.

3. Be clear. Decide what you will accept, and what you will not accept from others. Perhaps you have set a boundary mentally but allow it to be pushed or broken. Write down your boundaries and say them out loud to a supportive person who will help you stay true to them.

4. Accept. Some people will not respect your boundaries no matter what you do. It may be disappointing to realize you will need to decide whether you want to continue relating to people who violate your boundaries.

5. Detach. Some people intentionally violate boundaries to hurt you, get a reaction out of you, or exert control. Avoid engaging in the same arguments with these people. You can choose to ignore them or laugh off their comments to shift the power.

6. Limit or cut off contact. You have choices, and even if it is a family member, you may decide your wellbeing is more important than putting up with repeated boundary violations.

What to Do

Visualize yourself and your personal boundaries (emotional, mental, and physical). What do you need to feel safe? Make a list and speak them aloud to a trusted, supportive person.

Write down recent boundary violations and how you responded.

Date	Boundary violation	Your response



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Now, imagine someone you want to set a boundary with. What will you say to them?

Who is violating your boundaries? The nature, power differential, and closeness of the relationship can make a difference in how you will address the person.

Is the boundary violator(s) willing to change? Are they willing to work with you to improve the relationship? Are they sensitive to your needs or feelings? Why or why not?

How long has this been going on? Longer behavior patterns might be more difficult to change. Explain.

Has the boundary violator been physically aggressive? Explain. *If the person violating your boundaries has been violent or threatened violence, proceed with caution. Get help from supportive people, professionals, and/or law enforcement.*

Are you setting clear, consistent boundaries? Boundaries must be clear and consistent if you are dealing with someone that does not respect you. This person may look for holes in your boundaries and use them against you. Describe the situation.

Make a statement that affirms your motivation and commitment to your personal boundaries.

I require _____ to feel safe. I need you to respect my boundary by _____.

Consider my boundary request by _____.

I will no longer _____.

If you are consistent and clear, and present others with your statement, there may be people who continue to disrespect your boundaries. Whom? Would you consider disengaging or ending the relationship altogether? Why or why not?