

Personal Boundaries and Recovery

What are personal boundaries?

Our personal boundaries have to do with establishing comfortable space—not too much, not too little—between ourselves and other people. Having healthy boundaries means we feel comfortable letting people get close to us because we know we can have control over how much we share with another person.

- We all have personal boundaries
- Our boundaries let us know where we end and the other person begins
- Growing up in families where there is substance abuse, violence or severe mental illness can interfere with our ability to develop healthy boundaries
- Developing healthy boundaries is part of the recovery process
- Boundaries that are too rigid makes it hard to get close with other people; it's hard to relax and have fun with rigid boundaries.
- When our boundaries are too soft, we can find it difficult to protect ourselves from situations that are unsafe; it's easy for others to take advantage of us.
- Establishing “firm but flexible” boundaries is a process that's different for everyone. There are no rules about what will work for you: the right boundaries are boundaries that feel comfortable and allow you to have a life worth living.

Signs of difficulty maintaining healthy boundaries:

- Feeling like you can't say no, even when you want to
- Sacrificing your personal values, plans or goals to please others
- Expecting other people to fulfill all your needs
- Hesitating to speak up or make changes when you're not treated fairly
- Feeling used, threatened or mistreated by others
- Having sex or doing other things when you don't really want to
- Feeling responsible for other people's feelings

Signs your boundaries are getting stronger:

- You act on feelings when you need to
- You can say NO without experiencing tidal waves of guilt
- You do what YOU want to do instead of other people's ideas of what you should do
- You no longer feel responsible for making a relationship work or keeping everyone happy
- You don't take things so personally
- You can disagree with your friend but still keep the friendship

- You realize you're not responsible for other people's actions
- You feel comfortable giving as well as receiving
- You don't feel as angry and resentful towards the important people in your life

Personal Bill of Rights

1. I have the right to ask for what I want.
2. I have the right to say no to requests or demands I cannot meet.
3. I have the right to express all of my feelings, positive or negative.
4. I have the right to change my mind.
5. I have the right to make mistakes and not have to be perfect.
6. I have the right to follow my own values and standards.
7. I have the right to say no to anything when I feel I am not ready, it is unsafe, or it violates my values.
8. I have the right to determine my own priorities.
9. I have the right not to be responsible for others' behaviors, actions, feelings, or problems.
10. I have the right to expect honesty from others.
11. I have the right to be angry at someone I love.
12. I have the right to be uniquely myself.
13. I have the right to feel scared and say, "I'm afraid."
14. I have the right to say, "I don't know."
15. I have the right not to give excuses or reasons for my behavior.
16. I have the right to make decisions based on my feelings.
17. I have the right to my own needs for personal space and time.
18. I have the right to be playful and frivolous.
19. I have the right to be healthier than those around me.
20. I have the right to be in a non-abusive environment.
21. I have the right to make friends and be comfortable around people.
22. I have the right to change and grow.
23. I have the right to have my needs and wants respected by others.
24. I have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
25. I have the right to be happy.

~ Author Unknown