

Setting a boundary

Moderate · 10 min to read; 10 min to plan what you'll say · Free

A boundary is what you're okay with and how you want to be treated, with a partner, roommate, friend, parent or boss. Decide your line, then say it once, directly, with an "I" statement: "I'm okay texting during the day, but not multiple times an hour." Rehearse it, keep any explanation brief (no is a complete sentence), and decide ahead of time what you'll do if it's ignored. If you're afraid to bring it up because of how they'll react, that's a warning sign.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ A few minutes to think about what bothers you and why
- ☐ A friend to practice with, if you want

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Figure out your line.** Pay attention to what makes you uncomfortable, what's important to you, what you want to keep private, and any dealbreakers. Writing it down helps.
- 2 **Know that boundaries can be emotional, physical or digital.** Examples: following each other on social media but not sharing passwords; holding hands but not in public; quiet time to yourself every day.
- 3 **Write out what you'll say and rehearse it out loud, or role-play with a friend and ask for honest feedback.**
- 4 **Say it with an "I" statement, simple, specific and clear:** "I'd like you to knock before coming in," not "You never respect my privacy".
- 5 **Keep explanations short.** No is a complete sentence, and you don't owe a reason. If an explanation fits, keep it brief.
- 6 **Back it with body language: stand or sit upright, face the person, keep regular eye contact, a neutral expression and uncrossed arms.**
- 7 **If you're too upset, wait until you're calmer, if you can.** See Cooling down before you respond.
- 8 **Decide your follow-through before the conversation.** If it's ignored, repeat it once, calmly. If it keeps happening, act on what you decided: leave the room, end the call, stop lending money, or spend less time with that person.

Watch out A healthy boundary protects and respects you. An unhealthy one tries to control someone else: "I need space to see my friends" is healthy; "Stop talking to other people because I get jealous" is a warning sign of control.

DAD NOTE Say it once, say it kindly, and mean it.

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/people/boundaries/setting-a-boundary/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: love is respect; Mayo Clinic; National Domestic Violence Hotline.