

clarify your boundaries

Your boundaries are more than just saying “no.” They are an essential resource for helping you create a life of meaning, fulfillment, and joy.

They help you

- Focus on what matters most
- Honor and maintain your values and sense of autonomy
- Enhance self-respect and self-esteem
- Teach others how to treat you
- Create mutual relationships and expectations
- Limit the impacts of others’ behaviors

In other words, your boundaries define who you are and your relationships with others. with others.

boundary: “what’s okay / what’s not okay”

This definition comes from Dr. Brené Brown, and it gives us both an excellent definition of what a boundary is and immediate language for setting one.

Some examples:

- “It’s okay to be disappointed about not getting a raise. / It’s not okay to retaliate by only doing the bare minimum.”
- “It’s okay to disagree with colleagues. / It’s not okay to scream at them.”
- “It’s okay to feel excited about your ideas. / It’s not okay to interrupt someone else or talk over them to share them.”

types of boundaries

Psychologists have created numerous ways of mapping out our boundaries. I favor a simplified approach that articulates three types of boundaries (social, emotional, and time/energy) within two broad categories (internal and external).

Two categories

- Internal: boundaries that you set and hold for yourself
- External: boundaries that you set and hold for others

Three types

- Social boundaries: acceptable ways to behave around, with, or towards others
- Emotional boundaries: acceptable ways to share or receive emotions with others
- Time / Energy boundaries: acceptable ways to give or receive time and/or energy with others

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emotions are data

As data, your emotions offer you powerful information for identifying how and where our boundaries exist, as well as recognizing when you or others cross them.

Because your boundaries exist as a way of honoring and maintaining your values and sense of security and autonomy, boundary crossings can feel like violations or disregard for your values and/or safety and autonomy.

Boundary crossings themselves occur along a continuum from minor **boundary crossings** to explicit **boundary violations**, and your emotional experience of those crossings or violations alert you to a need for repair, protection, or re-establishing what's okay and what's not okay for you and others.

Sometimes we only recognize boundaries after we cross them, especially when they are **stealth** (you don't know they exist) or **unspoken** (you haven't articulated them to yourself or others).

warning signs

Two important warning signs to look for with boundary crossings are **resentments** and **feeling triggered**.

They are clear signals that an internal or external boundary isn't being respected by you or someone else, and you have an opportunity to define, repair, or re-establish that boundary for yourself and others.

Resentments

- Where do you feel resentment?
- What might that resentment be trying to tell you?
- What boundary or boundaries are getting crossed?
- Is it an internal boundary (for yourself) or an external boundary (for others)?

Feeling Triggered

- Where do you feel triggered
- What might those triggered feelings be trying to tell you?
- What value is getting overlooked or ignored?