

Setting healthy boundaries

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA's education team have developed a range of tips to help support you during difficult times. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

Difficult times bring about disruption, loss of control and increased levels of stress. During times such as these, we need to maintain some sense of identity and control.

We can do this by setting boundaries. Boundaries are guidelines, rules or limits that we create for ourselves to define where we end and the 'other' begins. They help us decide what types of communication, behaviour and interaction are acceptable.

Here are some suggestions to help you set healthy boundaries:

1. Assess your needs and limits

Examine the current situation. Ask, what do I need and what don't I want? Remember, it is important to have realistic expectations. When considering the situation, be sure to include the following areas:

- physical - space, noise, routines
- emotional - management and expression of feelings
- mental - thoughts, values, beliefs, information

2. Decide it is your responsibility to act

In times of difficulty it is very easy for us to get caught up in the blame game. This is when we spend all our time thinking about how unfair things are and how we are powerless to make any changes. Even though this may feel somewhat true in difficult circumstances, thinking this way is not helpful. While we can't do much about the situation in the world, we can determine where and how we can act that will be of benefit.

3. Share boundaries respectfully

It is important to let others know about our boundaries. The best way to do this is with a respectful and neutral tone. For example, "I need to get some work done, so I've decided to close my door to minimise interruptions". Being firm, respectful and direct adds impact to our position.

4. Back up the boundary with action

When a boundary is crossed, remind the person involved of the boundary and ask for their help in maintaining it. If they continue to violate the boundary, consider what natural consequence you need to put in place to maintain the boundary. For example, “If the interruptions continue, I won’t be able to finish my work and then I will need to work later this evening instead of spending time with you”. It is important to follow through on what we say we are going to do.

5. Show gratitude to those who respect our boundaries

When others honour our boundaries, it is affirming for us to notice and say thank you. Not only does this reinforce our position, it also acknowledges the efforts of others. This kind of positive behaviour makes it more likely that our boundaries will be honoured in the future.

6. Be adaptable

Setting a boundary is not like building a brick wall. Healthy boundaries are flexible. This means that we can stick to them when we need to and let them go when the situation demands. It is always our decision to make this choice.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you’d like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team are continuing to facilitate Relationship Australia WA’s seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face and online.

If you’d like to register your interest in attending a course on [Setting Healthy Boundaries](#), or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.