

Signs Your Boundaries Are Too Loose or Too Rigid

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Many of us might not realize it, but the boundaries we currently have may be too restrictive or too permissive. Since boundaries are our rules for relationships and really how we live our lives, it's important to make sure we're maintaining healthy limits — which both protect us and permit intimacy.

Psychotherapist Joyce Marter, LCPC, described healthy boundaries as the “midway between Diva and Doormat.”

The Diva is grandiose and entitled, while the Doormat is passive and has low self-esteem. The Diva doesn't respect others' boundaries, while the Doormat doesn't respect her own, she said.

Clinical psychologist Ryan Howes, Ph.D, described healthy boundaries as knowing what you want and need, and meeting those goals without feeling negative feelings about yourself or others.

“You know exactly how much you can give without feeling depleted,” he said. And you can say yes to something without feeling manipulated or say no without feeling guilty.

Below, you'll find specific signs for boundaries that are too loose or too rigid, along with other insights.

Loose Boundaries

- When someone asks you for something, the inner voice that says “I should say no” keeps getting louder and louder, according to [Howes](#), who has a private practice in Pasadena, Calif.
- You resent the other person and yourself for saying yes, Howes said. This becomes a vicious cycle: You say yes, feel resentful and distance yourself. Yet you say yes, again, to another request, and the cycle continues.
- You disclose personal information that you feel anxious and vulnerable about, said Marter, owner of [Urban Balance](#), a counseling practice in the Chicago area. She gave the example of “telling your neighbor that you just bounced a check.”
- You share inappropriate information that makes others feel uncomfortable, she said.
- “People take advantage of you, [such as] you often seem to be the one picking up the bill when your friends have ‘forgotten’ their wallets,” she said.

Rigid Boundaries

- “You feel lonely, isolated or disconnected,” said Marter, who also writes the blogs [The Psychology of Success](#) and [First Comes Love](#).
- You feel like no one really knows or understands the real you, because you don't open up to others, she said.
- You can't relate to others, either, “because you squash their attempts to share with you by throwing up a wall — and eventually, they will stop trying.”
- You've alienated all your loved ones, Howes said.
- “You enjoy all the time you have for your projects, but they don't include anyone else,” he said.

Other Considerations

According to Howes, “setting boundaries is about moderation and grey areas.” Of course, it’s much easier to live on the extremes. It’s much easier to always say yes or to always say no than to figure out when to accept or reject requests.

“A good boundary setter is willing to step into this uncomfortable space and establish a line of yes and no,” said Howes, who is the author of the blog [In Therapy](#).

When you’re setting boundaries for the first time, expect resistance.

“[People] are used to you saying yes and will resist this sudden change to your relationship. They may even call you selfish for saying no to their requests,” he said.

Hopefully, over time, they’ll learn to meet their own needs, instead of expecting you to “do their work for them.” And, over time, “they’ll probably respect you more, too.”

Just remember to be respectful of their feelings, Marter said. This means not being cruel or abusive — “You suck for being mad” — and having compassion.

She shared this example of what someone might say when setting a boundary: “I understand that you may feel upset and that this probably is a big loss for you, but please respect my needs and wishes and know that my intention is to preserve our relationship, not to hurt it.”

In sum, here’s a helpful description from Marter for thinking about healthy boundaries: “Boundaries should be firm enough that you feel emotionally [and] physically safe and comfortable, yet permeable enough that you allow love and intimacy to flow between you and another person.”

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