

# Learning How to Create Boundaries in Recovery

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Having healthy boundaries is one important way to extend self-love and care to ourselves. I've learned this firsthand—but not, of course, from having stellar boundaries my whole life. There was a time when I had zero boundaries. Zilch. Nada. None.

It didn't matter if it had to do with work, school or relationships, I was a flimsy doormat. And I'm not just being self-deprecating here (though I do enjoy a good laugh at my own expense). Because of a number of reasons, including the trauma I experienced in the past, my sense of self was very distorted. I didn't know how to and was not able to create and maintain my own boundaries.

I know many people, especially women, who struggle with boundary issues. Just google the topic and almost 400 million search results pop up! Clearly, this is something that is on a lot of people's minds and something that is important to address.

In order to explore this topic further, first I'd like to delve into what boundaries are. Then, let's look at some healthy ways to set up boundaries (and maybe I'll throw in some examples from my past that are of the “what not to do” variety). So here we go.

## What are boundaries?

I love this definition [from \*The Resilience Centre\*](#):

*Personal boundaries are guidelines, rules or limits that a person creates to identify reasonable, safe and permissible ways for other people to behave towards them and how they will respond when someone passes those limits. They are built out of a mix of conclusions, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, past experiences and social learning. Personal boundaries help to define an individual by outlining likes and dislikes and setting the distances one allows others to approach. Boundaries are essential to healthy relationships and, really, a healthy life. **Setting and sustaining boundaries is a skill.***

### **Why are boundaries important?**

Boundaries are really all about self-worth or how much we value ourselves. When we love and value ourselves, we set up healthy boundaries out of respect for ourselves. When we don't value who we are or don't feel like we deserve respect, we let other define and set our boundaries for us.

In a healthy and vibrant recovery, personal boundaries both respect our own selves, promote self-care, and communicate to those around us how we feel about ourselves. Importantly, boundaries also let others know not only how we want to be treated, but what we will tolerate and where we draw the line. In order to make recovery shine, learning to set up healthy boundaries is something that we can practice.

For me, this wasn't an innate skill. I needed to learn and practice this over time. What helped me the most was coming to understand my true worth and value as a woman. Not because of anything I've done (or not done) but simply because I was created—and created by a God who loves me.

### **How do I know if I'm practicing unhealthy boundaries?**

Here's a fun list of all the ways that I've had very unhealthy boundaries in the past. Can you relate?

- Not knowing who I am or having a flimsy sense of my own identity or selfhood

- Oversharing very intimate details about myself or my past in unsafe spaces
- Not expressing my true needs and wants
- Allowing others to make decisions for me
- Not taking responsibility for my own choices or life direction
- Getting self-worth (or lack thereof) from how I'm treated by others

According to the Resilience Centre, **HEALTHY Boundaries** allow an individual to:

- Have high self-esteem and self-respect.
- Share personal information gradually, in a mutually sharing and trusting relationship.
- Protect physical and emotional space from intrusion.
- Have an equal partnership where responsibility and power are shared.
- Be assertive. Confidently and truthfully say YES or NO and be OK when others say NO to you.
- Separate your needs, thoughts, feelings, and desires from others. Recognize that your boundaries and needs are different from others.
- Empower yourself to make healthy choices and take responsibility for yourself. If you are dealing with someone who is physically dangerous or threatening to you, it may not be safe to attempt to set explicit boundaries with them. If you are in this situation, it can be helpful to work with a counselor, therapist or advocate to create a safety plan and boundary setting may be a part of this.

And what is more, having healthy and bright recovery is all about recognizing that we have the right to be treated well. This might sound simple, but for many of us with addiction and other co-occurring challenges, this has been a lesson hard learned. Many of us have experienced so many boundary violations it is a miracle that we are still standing.

**So How Can We Practice Healthy Boundaries?**

A practical way to practice healthy boundaries is through Assertive Communication. This communication style is a skill and can be learned if you are like me and it hasn't been something to come naturally (I lean towards the more passive-aggressive communication styles). Being assertive in communication expresses to others that you respect yourself enough to share your opinions, thoughts, and stand up for your beliefs. Importantly, it is also done in a way that respects others' viewpoints.

Having healthy boundaries has been a tough one for me over the years. Because of a lot of reasons, I've had a tough time establishing boundaries because I've struggled with feeling like I have much agency or choice in my own life. Learning to develop boundaries, whether that is in romantic relationships, friendships, co-workers or even with my own time has been life-changing. To be able to say "no" and prioritize my own self-love, care and health can mean that I can show up in a healthier way when I need to.

Ultimately, when we communicate in a direct and assertive way, we are communicating to others that we respect and value ourselves.

It may not happen overnight, but practicing assertive communication can really pay off in the long run and help to make our recoveries shine.