



**Independence***First*

*The Resource For People With Disabilities*

## **Boundaries and Personal Space**



**Violence is not a virtue of manhood.**

Take pride in being a man by standing up to violence  
against women in our community.

## What Are Boundaries?

**Boundaries** essentially keep the good stuff on the inside and the bad stuff on the outside. In the physical world, boundaries are things that separate one thing from another, like walls that separate the outside of a house from the inside. Though they have no physical substance, psychological boundaries act very much like walls, by separating the private parts of people or relationships separate from the public parts.

Examples of violations of your person boundaries include: the loss of freedom of oneself, being with the wrong person, control issues, the inability to say no, doing too much within the relationship at the expense of yourself. Boundaries are your beliefs and ideals that make you especially unique. Infringing upon your boundaries only serves to make you an unhappy person.

### Physical Boundaries

A person's comfort zone is a space around him/her of about one foot. Step inside this and he/she is likely to become uncomfortable and step back. This is his physical boundary: his body combined with the space he needs from you to feel comfortable. The size physical boundaries are different for everyone.

Stepping inside that comfort zone deliberately is called a boundaries violation, or transgression. Most people will get frightened to one degree or another if you violate their physical boundaries. Abuse, by definition, is "boundaries violations." Deliberately stepping inside one's comfort zone, making someone uncomfortable and/or feel threatened, therefore, is defined as physical abuse.

If you touch a person without permission technically that, too, is a boundaries violation, regardless of how affectionate you intended the gesture to be. Some people don't mind this type of physical boundaries intrusion from a family member but most people feel uncomfortable about it when it comes from anyone else. They may say nothing, but if they do reproach you, know that you are, indeed, at fault. As mother used to say, "Keep your hands to yourself unless invited."

Hugging someone without permission is a boundaries violation, too - a deliberate invasion of that person's personal space. We do it all the time, don't we? It's widely accepted and encouraged. But be warned: many people don't like it, they may avoid you or reproach you and again: it's not your intent that matters, it's the effect the gesture has on the receiver. It technically is a boundaries violation: we have no right to touch another person without their permission.

Obviously, hitting or harming a person's body is a serious boundaries violation and constitutes serious physical abuse.

Becoming aware of people's physical boundaries is an important first step to ending all abusive behavior.

### **Emotional Boundaries**

People also have emotional boundaries. This comprises everything about who they are: what they do, what they like, their past, their family and friends, their looks, their personality, where they went to school, the house they live in.

Making remarks about any of these things - anything that has to do with "who a person is" - is an emotional boundaries violation. Intentions don't matter when it comes to trespassing someone's emotional boundaries; only the effect the words had on the person matter.

"Refined" people steer clear of any personal remarks. Even compliments are judgments and diagnoses (about people's mental health, for example) are serious emotional boundaries violations.

Any remarks that start with "You " are probably trespassing on someone's emotional boundaries. A man in an elevator once said to a stranger, "You should wear short skirts." He may have thought that was nice, he wasn't too "refined". To the woman it felt invasive, personal, like it reduced her personhood to nothing but body parts, it attempted to "define" her by telling her something she "should" be doing with her life and therefore felt controlling. In fact, it was all of these, whether he was consciously aware of it or not. He was, as we say, "out of line."

Language is powerful, words can be destructive. Refining the language you use, is a very important part of learning to respect other people's boundaries.

### **Boundaries and Family Members**

Boundaries tend to be more lax among family members - but, really, should they be? Unless we are **asked** to comment on something that falls within someone's personal emotional boundaries, we are trespassing on their territory and risk doing emotional damage and causing relationship problems and conflicts when we do. Remember: it doesn't matter what your intention was. If you trespass someone's boundaries they have a right to be upset.

The home is probably the MOST important place to exercise a healthy respect of boundaries. So much of our happiness depends on the smooth functioning of these relationships.

### **Boundaries and Manipulation and Control**

Emotional boundaries violations are verbal and emotional abuse. You can emotionally abuse without OVERTLY trespassing a boundary. In fact, very quiet attempts to manipulate someone are also violations - these are attempts to control someone, someone's emotions or behavior, and therefore constitute "stepping over the line".

***How good are your personal boundaries? (Take the Survey on Personal Boundaries)***

## Survey on Personal Boundaries

	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Often	Usually
	1	2	3	4	5
I can't make up my mind.					
I have difficulty saying "no" to people.					
I feel as if my happiness depends on other people.					
It's hard for me to look a person in the eyes.					
I find myself getting involved with people who end up hurting me.					
I trust others.					
I would rather attend to others than attend to myself.					
Other's opinions are more important than mine.					
People take or use my things without asking me.					
I have difficulty asking for what I want or what I need.					
I lend people money and don't seem to get it back on time.					
Some people I lend money to don't ever pay me back.					
I feel ashamed.					
I would rather go along with another person or other people than express what I'd really like to do.					
I feel bad for being so "different" from other people.					
I feel anxious, scared or afraid.					
I spend my time and energy helping others so much that I neglect my own wants and needs.					
It's hard for me to know what I believe and what I think.					
I feel as if my happiness depends on circumstances outside of me.					
I feel good.					
I have a hard time knowing what I really feel.					
I find myself getting involved with people who end up being bad for me.					
It's hard for me to make decisions.					

<b>Survey on Personal Boundaries</b>					
	<b>Never</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Usually</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
I get angry.					
I don't get to spend much time alone.					
I tend to take on the moods of people close to me.					
I have a hard time keeping a confidence or secret.					
I am overly sensitive to criticism.					
I feel hurt.					
I tend to stay in relationships that are hurting me.					
I feel emptiness, as if something is missing in my life.					
I tend to get caught up "in the middle" of other people's problems.					
When someone I'm with acts up in public, I tend to feel embarrassed.					
I feel sad.					
It's not easy for me to really know in my heart about my relationship with a Higher Power or God.					
I prefer to rely on what others say about what I should believe and do about religious or spiritual matters.					
I tend to take on or feel what others are feeling.					
I put more into relationships that I get out of them.					
I feel responsible for other people's feelings.					
My friends or acquaintances have a hard time keeping secrets or confidences that I tell them.					

**Scoring**

**161 or More:** You have a serious problem with not setting Personal Boundaries.

**121 to 160:** You are not setting Personal Boundaries.

**81 to 120:** You may have a problem with setting Personal Boundaries.

**40 to 80:** You do not have a problem setting Personal Boundaries.

## **Descriptions Of Boundaries**

### **RIGID BOUNDARIES**

#### **Physical:**

- Stiff body posture
- Stoic
- Uncomfortable being touched
- Avoids touching or showing affection to others
- Avoids physical closeness
- Does not react or under-reacts
- “Stone face”
- Very predictable behavior

#### **Emotional:**

- Appears insensitive to the feelings of others
- Appears aloof and disinterested
- Does not show feelings
- Does not talk about feelings
- Seems emotionally numb
- Attempts to meet needs and wants by themselves
- Has difficulty asking for or accepting help from others
- Does not react or under-react emotionally
- Has difficulty giving or receiving from others

### **NO BOUNDARIES**

#### **Physical:**

- Does not like being alone
- Touches other without asking
- Allows others to touch him/her even when it is uncomfortable or inappropriate
- Is not aware of own need for privacy
- Imposes on the privacy of others
- Allows physical space to be invaded
- Over-reacts to the feelings and behavior of others
- Personalizes
- Behavior is influenced by others
- Is unpredictable

**Emotional:**

- Feels everything
- Feels the feelings of others
- Cannot contain feelings
- Over-discloses, tells too much
- Is dependent on others for emotional well-being
- Gets too close too fast
- Feels like a victim
- Experiences prolonged resentments
- Is overwhelmed and preoccupied with others
- Says yes when he/she wants to say no
- Feels responsible for the feelings of others
- Identity tied to being in an intimate relationship
- Overcompensates
- Expects others to meet needs
- Gives too much
- Takes too much
- Unable to respect the rights of others

**PARTIAL BOUNDARIES:****Physical:**

- May have extremes in need for physical space
- Shows characteristics of fluctuation in boundaries
- May have rigid or healthy boundaries in some circumstances and fragile boundaries in others

**Emotional:**

- Has mood swings
- Is indirect-Example: Shares feelings about marriage with mother rather than with husband
- Is emotionally inconsistent - may have rigid or healthy boundaries in some circumstances and fragile boundaries particularly in intimate relationships

**HEALTHY BOUNDARIES****Physical:**

- Makes physical boundary clear to others
- Respects and is sensitive to the needs and rights of others

- Is able to negotiate and compromise
- Asks permission before touching others

**Emotional:**

- Shares feelings appropriately and directly
- Is assertive
- Is interdependent
- Identifies choices
- Is able to make mistakes without damage to self-esteem
- Has an internal sense of personal identity
- Can allow “differentness” in others
- Tolerates and accepts differences of opinion without altering their own
- Is sensitive to feelings of others (empathetic)

**OTHER SIGNS OF UNHEALTHY BOUNDARIES**

**Sexual:**

- Having sex when you do not want to
- Falling in love at first sight
- Intimate sharing on first meeting
- Using sex as a reward or punishment
- Inability to distinguish between love and sex
- Manipulating another person through sex
- Feeling a need to always be in a sexual relationship
- Attaching self-esteem to sexual attraction
- Forcing sex on someone who does not want it
- Sexual abuse

**Physical:**

- Touching others without asking
- Physical intimidation
- Not allowing other privacy
- Not protecting your own need for privacy
- Physical abuse

**Emotional:**

- Verbal abuse
- Making threats\
- Assuming I know what someone else feels

- Assuming others know what I feel
- Expecting others to know my needs and meet them
- Assuming to know the needs of others
- Over-reaction to feelings or behavior of others
- Insisting others tell us how they feel
- Not respecting the rights of others
- Intolerance to difference in opinion
- Dependence on others for my sense of well-being
- Inability to ask for help
- Personalizing
- Need for constant reassurance from others
- Going against personal values and morals to please others
- Unclear about preferences
- Accepting gifts that I don't want
- Making material gifts the measure of another's caring
- Over giving
- Frequent advice-giving; with expectation that others follow it

**MY BOUNDARIES**

1. What kind of boundary do I have?
2. Where in my life is it the hardest to have a healthy boundary?
3. What changes would I like to make in my boundary?
4. What do I need to do to make these changes?

<b>Unhealthy</b>	<b>Healthy</b>
Telling all.	I consider the other person's level of interest and caring before opening up to them.
Talking at an intimate level on the first meeting.	I do not overwhelm a person with things about me. I trust step-by-step as I feel I am getting trust in return.

Falling in love with a new acquaintance.	I allow love to develop. I know the qualities I need in a relationship and those that are negative for me. I take time to check those out in a new acquaintance.
Falling in love with anyone who reaches out.	When someone reaches out to me, I ask myself whether this person has the qualities I need.
Being overwhelmed by a person - preoccupied.	When I am in a relationship, I am able to "compartmentalize" other areas of my life and to continue to function in them.
Acting on first sexual impulse.	My feelings and my self-esteem decide whether I act on sexual impulses. "Will I feel good about myself?" is my first question.
Being sexual for partner not self.	I do not "fake" sexual feelings. I do not have sex to avoid hurting my partner's feelings. I cannot be nagged or blackmailed emotionally into having sex.
Going against personal values or rights to please others.	I have values which are not negotiable in a relationship. I am not willing to "do anything" for a partner.
Not noticing when someone else displays inappropriate boundaries.	I am wary of someone who wants to get too close to me too soon. I notice whether someone I am beginning to relate to has values and opinions.
Not noticing when someone invades your boundaries.	I notice when someone is overly helpful, tries to make decisions for me, or does not consult me about time commitments.
Accepting food, gifts, touch, sex.	I decide before accepting something whether I want to do it. I do not ask whether the other person's feelings will be hurt if I refuse.
Touching a person without asking.	I do not touch others without thinking about whether they have given me signals that it is okay.
Taking as much as you can get for the sake of getting.	I do not "test" in a relationship by keeping track of how much is given me as a way of measuring love.

Giving as much as you can give for the sake of giving.	I do not give beyond what I can afford materially or emotionally because it makes me feel secure to think I have "sacrificed" for the other person.
Allowing someone to take as much as they can from you.	I am aware of when I am being taken advantage of and I am willing to confront the other person about it.
Letting others direct your life.	I know what I want from life and have goals in many areas. I listen to opinions but make the decisions for myself.
Letting others describe your reality.	I assume that my perception of what is going on is just as accurate as my partner's in a relationship. I refuse to allow my partner to tell me, "You don't feel that way."
Believing others can anticipate your needs.	I do not expect others to read my mind about what is going on with me. I tell them.
Expecting others to fill your needs automatically.	I do not expect others to put me first in everything we do together. I do not expect a partner to make me OK just by being there.
Falling apart so someone will take care of you.	I do not play games about how I feel to get sympathy or support.
Letting others define you.	I know who I am. I am wary of partners who want me to be different.
Self-abuse, Sexual and Physical abuse, Food abuse, Work abuse.	I respect myself as a person who is worthwhile. I believe I am in charge of my body and what others do to it. I take care of my body and my health as a part of my respect for me as a total person.

## Boundary Violations

### Definitions

**Sexual abuse** (also referred to as **molestation**) is defined by the forcing of undesired sexual acts by one person to another.

Different types of sexual abuse involve:

- Non-consensual, forced physical sexual behavior such as rape or sexual assault
- Psychological forms of abuse, such as verbal sexual behavior or stalking.
- The use of a position of trust for sexual purposes.

**Rape** is the act of forcing penetrative sexual acts, against his or her will through violence, force, threat of injury, or other duress, or where the victim is unable to decline, due to the effects of drugs or alcohol. Rape is considered one of the most serious sex crimes in general.

**Informed consent** is a legal condition whereby a person can be said to have given consent based upon an appreciation and understanding of the facts and implications of an action. The individual needs to be in possession of all of his faculties, such as not being mentally retarded or mentally ill and without an impairment of judgment at the time of consenting. Impairments include illness, intoxication, drunkenness, using drugs, insufficient sleep, and other health problems.

**Coercion** is the practice of compelling a person to involuntarily behave in a certain way (whether through action or inaction) by use of threats, intimidation or some other form of pressure or force. Coercion may typically involve the actual infliction of physical or psychological harm in order to enhance the credibility of a threat. The threat of further harm may then lead to the cooperation or obedience of the person being coerced.

**Sexual harassment** is harassment or unwelcome attention of a sexual nature. It includes a range of behavior from mild transgressions and annoyances to serious abuses which can even involve forced sexual activity. (Dziech et al 1990, Boland 2002) Sexual harassment is considered a form of illegal discrimination, and is a form of abuse (sexual and psychological) and bullying.

**Since you are all in here because of a boundary violation you have committed, can you think of a time when you were the victim of a boundary violation, what was it?**

## BOUNDARIES VIOLATIONS

Insults, put-downs	Giving Ultimatums	Orders
"Shut Up"	Sarcasm	Peer-pressuring
"Ganging up on" another - participating in or leading	Covert ganging up - turning others against someone, behind the victim's back	Rolling eyes
Dirty looks, sneers, and other facial expressions meant to hurt or intimidate	Storming around	Ridicule
Snobbery	Interrupting	Shouting
One-upmanship	Holding grudges	Threatening
Loudness	Badmouthing	Turning Others Against Someone
Acting superior	Insulting another's family or friends (to face or behind back)	Ridiculing one's valued beliefs
Questioning intelligence or taste	Stereotyping sex, race, ethnicity, etc.	Expressing superiority in sex, race, religion, etc. verbally or non-verbally
Prejudice	Verbal pressure for favors	Demeaning or degrading another
Calling someone "too sensitive" or "very sensitive"	Silent treatment	Refusing to admit when wrong
Refusing to apologize when wrong	Denying responsibility for actions	Changing the subject
Dominating the conversation (all statements, no questions)	Denying one's right to feelings ("You shouldn't feel...")	Jealousy: displaying jealousy
Acting indifferent	Taking anger out on others	Withholding compliments or approval on purpose
Judgementalism	Labelling ("You are.." "You need")	Psychoanalyzing
Advice-giving (particularly if it's constant)	"You always," "You never," "You should"	Harassing
Depriving one of privacy	Going into another's room/house without knocking and getting permission to enter	Depriving one of sleep, food

## BOUNDARIES VIOLATIONS

Blaming	Being uncooperative	Chronic impatience
Chronic procrastinating	Chronic lateness	Cynicism
Lying, deceiving	Stealing	Getting even
Forgetting things	Selfishness	
<b>Sexual Abuse</b>		
Acting jealous	Treating women as sex objects	Publicly showing interest in other women/men
Telling mate about other romantic involvements	Accusing partner of romantic inclinations	Harassing mate about imagined romantic involvements
Stereotyping sex, race, etc.	Suggesting mate would be or is sexually active with another	Suggesting mate is less physically attractive than s/he was before or suggesting no one else would want him/her sexually
Insisting mate dresses in a more sexual way than s/he wants to	Minimizing the importance of mate's feelings about sex	Criticizing mate sexually
Insisting on unwanted and uncomfortable touching	Withholding affection, sex	Calling names like "whore" "frigid"
Forcing mate to take off clothes when she doesn't want to	Expressing verbally or non-verbally superiority in sex, race, religion, etc.	Depriving another of privacy
Inappropriate displays of affection	Going out with others after agreeing to a monogamous relationship	
<b>Emotional/Verbal Abuse</b>		
Withholding affection, appreciation or approval as punishment or coercion	Withholding compliments	Withholding love
Withholding empathy, understanding, feedback	Withholding information (including marital financial information)	Withholding money, food, car, friends, sleep from mate
Withdrawing emotionally from the relationship to	Chronic impatience	Verbal pressure for favors

## BOUNDARIES VIOLATIONS

punish or get one's way		
Humiliating in public or private	Waiting for someone else to bring up the problem	Acting superior
Figuring out the another's problem	Refusing to admit when wrong	Refusing to apologize when wrong
Denying responsibility for actions	Body posturing to evoke fear, or to express disapproval	Depriving one of sleep, food (and in marriage, money)
Taking car or house keys away	Insulting another's family or friends (to face or behind back)	Ridiculing one's valued beliefs
Continually criticizing mate	Guilt-tripping	Silent treatment
Stonewalling, ignoring	Not listening	Dirty looks, sneers, and other facial expressions meant to hurt or intimidate
Dehumanizing	Pushy impatience	Pouting
Leaving inappropriately	Changing subject w/o appropriate announcement	Refusing to socialize with mate
Manipulating mate with lies and/or contradictions	Making decisions for mate	Controlling mate's actions
Painting the victim as an abuser	Feigning incompetence or competence	Economic irresponsibility
Building financial dependence - control	Chronic lateness	Selfishness
Breaking dates	Fawning	Endangering oneself to get rescued
Using kids as weapons	Threatening custody battles	Not caring, indifference, apathy

## **Violent & Controlling Behavior Checklist**

### **Physical Violence**

- Slap, punch, grab, kick, choke, push, restrain, pull hair, pinch, bite
- Rape (use of force, threats to get sex)
- Use of weapons, throwing things, keeping weapons around which scare her
- Abuse of furniture, things in the home, pets, destroying her things
- Intimidation (standing in the doorway during arguments, angry or threatening gestures, use of size to intimidate, standing over her, outshouting, driving recklessly)
- Uninvited touching
- Threats (verbal or nonverbal, direct or indirect)
- Harassment (uninvited visits or calls, following her around, checking up on her, embarrassing her in public, not leaving when asked)
- Isolation (preventing or making it hard for her to see/talk to friends, relatives, others)
- Other (please list)

### **Psychological and Economic Abuse**

- Yelling, swearing, being lewd, raising your voice, using angry expressions or gestures
- Criticism (name-calling, swearing, mocking, put-downs, ridicule, accusations, blaming, use of trivializing words or gestures)
- Pressure Tactics (rushing her to make decisions, using guilt/accusations, sulking, threatening to withhold financial support, manipulating children, abusing feelings)
- Interrupting, changing topics, not listening, not responding, twisting her words, going on and on
- Economic coercion (withholding money, the car, or other resources; sabotaging her attempts to work)
- Claiming "the truth," being the authority, defining her behavior, using

"logic"

- \_\_\_\_\_ Lying, withholding information, infidelity (having sex with others)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Using pornography (e.g., magazines, movies, strip shows, home videos, etc.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Withholding help on childcare/housework; not doing your share or following through on your agreements
- \_\_\_\_\_ Emotional withholding (not expressing feelings, not giving support, validation, attention, compliments, respect for her feelings, rights, and opinions)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Not taking care of yourself (not asking for help or support from friends, abusing drugs or alcohol, being a "people-pleaser")
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other forms of manipulation (please list)

### **What Counts as Harmful Behavior?**

In general, harmful behavior is any action which causes pain or harm in someone else. As you can imagine, there are an infinite amount of actions which have the potential to cause pain or harm and many of those are not necessarily intentional. The following list contains some examples of harmful, abusive, controlling and violent behavior, as well as the effects that they may have caused. If you have done anything on the list to a partner, chances are that you understand the damage that can be caused to a relationship.

1. Have you ever hit, pushed, grabbed, threatened, frightened or intimidated your partner?
2. Is your partner afraid of you?
3. Are your children afraid of you?
4. Are you concerned that your behavior is harming your relationship?
5. Have you broken promises about changing behavior?
6. Have you ever punched a wall, banged a table, or broken something during a disagreement?
7. Have you ever grabbed your partner during a disagreement, attempted to stop them from leaving, locked them out or restrained them in any way?

8. Do you pressure your partner to do things your way, even when you know your partner doesn't want to?
9. Has your partner ever said 'you're always trying to control me'?
10. Do you use names, put-downs or swearing to control your partner?
11. Do you put the blame onto your partner for things you are responsible for?
12. Have you found yourself 'keeping score' of the wrongs your partner has done to you in order to hold those things against them?
13. Have you ever blamed your abusive actions on alcohol, other drugs, stress or family problems?
14. Have you cheated on your partner or been sexually abusive in other ways ?
15. Have you ever been accused of mistreating your children?
16. Are you concerned that your children are being emotionally or psychologically harmed because of the way you treat your partner?
17. Has your partner complained about jealous or possessive behavior on your part?
18. When you do something that hurts your partner, do you just say "I'm sorry" and then expect acceptance of your apology without making any change in how you were hurtful?

## **10 THINGS MEN CAN DO TO PREVENT GENDER VIOLENCE**

1. Approach gender violence as a MEN'S issue involving men of all ages and socioeconomic, racial and ethnic backgrounds. View men not only as perpetrators or possible offenders, but as empowered bystanders who can confront abusive peers
2. If a brother, friend, classmate, or teammate is abusing his female partner -- or is disrespectful or abusive to girls and women in general -- don't look the other way. If you feel comfortable doing so, try to talk to him about it. Urge him to seek help. Or if you don't know what to do, consult a friend, a parent, a professor, or a counselor. **DON'T REMAIN SILENT.**
3. Have the courage to look inward. Question your own attitudes. Don't be defensive when something you do or say ends up hurting someone else. Try hard to understand how your own attitudes and actions might inadvertently perpetuate sexism and violence, and work toward changing them.
4. If you suspect that a woman close to you is being abused or has been sexually assaulted, gently ask if you can help.
5. If you are emotionally, psychologically, physically, or sexually abusive to women, or have been in the past, seek professional help **NOW.**
6. Be an ally to women who are working to end all forms of gender violence. Support the work of campus-based women's centers. Attend "Take Back the Night" rallies and other public events. Raise money for community-based rape crisis centers and battered women's shelters. If you belong to a team or fraternity, or another student group, organize a fundraiser.
7. Recognize and speak out against homophobia and gay bashing. Discrimination and violence against lesbians and gays are wrong in and of themselves. This abuse also has direct links to sexism (eg. the sexual orientation of men who speak out against sexism is often questioned, a conscious or unconscious strategy intended to silence them. This is a key reason few men do so).
8. Attend programs; take courses, watch films, and read articles and books about multicultural masculinities, gender inequality, and the root causes of gender violence. Educate yourself and

- others about how larger social forces affect the conflicts between individual men and women.
9. Don't fund sexism. Refuse to purchase any magazine, rent any video, subscribe to any Web site, or buy any music that portrays girls or women in a sexually degrading or abusive manner. Protest sexism in the media.
  10. Mentor and teach young boys about how to be men in ways that don't involve degrading or abusing girls and women. Volunteer to work with gender violence prevention programs, including anti-sexist men's programs. Lead by example

