Developing Healthy Personal Boundaries

Personal boundaries are defined by the physical and emotional limits you establish with other people. They are the unspoken rules you have about personal closeness in every relationship, whether it is with your boss, your friends, or your loved ones.

When you do not have clear personal boundaries, you may feel that you are controlled by another person. When your personal boundaries are too rigid, you may feel isolated, lonely, and misunderstood. When you have healthy personal boundaries, you recognize that everyone is unique, with distinct emotions, needs, and values. You can communicate what you need from other people, while respecting their points of view.

As you develop insight about your personal boundaries, you will develop healthy and mutually rewarding relationships. You can use this worksheet to help you think about your personal boundaries and the things you can do differently in your relationships.

The following are statements that reflect a positive approach to personal values.

Rate each statement from 1 to 3, with: 1 = never, 2 = sometimes, and 3 = always. If you feel that a statement does not apply to you, write in “NA.”

_____ I’m able to trust others by observing their behavior over time.
_____ I look to myself first to fulfill my personal needs.
_____ I reveal my personal thoughts and feelings to people I trust.
_____ I seek emotional intimacy with the people who care about me.
_____ I seek physical intimacy only in a trusting and caring relationship.
_____ I make my own decisions about my relationships.
_____ I focus on my own needs and goals without being influenced by others.
_____ I consider the consequences of my decisions and how they affect others.
_____ I don’t allow people to take advantage of me.
_____ I maintain my personal values no matter what other people say or believe.
_____ I’m able to take care of myself when I feel emotionally vulnerable.
_____ I’m aware when someone infringes on my rights.
_____ I’m able to say ‘no’ if I feel that someone is asking for something I do not wish to give.
_____ I’m aware of the personal boundaries of others and respect them.
_____ I don’t take advantage of others.
_____ I don’t change my opinions or do something against my values in order to get someone to like me.

_____ I don’t allow people to take advantage of my time or money.

_____ I trust the decisions I make about my relationships.

_____ When in doubt, I seek advice from people I trust, but I still make up my own mind.

_____ I have a clear idea about who I am and what I want from life.

_____ I recognize that people are not “mind readers” and I’m able to communicate my needs and feelings.

_____ I’m able to be assertive and still consider the rights and needs of others.

Add up your score: _____

If your score is between 50-66, you have strong, healthy, appropriate personal boundaries.

If your score is between 33-49, your boundaries are fair and could use some work.

If your score 32 or less, you might have poor personal boundaries and you will benefit from strengthening them.

Review your answers and pick one area of your personal boundaries you would like to work on.

In the space below, describe an incident that illustrates this problem.

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Now describe how you would behave differently in this situation to reflect healthier personal boundaries.

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What can you do to strengthen your boundaries?