

Setting Appropriate Boundaries

There are many ways to set and maintain appropriate boundaries. The following tips can help you set good boundaries:

- Identify teens and adults you can trust and build relationships with them.
- Avoid people who are selfish, disrespectful, manipulative or abusive. Such people will likely disrespect you and your boundaries.
- Spend time with people who do well in school and at home, who are liked and respected by many people. Such people are more likely to have good boundaries themselves and will be more likely to respect your boundaries too.
- Learn to say “no” when you’re being pressured to do something wrong. Anyone who pressures or invites you to do something wrong doesn’t respect you or your boundaries.
- Trust your sense of safety or danger. These are good indicators of right and wrong. If someone or something seems dangerous or threatening, stay away!
- Learn how to think through and solve problems before reacting. Problem-solving and critical thinking skills can help you maintain your boundaries and respect others.
- Think about times when your personal boundaries were violated. Who was involved? What was the situation? Think of a better way to handle boundary violations in the future.
- Speak up when someone or something bothers you. Talk to adults you can trust.
- Set limits about where you will go, what you will do, and how long you will be there. Having and sticking to a plan helps you keep and respect boundaries.
- Find ways to tell (or show) others what your personal boundaries are.

A Boundary Questionnaire

How do you know if a relationship has unhealthy boundaries? The following questions can help you take a closer look at your friendships and dating relationships. Be honest with yourself as you answer these questions.

1. Does this person try to tell me what to do, how to dress, whom to hang out with?
2. Do I spend most of my time worrying about this relationship?
3. Does it seem that this person purposefully tries to make me feel jealous or insecure?
4. Does it seem that I do all the giving and my friend does all the taking?
5. Does my friend put unrealistic demands on me? What demands?
6. Does my friend ignore me or attempt to control me when others are around? What usually happens?
7. Does it seem like this friend is always trying to change me? How?
8. Does my friend purposefully do things that hurt me emotionally or physically? What?
9. Do other people tell me that my friend talks behind my back? About what?
10. Do I get in trouble when I do what my friend says? How?
11. Do I feel ashamed, guilty, or afraid after talking or being with this person?
12. Have I quit doing things that I used to enjoy since I've become involved with this person? What? Why?
13. Does this person ever threaten or intimidate me?
14. Has this person ever given me a gift and expected sexual contact in return?

A "yes" to any of these questions points to an unhealthy characteristic in your friendship. The more "yes" answers you gave, the more unhealthy qualities your friendship has. Take some time to figure out if you can correct what's going wrong (or if the friendship is worth it).

If you need more help, or just need someone to talk to, call the Girls and Boys Town National Hotline 24-7 at 1-800-448-3000.

From *Unmasking Sexual Con Games: A Teen's Guide to Avoiding Emotional Grooming and Dating Violence*, 3rd Edition, by Kathleen M. McGee and Laura J. Buddenberg, 2003, Boys Town Press, 1-800-282-6657, www.boystownpress.org

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Dating Steps

Step 7 Marriage

Bonding on all levels: emotional, physical, and spiritual.

Step 6 Engagement

Couple prepares for life-long, committed, bonded relationship.

Step 5 Serious Steady Dating

Is this the spouse for me? Begin examining relationship in light of marriage. Maintains same boundaries listed below.

Step 4 Steady Friendly Dating

Dating one person exclusively while maintaining appropriate emotional and sexual boundaries. Goes no further than hugging and kissing.

Step 3 Friendly Dating

Includes group dating and single dating. Purpose is to get to know many different people. Helps to shape your idea of who you might want to date seriously. It is wise to go no further than holding hands or hugging.

Step 2 Opposite Gender Friendships

Learn and practice how to have fun with and appreciate the other gender.

Step 1 Same Gender Friends

Learn and practice what it means to be a genuine friend.

People with healthy boundaries:

- Are secure about themselves.
- Don't let others intrude.
- Have a clear sense of their own views, values, and priorities.
- Are confident.
- Can protect themselves without shutting off from others.
- Know how to stand up for themselves at appropriate times.
- Are able to enter into relationships without losing their own identity.
- Are able to identify safe and appropriate people.