Healthy boundaries

For many reasons, it can be difficult and confronting to establish healthy boundaries. Often, in order to support our health progress, we might need to communicate to those closest to us that things need to change.

When fear of conflict is real, how can you develop the language and tools to support yourself and feel safe in those relationships?

Unhealthy boundaries

What is the cost of not setting healthy boundaries?

- You 'go with the flow' instead of doing what is right for you (and your health)
- There is an actual cost to your health. Often this is fatigue
- You're more likely to be in 'fight or flight' in your body as unhealthy boundaries can feel stressful
- You don't develop or maintain balanced, respectful relationship dynamics

What are examples of unhealthy boundaries?

- Not leaving work on time believing "I'll fall behind" or "I'll get in trouble"
- Committing to too many social events
- Feeling guilty (for doing or not doing something)
- Feeling like you're letting people down
- Not prioritising your health - sleep, nutrition, movement, connection

An unhealthy boundary is evident when you're frequently putting other's needs before your own

Conflict

One of the most common objections to creating healthy boundaries is a fear of conflict. It is important to remember, a healthy boundary is not about confrontation or being aggressive, but is instead using language frameworks to give yourself some space to make decisions and create changes.

Whilst continuing to not set boundaries has a health and happiness cost, it can often feel like setting boundaries might also be stressful. It doesn't have to be when done with kindness and clarity.

Healthy boundaries are not selfish. You can say yes to things that are important and continue to support those you care for...just not at the cost of your own health or happiness. Healthy boundaries are not about always saying no, but rather saying yes to the right things.

MELBOURNE FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE

melbournefunctionalmedicine.com.au

Healthy boundaries

Key elements of healthy boundaries

When in conversation with someone, it is the wrong time to come up with your strategies for communicating boundaries. If you already know which situations need attention, you can do the work ahead of time.We recommend choosing several strategies from the options below that feel the most comfortable for you, and practice those.

(1) Give yourself time

By creating some space, you are able to take some tension out of the conversation. You don't need to respond on the spot, and offering a time buffer can help you map out your next choice.

> "That sounds really lovely. Let me think about it and I'll come back to you by...."
> "I'd love to say yes, but I'll just need a few days to think it through"
> "How exciting. I'll go away and check my calendar and come back to you"

(2) Avoid giving excuses

This is where guilt lives. Not being able to attend, deliver or respond to something can have you swimming in guilt and your mind could easily race with all of the stories you make up about what the other party thinks. So exhausting! No excuses are necessary or helpful when establishing a boundary with someone.

> "I'd love to but I can't this time. I hope it's fun"
> "That's so kind, but no thanks"
> "What a wonderful idea. Please keep me in mind next time, but unfortunately I can't make this one"

(3) Be clear, direct and kind

The way you deliver information is powerful. Using a calm voice and a steady tone sets assurance. That combined with clear and concise language doesn't leave much space for battle. Before having a conversation about boundaries, centring yourself with a few deep belly breaths can help to steady you.

(4) Gently remind

People need reminding because, frankly, you're not as important to them as they are. Bringing them back to your original need or earlier communication can help to gently steer them back your way.

> "It's been a while since our first chat about my health, so I just wanted to remind you that I'm still being very mindful about my social commitments"
> "I'm still trying so hard to prioritise rest, so I'll continue to say no for the moment"

(5) Be unapologetic

Feeling guilty, shameful, regretful...these are just some of the emotions that can rise for those finding it tricky to establish healthy boundaries. It is important to know and remember that you are the most important person in your life. Your health and wellbeing is a priority, and is not something to apologise for. That doesn't mean you can't apologise at all for anything, just not for being pro-you. See the language examples in step 2.

Healthy boundaries in practice

Your healthy boundaries

As mentioned, this work is best done prior to communicating. You want to feel your best and safest when conveying your needs. Let's take some time to explore those areas in your life where you notice room for improvement. We also recommend practicing healthy boundaries with 'safe people' - those who you don't really have any boundary issues with. This is a great way to build confidence.

Where do you currently experience poor boundaries?

List the names of people or the environments where you struggle with boundaries (eg work, friends, parents)

Eg, I find it hard to leave work on time because I don't want to let my boss down. I want her to know that I'm a good worker and am valuable. I notice my self worth is attached to my work ethic and I've previously been celebrated for being such a hard worker.

What are the costs of these?

What do you give up or suffer as an outcome of not having boundaries there?

Eg, Because I stay late most nights, or go home to complete tasks, I often say no to friends. I also find it really hard to get to sleep because I'm wound up from working late. My friends aren't inviting me to things any more so I'm starting to feel a bit rejected and sad. I'm also tired and wired from working late.

Let's make a plan

Of the strategies on page two, which of those would you like to practice in these situations? Can you spend some time expanding on the ideas now so that you're clear when the conversations arise?

Eg, In a meeting with my boss. "I've noticed I work out of hours a lot to try to stay ahead of the work load. This has been taking a toll on my wellbeing so I'd like to practice leaving work on time. I'm thinking about how to stay productive while at work and prioritising tasks so that the important projects are always completed. If we can use the next month to see how this works and then review I'd really value your support.

Practice

Use this page to continue exploring your strategies

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____