



Setting Boundaries: Defining What is Best for You, the Caregiver

What is a boundary? A boundary is a border or limit, which you set in order to protect yourself. Personal boundaries may be physical or emotional. Boundaries provide an important tool in protecting and caring for you.

- **Physical boundaries** define the physical space between you and others. It is a clear indicator of where your space ends and another person's begins. Personal space is a bit different for everyone and may be different among different cultures and different relationships.
- **Emotional boundaries** are more difficult to define, as there isn't a physical or visual prompt. Emotional boundaries require that you are aware of your own wants and needs and can separate these from the wants and needs of others. Once you identify what is right for you, and communicate this in a concise way, you are setting boundaries that inform others about what is important to you.

Barriers - What interferes with setting appropriate boundaries?

- Lack of awareness - You do not know what a healthy boundary is or haven't recognized the need for them.
- Caregiver identity - You gain positive feedback by taking care of others to the exclusion of taking care of you.
- Low self-worth - You feel you are not good enough or worthy of the protection boundaries can offer.
- Guilt - You have beliefs about what you "should" do as opposed to deciding what you chose to do.
- Fear - You are afraid that setting boundaries will cause others to react in anger, reject, or abandon you.

Benefits of boundaries

- Helps you to clarify for yourself and others what you are taking responsibility for and what you chose not to be responsible for.
- Establishes and improves your self-respect and self-esteem by valuing and speaking up for what matters to you.
- Provides the limits and boundaries needed to properly take care of yourself, rebuild your own reserves, and make clear decisions to provide the care and support you decide for those you care for.



Steps to setting boundaries

- Slow down and take time to respond to requests before responding.
- Give yourself time to become clear about your feelings, needs, and the decisions that you chose to make.
- Tune into and respect your intuition or gut feeling.
- Start small. Set limits or identify a person that you feel more comfortable trying this new behavior with.
- Use clear communication skills.
- Make “I” statements. Let’s take an example of setting a boundary with home health aides, that prepares a meal for themselves, when making the meal for the Veteran.
 - Describe your observations. State what you see, hear, or notice, in specific terms without judgment. “I noticed that when you make lunch for the Veteran, you make a meal for yourself also.”
 - Share your feeling using a one word description of the emotion, such as “I feel frustrated, worried or confused.”
 - Next, add the need that you have. “I feel worried about my husband and I having enough to eat for the month if you join us for meals because we are on a fixed income.”
 - Finally make a request that is clear, specific, and describes the positive action you want the person to take. “Could you please plan to bring your own lunch unless I offer to have you join us?”
- Once the receiver responds, you can choose how to move forward.
 - You may find you need to provide a reminder of the original request to abide by the boundary if needed.
 - Provide a consequence if the boundary is not respected. “I need to talk to you about your choice to continue to eat with the Veteran. I have asked that you do not do this if you are not invited. If this continues to happen, I will need to ask the company to provide a new aide.”

Remember to be kind to yourself and others while trying these new skills. All new skills take practice and time. Keep at it and you will slowly notice the positive changes in your self-esteem, and self-confidence. The Caregiver Support Line Social Workers are available to support and assist you in your attempts to clarify and communicate your boundaries.