

MCWVC

Montgomery County Women's Center

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*Healthy Boundaries,
Communication & Trust*

HEALTHY BOUNDARIES IN RELATIONSHIPS

Having boundaries is like drawing a line. One side has the things you are okay with, and the other side, those that you are not okay with, don't feel ready for, or make you uncomfortable. This line looks different for everyone, so it is important for you to know where yours needs to be drawn. Setting boundaries is a way to teach your partner about your needs, and let you know when something doesn't feel right. You are allowed to put your needs before someone else's needs, especially if their needs make you uncomfortable.

Step 1: What are your boundaries?

Think about these categories and what they mean in terms of your relationship.

- Physical: Are you okay with public displays of affection? Does affection make you uncomfortable? Do you hate it or love it when your partner tickles you? Do you need a lot of alone time?
- Emotional: Are you able to share what you are feeling right away, or do you need some time to think about it? Do you need your partner to be available anytime you have a crisis? When are you ready to say I love you?
- Sexual: Do you need to get to know your partner a while before engaging in any kind of sexual activity, or are you okay getting physical right away? What sexual activity are you okay with?
- Digital: Are you posting your relationship status? Is it okay if your partner uses your phone? Do you want to share passwords?
- Material: Do you like sharing your stuff? Are you okay paying for your partner or vice versa?
- Spiritual: Do you like to practice your religion with a partner or alone? Does your partner need to have the same beliefs as you, or can they be different as long as yours are respected? Are you waiting until marriage before you have sex?

Step 2: Letting your partner know what your boundaries are.

You don't have to sit down with your partner with a check list of all of the things that make you uncomfortable, but you do have to be open and honest. Some of these things might come up early in the relationship, like if you are a virgin and don't want to have sex until you're ready. Some of these things may not come up for a while, like if your partner wants to share passwords after dating for six months. When your needs are different than your partner's, have a conversation; you don't need to give an explanation. It may be awkward, but having the tough conversations is part of having a healthy relationship. When your partner listens to you and respects you, it builds trust.

Step 3: Recognizing when the line has been crossed.

Sometimes, boundaries get crossed even after you've talked with your partner; this is where trusting yourself comes in. You may be sad, anxious, or angry, or you may not know exactly what you are feeling. Always trust your gut. If something doesn't feel right to you, it probably isn't.

Step 4: Responding.

If a boundary has been crossed by your partner who didn't know where your line was drawn, have an honest conversation. It could be something as simple as saying, "Hey, I really don't like it when you _____. This makes me really uncomfortable. Do you think next time you can _____ instead?" This might take some back and forth before coming to an agreement that meets both of your needs, but your relationship will be stronger because of it.

If a boundary has been crossed even though you had already been clear about your boundaries, this might be abuse. Crossing a line might be obvious, like if you say no to having sex, but your partner uses physical force to make you do something you don't want to do. But it can also be more subtle, like if your partner guilt-trips you into something, begs you until you give in or threatens to break up with you unless you do what they want.

COMMUNICATION IN RELATIONSHIPS

Open and honest communication is an important part of every relationship because it allows you to share who you are and what you need from the people around you. Miscommunication is common but can often lead to problems, misunderstandings, and hurt feelings. These tips will help you talk to your partner honestly.

Speaking: Be open and clear about how you are feeling; if you don't understand something, tell them; use "I statements" so that the other person doesn't feel like you are blaming or attacking them ("I feel that..."); be honest, even if you think the other person might not like hearing how you truly feel; apologize when you are wrong or hurt the other person; when talking about something negative, also mention something positive.

Listening: Pay attention without distractions (put your phone away) when the other person is talking; listen to what they are saying instead of just thinking about how to respond; wait for them to finish talking before you say something; use acknowledging statements like "interesting" to let them know you hear what they are saying; ask questions if you don't understand something to avoid confusion and misunderstanding; don't leave them hanging (if you need to think about what they said before responding, tell them that); be prepared to hear something that you don't like and really think about it before responding.

Body Language: Make eye contact; face them; give your full attention; and lean in as they are speaking.

Digital Communication: Don't have an important conversation over text or online. When chatting online, focus on the conversation instead of being distracted by other things or having multiple other conversations; if you can't respond, let the other person know so you don't leave them hanging.

Where and when to have an important conversation: When talking about something important, talk when you are feeling calm, or take some time to cool down if you had a fight. Talk about your concerns before they become problems and get worse. Make sure you are talking privately so you can be open about your feelings.

TRUST IN RELATIONSHIPS

It can take time to build trust. And while it can be hard to trust someone, especially if your trust was broken in the past, you can't blame your current partner for something someone else did. Here are some ways to help build trust:

Be reliable: If you needed your partner to listen to you because you were having a bad day, or if you needed a ride home from school, would they be there for you? Would you be there for them?

Respect boundaries: When you tell your partner that something makes you uncomfortable, do they respect that? Does it go both ways?

Be honest: Does your partner tell you how they feel instead of just giving you the silent treatment? Do you tell your partner how you feel, and make an effort to talk things through? If you made a mistake, would you tell your partner? Would your partner tell you?

Walk the walk, don't just talk the talk: Do what you say, and say what you mean.