

# Access

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## Creating your own personal happiness with healthy boundaries

*“Good fences make good neighbors.”*  
– Ancient proverb

Although you may find yourself wondering if you agree with the statement above, it does nevertheless provide us with some insight about creating positive, long-standing relationships ... that by protecting our separateness, we're ensuring our happiness.

Every relationship we have, whether romantic, friendly or professional, requires a certain degree of space. That space, be it physical or emotional, serves to define where someone else ends and we begin. Though creating and protecting that space can be a challenge at times, it is important for our own well-being, and the well-being of all



relationships. Learning to set boundaries will be helpful in establishing and maintaining the health of those relationships.

### What is a boundary?

When we think about a boundary, we typically imagine examples of a physical boundary. A fence or wall, your skin, body or sense of personal space – these are all boundaries that protect you physically. They provide a barrier between you and something else. Other non-physical boundaries, such as emotional boundaries, protect you by defining how you'll treat yourself and allow yourself to be treated by others. Having unhealthy emotional boundaries can feel like you're caught in the midst of a storm without any protection. You're exposed, and as a result, greatly affected by others' words, thoughts and actions. You can often end up feeling bruised and battered.

### Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do I have a hard time standing up for myself?
2. Do I agree to do things that I really don't want to do?
3. Do I take things personally?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, then you may be struggling with setting healthy boundaries in your own life and relationships. It may be time to consider developing some clear and healthier ones.



Let's look at some characteristics of people with healthy versus unhealthy boundaries.

**Those with healthy boundaries:**

1. Are honest and assertive – they say and hear “yes” or “no” and are OK.
2. Recognize that their needs, thoughts and feelings are different from others.
3. Feel confident and in control, and take responsibility for their own lives.

**Those with unhealthy boundaries:**

1. Are unable to say “no” due to guilt, fear of confrontation or rejection.
2. Base how they feel about themselves on how others treat them.
3. Allow others to make decisions for them and feel unable to manage their own lives.

As you can see, boundaries play a significant role in our everyday lives. Are you beginning to wonder how you can create healthy boundaries in your own life? Here are a few suggestions to get you on your way:

1. Be good to yourself. Take time to care for **you**. Make your needs a priority.
2. Be honest. Both speak and listen to the truth. Accept and believe the truth of another.
3. Use “I” statements. *“I feel \_\_\_ when you \_\_\_.”* And *“I want/need \_\_\_.”* (For example, *“I feel scared when you raise your voice. I need you to speak calmly.”*)

4. Avoid using blaming “you” statements with others. For example, *“You are always yelling at me.”* “You” statements make others feel defensive and they stop listening.
5. Keep a neutral tone when communicating.
6. Treat others with respect and as your equal.
7. Define and set your limit. Take action to enforce it. Remember, actions speak louder than words.
8. Allow yourself to let go of the outcome after you've enforced a limit. Keep in mind that you cannot change nor control another's response.
9. Replace *“I have to”* with *“I choose to.”*
10. Be responsible **for** yourself and **to** others.

It is important to recognize that your understanding of boundaries was likely shaped by your unique experiences within your own family. Whether those were positive and healthy lessons or negative and unhealthy, you can choose a future path that feels comfortable for you. Learning to set healthy boundaries takes time and practice. It is a process and there will be bumps along your road to happiness. Developing a support system of people both at work and in your personal life can be helpful. If you'd like to learn more about boundaries, or are experiencing any other challenging life issue, your Aurora Employee Assistance Program can help. Call us at **800-236-3231** and ask to speak with a counselor.



In our next Access newsletter, we will explore healthy boundaries in the workplace.

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