

What Happens When I Set a Boundary?

NOTICE THE RESPONSE · NOTICE YOUR EXPERIENCE · NOTICE THE PATTERN

This form is not about labelling another person or deciding what might be "wrong" with them. It is about noticing what happens — for you and in the interaction — when you communicate a limit, need or preference. Another person does not have to agree with a boundary for it to be legitimate. The focus here is on what happens when you assert yourself, and on the pattern of responses over time.

"What happens when I assert myself?"

The Boundary

Choose one recent situation. Be as concrete as you can.

What boundary did I try to set?

What was I saying no to, asking for, or limiting?

Why did this boundary matter to me?

What was I protecting, asking for, or trying to make clear?

How did I communicate it?

What did I actually say or do?

What Happened When I Said It?

First notice the response — before interpreting it.

- | | | | |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ☐ Respectful | ☐ Neutral | ☐ Dismissive | ☐ Defensive |
| ☐ Angry | ☐ Critical | ☐ Pressuring | ☐ Controlling |
| ☐ Withdrawn / silent | ☐ Mocking / contemptuous | ☐ Threatening | ☐ Other |

What did their response communicate to me?

What did I hear, see or experience? What did I understand the response to mean about my boundary — or about me?

SOURCES

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What Happened Inside Me?

A boundary can bring up emotion even when the boundary itself is reasonable. Notice your experience without judging it.

- ☐ Calm
- ☐ Anxious
- ☐ Guilty
- ☐ Afraid
- ☐ Confused
- ☐ Angry
- ☐ Sad
- ☐ Numb
- ☐ Ashamed
- ☐ Relieved
- ☐ Pressured
- ☐ On edge

What did I notice in my body?

What sensations, urges or changes did I notice?

What did I notice myself thinking?

What did my mind say I should do, what might happen, or what this meant?

What Did I Do Next?

- ☐ Held my boundary
- ☐ Explained myself again
- ☐ Apologised
- ☐ Backed down
- ☐ Changed my request
- ☐ Tried to calm them
- ☐ Ended the conversation
- ☐ Became quiet
- ☐ Argued
- ☐ Sought reassurance
- ☐ Asked for support
- ☐ Something else

What did I do next — and why?

What were you hoping would happen? What were you trying to prevent?

Was My Boundary Respected?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ Partly
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure

What happened to the boundary?

Was it accepted, negotiated, ignored, challenged, repeatedly revisited, or followed by consequences?

Was there pressure to reverse, weaken or abandon it?

- ☐ No pressure
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Some pressure
- ☐ A lot of pressure
- ☐ I'm not sure

If there was pressure, what form did it take?

What was said or done? How did you respond?

SOURCES

What Happened Afterwards?

- ☐ The issue was repaired
- ☐ Nothing changed
- ☐ There was renewed conflict
- ☐ Things temporarily improved
- ☐ We reached an agreement
- ☐ The boundary was raised again
- ☐ I was ignored / punished
- ☐ I felt I had to compensate

What happened afterwards?

What changed — in the next few hours, days or weeks?

What Did I Learn?

What did I learn about how this person tends to respond to my boundaries?

What did I learn about my own response to pressure?

What do I want to remember next time I set a boundary?

Step back and notice. Look for the pattern rather than one isolated reaction. Respect, disagreement, negotiation and repair are different from repeated pressure, retaliation, or punishment. You do not need to reach a conclusion about why someone responds the way they do in order to notice what happens to you when you assert yourself — and to take that seriously.

A Note to Bring to Your Next Session

The part of this experience I most want to discuss is...

A NOTE ON SAFETY

If setting a boundary raises fears of retaliation, threats, violence, sexual coercion, stalking, serious intimidation or other harm, prioritise your safety rather than confronting the situation alone. If completing this form becomes distressing, you can stop and seek support from a qualified professional or a relevant support service.

SOURCES

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Stark, E. (2007). *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life*. Oxford University Press.