

What are Personal Boundaries?

Personal boundaries are the limits and rules we set for ourselves within relationships. A person with healthy boundaries can say “no” to others when they want to, but they are also comfortable opening themselves up to intimacy and close relationships.

A person who always keeps others at a distance (whether emotionally, physically, or otherwise) is said to have *rigid boundaries*. Alternatively, someone who tends to get too involved with others has *porous boundaries*.

Common traits of rigid, porous, and healthy boundaries.		
Rigid Boundaries	Porous Boundaries	Healthy Boundaries
Avoids intimacy and close relationships. Unlikely to ask for help. Has few close relationships. Very protective of personal information. May seem detached, even with romantic partners. Keeps others at a distance to avoid the possibility of rejection.	Overshares personal information. Difficulty saying “no” to the requests of others. Overinvolved with other’s problems. Dependent on the opinions of others. Accepting of abuse or disrespect. Fears rejection if they do not comply with others.	Values own opinions. Doesn’t compromise values for others. Shares personal information in an appropriate way (does not over or under share). Knows personal wants and needs, and can communicate them. Accepting when others say “no” to them.



Most people have a mix of different boundary types. For example, someone could have healthy boundaries at work, porous boundaries in romantic relationships, and a mix of all three types with their family. One size does *not* fit all!



The appropriateness of boundaries depends heavily on setting. What’s appropriate to say when you’re out with friends might not be appropriate when you’re at work.



Some cultures have very different expectations when it comes to boundaries. For example, in some cultures it’s considered wildly inappropriate to express emotions publicly. In other cultures, emotional expression is encouraged.