



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. You can protect your physical or emotional self when you set a limit. Boundaries are an important tool to protect and care for you.

- **Physical boundaries**-They define the space between you and others. It is a clear indicator of where your space ends and another's begins. Each person has their own comfort level. Culture and personal preference also play a role. The relationship to the person affects your comfort with them in your space. You would set different limits with a stranger than with a family member.
- **Emotional boundaries**-It is difficult to determine a boundary for your emotional wellbeing. It is hard to clarify a boundary to protect your feelings. These are not as easy as physical boundaries to define. Emotional boundaries require that you are aware of your own wants and needs. You must also recognize how your wants and needs may differ from another. Start by sorting out what is right for you. Communicate what you need clearly. When you do this, you are informing others what is important to you.

Barriers-What gets in the way of you setting boundaries?

- **Lack of awareness**-You never learned to value your own boundaries. You haven't noticed the need for them.
- **Caregiver identity**-Caregiving is so important to you that you put the needs of others ahead of your own.
- **Low self-worth**-You do not feel good enough about yourself to protect your rights.
- **Guilt**-You have beliefs about what you "should" do as opposed to deciding what you chose to do.
- **Fear**-You are afraid that if you set a boundary it will make others angry with you.

Benefits of boundaries

- It makes it clear what you are responsible for and what you are not responsible for.
- They establish that you matter. They reinforce your self-esteem. When you stand up for yourself, it improves your self-respect.
- They provide limits, so you can take proper care of your self. They can provide the space and time to rebuild your reserves.



Steps to set 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 intuitions or gut feelings.
- Start small. If setting limits is a new behavior, try it out with someone that you can take the risk with.
- Speak clearly. Make “I” statements. For example, you want to set a limit on a home health aide. They prepare a meal for themselves when preparing one for the Veteran. You have not given them permission to do this.
 - State what you see, hear, or notice. Give clear details. Don’t pass judgment, just the facts. “I noticed that when you make lunch for the Veteran, you make a meal for yourself also.”
 - State your feeling. Use a one-word description of the feeling. Such as, “I feel frustrated, worried or confused.”
 - Next, describe what you need. Such as, “I need to be careful my husband and I have enough to eat on our small income. If you make meals I am concerned, we won’t have enough.”
 - Make a request that is clear and describes what you are asking the person to do. For example, “Could you please plan to bring your own lunch, unless I offer to have you join us?”
- Allow the person to respond to your feedback.
 - You may need to remind the person of your concern if they cross the limit again.
 - If the limit is not respected, you may need to give a consequence. For example, “I asked you not to make a meal for yourself unless I invite you. If you do it again I will have to find a new aide to work here.”

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 that your self-esteem, and confidence improves. The Caregiver Support Line is here to support your attempts to set clear limits.