Healthy Boundaries

Relationships: Healthy Versus Unhealthy Boundaries

Healthy boundaries let you stay close to people while still being yourself. Family therapist Salvador Minuchin described boundaries as clear, which is healthy, or as too loose (he called them diffuse) or too rigid. Most people have a mix, depending on the person and the area of life. This worksheet helps you see where yours fall and choose one to adjust.

1 Three kinds of boundaries

Too loose Diffuse	You say yes when you mean no, share more than you want to, and take on other people's feelings and problems as your own.
Healthy Clear	You say what you need, listen to others, and can say no without much guilt. You feel close to people and still like yourself.
Too rigid Rigid	You keep people at a distance, rarely ask for help, and avoid sharing feelings, even with people you trust.

Why does this work? *Minuchin saw that families run into trouble at both ends: when everyone is tangled up in each other's lives, and when people are cut off from each other. Clear boundaries sit in between, with room for closeness and for each person to be independent.*

2 Self-check

Check each sentence that sounds like you most of the time.

Group A	Group B	Group C
☐ I feel guilty when I say no. ☐ I tell people things I later wish I had kept private.	☐ I can say no and still feel okay about myself. ☐ I share personal things with people I trust.	☐ I would rather handle things alone than ask for help. ☐ People say I am hard to get to know.
☐ I put other people's needs before mine, even when it hurts me. ☐ Other people's moods decide my mood.	☐ I ask for what I need. ☐ I can hear someone's feelings without taking them on as mine.	☐ I keep my feelings to myself, even with people close to me. ☐ I cut people off rather than talk a problem through.
Total checks: _____	Total checks: _____	Total checks: _____

Group A points to boundaries that are too loose, Group B to healthy ones, and Group C to boundaries that are too rigid. This is a guide for reflection, not a test.

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

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3 Healthy or not? Three examples

Too loose	Healthy	Too rigid
"I'll cancel my plans again so you're not upset."	"I can't make it tonight. Can we do Thursday?"	"I don't do plans. Stop asking."
Telling your coworkers every detail of your breakup.	Sharing personal things with people you trust.	Never telling anyone how you feel.
Lending money you need for rent.	"I can lend you $20, but not more."	Refusing to help anyone, even in an emergency.

4 One boundary to adjust

An area where my boundary is too loose or too rigid (with whom, and about what):

What a clear, healthy boundary would look like there:

One small step I can take this week:

How might the other person react, and how will I take care of myself if they push back?

Changing a long habit takes practice, and a therapist can help. If someone punishes you for having boundaries or makes you feel unsafe, the National Domestic Violence Hotline is free and confidential in the US: call 1-800-799-7233 or text START to 88788.

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