

# Setting and maintaining boundaries



This information sheet is about understanding your boundaries and how to set and respect boundaries in your relationships.

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Health Canada Santé Canada

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**sieccan**  
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# What are personal boundaries?

Personal boundaries are the limits and rules we set for ourselves in different relationships.


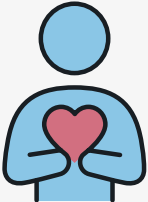

Some examples of relationships can be:	
	Parent – child relationship
	Sibling relationship
	Romantic relationship
	Sexual relationship
	Friendship
	Youth – care provider relationship
	Youth – educator relationship
	Employee – boss relationship

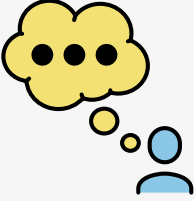
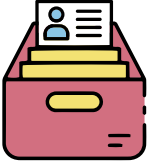


**Every person has the right to decide for themselves what kinds of things they are okay with and not okay with when they are around other people. This includes what you are okay with doing to or with your body, or not okay with.**

**Boundaries help us to feel safe, comfortable, and respected around other people.**

# Understanding your boundaries

There are many types of boundaries. Here are some examples of questions you can ask yourself to figure out what your boundaries are.

Type of boundary	Things to think about
 <p><b>Physical:</b> This is about a person's body, privacy, and personal space.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who do you allow to touch you?</li> <li>• What kind of touches are you comfortable with and by who?</li> <li>• When do you want privacy or want to be alone?</li> <li>• Who are you comfortable allowing to help you with personal care activities like showering or getting dressed?</li> <li>• Who are you comfortable allowing to touch your mobility aid(s) and in what situation(s)?</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Emotional:</b> This is about a person's feelings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are you comfortable sharing your feelings with and when?</li> <li>• What kinds of comments or jokes are you okay with or not okay with?</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Sexual:</b> This is about doing sexual things or engaging in sexual activity with other people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you want to have sex or not?</li> <li>• When are you comfortable having sex with someone you are dating?</li> <li>• When are you in the mood to have sex or not?</li> <li>• What kind of sexual activities do you like and are comfortable with?</li> <li>• How often do you want to have sex?</li> <li>• What kind of sexual comments are you okay with or not?</li> <li>• Are you comfortable talking about your past sexual relationships or not?</li> <li>• Are you comfortable watching pornography?</li> </ul>

Type of boundary	Things to think about
 <p><b>Intellectual:</b> This is about a person's values, perspectives, and opinions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is important to you in your life or in your relationships?</li> <li>• What are the ways you feel valued and respected in your relationships?</li> <li>• Are your values, perspectives, and opinions respected in your relationships?</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Personal information:</b> This is about sensitive or private information about who a person is.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kind of information about yourself and/or your disability are you comfortable sharing with other people?</li> <li>• Who are you comfortable talking to about your disability?</li> <li>• What is your preferred way to communicate information about your disability?</li> <li>• Who are you comfortable sharing your phone number, email, social media, or address?</li> <li>• Who are you comfortable talking to about your past experiences?</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Material:</b> This is about a person's belongings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What items are you comfortable sharing with other people?</li> <li>• What items do you not want anyone else to touch?</li> <li>• How do you want other people to treat the items you share with them?</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Time:</b> This is about how a person wants to spend their time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When do you want privacy or to be alone?</li> <li>• What activities do you want to do alone?</li> <li>• How much time do you want to spend with other people?</li> </ul>

## Things to remember:



**Everyone's personal boundaries are different.** A person's boundaries can be influenced by many things like their personal experiences, culture, family life, and personality traits.



**Everyone deserves to have their personal boundaries respected.** It is important to understand your own boundaries and learn about other people's boundaries.



**Some boundaries might apply to all of your relationships and other boundaries might change for different kinds of relationships.** For example, some people might not like getting hugs from anyone. Other people might only want hugs from people they are very close with.



**Boundaries can also change depending on the situation.** For example, a person who usually likes to tell you a lot about themselves at home might not want to share personal information with you in a public place.



**Boundaries can also change with time.** As you learn and have more experiences, you might find that your boundaries change or that you understand your boundaries better. Having more experiences with different kinds of relationships can help you learn about the things you are okay with or not okay with.

# Setting boundaries in relationships

Setting boundaries is about communicating to other people how you want to be treated. It is also about being able to say “no” when you feel unsafe or uncomfortable with something.

## Things to remember:



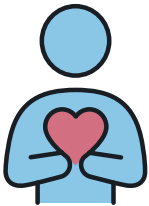
Feeling unsafe or uncomfortable can feel like:

- Wanting to run away
- Freezing in place
- Wanting to hide
- Feeling numb
- Having a strange feeling in your stomach



When you communicate your boundaries to someone, say clearly what you are okay with or not, and what will happen if someone does not respect your boundaries.

For example, you can say “Please do not touch my wheelchair. If you do, I am going to have to leave the date.”



When you set boundaries, you are doing something for yourself and not against another person. You are not responsible for how another person feels when you set your boundaries.



No means no. You do not have to give an explanation for feeling unsafe or uncomfortable with something.

## Things to remember:



Be clear about your boundaries. Another person might try to get you to change your boundaries. Stick to what you are comfortable with and what you feel safe doing.

If someone is trying to make you change your boundaries, they might not be someone you want to spend time with. If someone is making you uncomfortable, talk to someone you trust who can help you.



Setting boundaries is a learning process. It is not always easy to stick to your boundaries. The more you practice, the better you will get at it, and the more comfortable you will feel in your relationships.

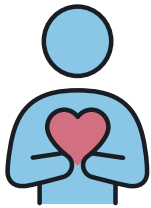


# Respecting other people's boundaries in relationships

Just like it is important for other people to respect the boundaries you set for yourself, you also need to respect other people's boundaries.

**Everyone is allowed to have boundaries. Respecting each other's boundaries is an important part of a supportive relationship.**

## Things to remember:



When someone sets boundaries with you, they are doing something for themselves and not something against you.



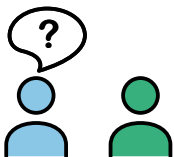
No means no. The other person does not have to give you an explanation for feeling unsafe or uncomfortable with something.



Do not pressure anyone to change their boundaries when they have expressed not feeling safe or comfortable doing something.



Setting boundaries is a learning process. This means that a person's boundaries can change as they learn more about themselves and become more confident in expressing their boundaries.



Sometimes we might make a mistake with another person's boundaries, even if we did not mean to. If someone tells you that you did not respect their boundaries, apologize and ask them what you can do to make sure it does not happen again.

## Setting boundaries in a romantic/sexual relationship

It is important to communicate your boundaries to your romantic/sexual partner so your partner knows how they should treat you. Telling your partner your boundaries can be scary sometimes. You might be worried that your partner will not understand or be accepting of your boundaries.

**Remember that a supportive partner will respect your boundaries.**

### Here are some examples of boundaries you could have in a romantic/sexual relationship:



I do not know you well enough for me to feel safe inviting you into my home. I am also not comfortable going to your house yet.



Before having sex, I want to tell you about my disability.



If we go out, I only want to stay for 2 – 3 hours. My care team will be at my place in 3 hours and I need to be home by then.



I am not ready to tell you about this experience yet. When I am ready to tell you, I will bring it up.



Please do not move my walker without asking me first.

## Here are some examples of boundaries you could have in a romantic/sexual relationship:



I do not like those kinds of sexual things. I will never want to do those things.



When you touch me there, I feel overstimulated. You can touch other parts of my body.



When we make plans, I want you to understand that we may have to change our plans at the last minute sometimes. Sometimes my symptoms will flare-up and I will feel really unwell. I can't always predict when this will happen.



You may also learn more about your boundaries as you spend more time with your romantic/sexual partner. It is important to continue communicating about your boundaries with your partner as you learn more about yourself or if your boundaries change.

### **Asking for and giving consent is also an important part of any relationship.**

Consent is necessary when one person wants to do anything with another person. This includes having sex. Consent is about asking someone for their permission to do anything with them and the other person choosing to give you their permission or not.

Check out [Communicating Consent: Information Sheet](#) for more information about consent.



Check out this comic about consent: <https://robothugscomic.tumblr.com/post/149995885165/new-comic-link-to-good-version-this-comic-was>



If someone does something to you that makes you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, it is important that you communicate to them to stop.



If that person continues to break your boundaries, try to leave the situation. You can also block the person on your phone or social media so they cannot contact you. If you need help, talk to someone you trust who can help you.

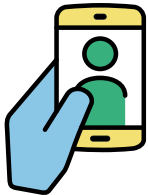
### **Here are some examples of situations where your partner is not respecting your boundaries:**



You tell the person that what they are doing makes you uncomfortable and they respond by saying that you are just being too sensitive.

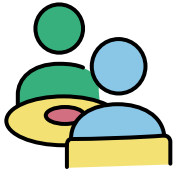


You tell the person that you do not want them to help you with something, but they continue to help you anyways.



The person searches through your phone or computer without your permission.

## Here are some things you could say to a partner if they are not respecting your boundaries:



I understand that you were trying to help me, but I do not want you to speak for me. I can communicate my needs to others on my own. When you speak for me, you may not realize it, but you're taking away my voice and control. I will let you know if I need your help.



I already told you that this is not something I will ever want to try when we have sex. It makes me feel very uncomfortable that you keep asking me. Please respect my decision.



If you keep ignoring my boundaries, this isn't going to work for me. I am going to have to leave.

## Setting boundaries with a care provider

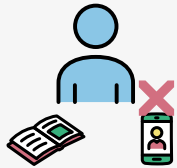
A care provider can be a parent/family member, a paid or unpaid health or social service provider, a friend, or a romantic/sexual partner.

It is important to communicate your boundaries to your care provider(s). You should feel safe and comfortable with your care provider(s).

### For example, you can tell your care provider about:



The things you want them to help you with and the things you do not want them to help you with.



The things you are okay with them touching and the things you do not want them to touch. These can include parts of your body or your material things.



When you want privacy.



Information you want to keep private and information you are comfortable sharing with them

Remind your care provider to ask you for your consent before they do anything to you or with you.

Check out [Communicating Consent: Information Sheet](#) for more information about consent.



## If your care provider is not respecting your boundaries:

Communicate to them that what they are doing is not okay and what they can do to respect your boundaries.

For example, you can say:



- I appreciate when you come with me to my doctor's appointments, but I want you to let me speak for myself. You do not always understand everything I go through and I want to be able to explain my experiences to the doctor myself.
- I know you are trying to keep me safe, but I need my own space sometimes. When I tell you I need privacy, please give me space.
- If you want me to tell you about my relationships, I need you to be respectful of them. It upsets me when you judge my relationships.



If the care provider is still not respecting your boundaries, you can try to leave the situation if it is safe to leave.



Report the care provider to someone you trust. Tell the person you trust what happened, including who the care provider is, what they did to you, where it happened, and when.



If the care provider is a professional, you can make a complaint to an Ombudsperson. Ombudspersons are people who can help to make sure your rights are respected when you use public services.

You can type "Ombudsperson complaint" + the name of your province or territory on Google to find the phone number for the Ombudsperson office you should call. For example, "Ombudsperson complaint Quebec."

## If your care provider is not respecting your boundaries:



If your care provider is a parent or family member, it can be helpful to ask a service provider you trust to help you communicate to your parent/family member about how they can respect your boundaries.








Explore your options for getting a different care provider if possible. Talk to someone you trust – they may be able to help you find a different care provider.

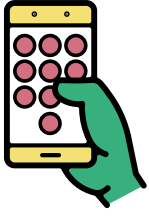
**Remember that it is not okay for a care provider to not respect your boundaries. You deserve to be respected by the people who are taking care of you.**



# Abuse

When someone continues to break your boundaries, even after you have told them many times to stop, this is abuse. Other forms of abuse are behaviours that scare, isolate, or control another person.

Type of abuse	Examples
 <p><b>Physical</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hitting</li><li>• Choking</li><li>• Physically preventing someone from seeing their friends or family</li><li>• Purposely hurting someone when transferring them onto a wheelchair</li></ul>
 <p><b>Psychological</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Making jokes about a person's disability</li><li>• Threatening to take away someone's walker</li><li>• Controlling what another person can do</li></ul>
 <p><b>Financial</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stealing someone's money</li><li>• Controlling how another person can spend their money</li><li>• Spending another person's money without their permission</li></ul>
 <p><b>Sexual</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Forcing someone to do sexual things that they do not want to do</li><li>• Touching someone inappropriately when helping them with personal care</li></ul>
 <p><b>Neglect</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not giving someone food or clean clothes</li><li>• Not giving someone the medication they need</li><li>• Not taking someone to their medical appointments</li></ul>



If you think you have been abused, you can contact The Redwood Shelter, Canada Abuse Helpline:

<https://www.theredwood.com>

Call their 24-hour helpline: 416-533-8538

TTY: 416-533-3736

Text: 647-370-8300