

## Boundaries: Loving you and loving me

Setting boundaries can be a confusing process. Getting to know ourselves is the first step in being able to set protective limits, ie boundaries. Following this process will help you gain clarity and be able to express love for yourself and those around you.

**Learn to identify your emotions:** Labeling our emotional states will help us be able to clearly communicate with others in a meaningful way. Be mindful during this process to dig deep into the primary emotions. Anger is a protective indicator that invites us to ask what is beneath the surface. Please see the Anger Iceberg handout.

**Explore your needs:** Each situation and relationship is unique. Taking the time to explore our needs will allow us to meet them, regardless of others willingness or abilities. For example, if you're feeling sad, you may need some time for solitude or you may need to spend some quality time with a loved one, or ask for physical affection in that moment. There are no wrong answers, this process is about getting curious and asking yourself these very important questions. What do I need in this situation? Who would I like to ask? Can I meet this need?

**Have a meaningful conversation:** Now that you have identified how you're feeling and you've explored the needs you have, take some time to share this openly with your loved one. You may feel uncomfortable at first, and that is completely normal. This step is a practice in vulnerability, which Brene Brown describes as "the feeling of taking an emotional risk."

**Set limits:** There will be times when a meaningful conversation is enough. When it is not, then is the time to set limits. This is another chance to gain some insight. Ask yourself, what will I do if my needs are not being met in this situation? Sometimes when we begin to set boundaries we swing for the fences so to speak. The only guideline about this part of the process is that you must be willing to follow through on what it is. Talking with others to process is beneficial. See the example phrasing below.



**Meaningful conversation:**

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_, I need you to do/not do \_\_\_\_\_.

**Meaningful conversation with boundary:**

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_, I need you to do/not do \_\_\_\_\_.

If this situation continues I will (insert **your** changed behavior here).

**Practice writing some out:**

I **feel** \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I **need** you to do/not do \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If this situation continues I **will** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I **feel** \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I **need** you to do/not do \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If this situation continues I **will** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**Revisit:** Be sure to revisit your boundaries from time to time, especially if it seems that they were not effective or if you feel your feelings or needs in the situation have changed. We are allowed to change our minds and adjust our boundaries as we learn and grow in our relationships.

**Check in:** Check in with yourself about the needs you identified in the second part of the process. Are your needs being met? If not, you now have all the information you need to ensure that they are met. If the person you initially identified is unable to or unwilling to meet your needs then take the time to find another person or another route to get your needs met. No one person can meet all of our needs and it's healthy to have a well-rounded group of supporters that we can reach out to and rely on in a sense of interdependence.

**Acknowledge your process:** Take a moment, a deep breathe, and acknowledge the work you have done to go through this process. Knowing ourselves is one of the greatest gifts of this process. Appreciate your progress and remember to reach out for support from others when you struggle in this practice. Setting boundaries is a practice!