

How to

# Respect Boundaries

A GUIDE

7

Tips to Setting  
Boundaries:



onelove

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# How to Respect Boundaries

## A GUIDE

Boundaries are key to healthy relationships!

We should all be prepared to not only set and share our own boundaries but also to respond to others in a way that respects and honors the other person's decisions and feelings. This means lots of open communication with partners, friends, family, and others!

After reading this guide, check out another one on: How to Handle Rejection on our Education Center at: [www.joinonelove.org/education-center](http://www.joinonelove.org/education-center).

It's good to know more about both respecting boundaries and handling rejection!

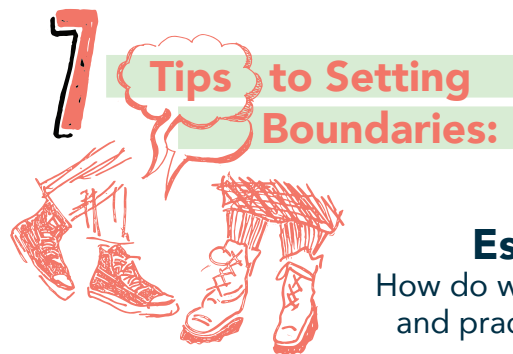
### **Essential Question:**

What is a boundary?

It's more than "no means no" and "yes means yes."

It can be helpful to think of a boundary as an invisible line. On one side of the line is comfort and on the other is discomfort. Since everyone's line is unique to them, it's important to communicate clearly in order to understand where each other's differences lie.

We can set boundaries for all sorts of important things: our bodies, emotions, technology, communication, and our time (and more!). AND, we can set boundaries with friends, family, partners, teachers, and even strangers. The tips on the following pages, can help you think through these ideas.



## Essential Question:

How do we establish healthy boundaries and practice consent in relationships?

1

### Be proactive.

Boundaries are often taught from the perspective of the person setting them. This puts the ball in their court. However, taking responsibility in a relationship means proactively working to understand the other person's needs. Trust your gut when you think it's something that needs to be brought up by asking questions and checking in with your friend or partner.

**Gut Check:** Addy and Jensen have been talking for a little over a month. Jensen sends Addy a picture he took of her while they were hanging out and asks if it would be okay to post it to his story. If Jensen hadn't been proactive, what are some of the potential consequences in this situation?

2

### Accept their choice, even if it's not what you want.

Even when a boundary is approached respectfully, the answer can still be no. In the moment, validate the person's choice by saying, "Okay" or "I totally get it!" After, do what you need to do to process your emotions in a way that won't make the other person feel scared, unsafe, guilty, or manipulated. You can ask for space to deal with any difficult emotions on your own or with the help of your support system.

**Gut Check:** Julian just broke up with their partner, Zia, but wants to remain friends. When Zia says that staying friends would be too hard, Julian is devastated, but doesn't pursue the friendship any further. What can Julian do if they really, really miss Zia?

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### Don't compromise comfort.

In relationships, compromise is an essential tool for healthy conflict. But boundary-setting should be approached differently because it involves personal safety and comfort. When someone expresses discomfort or unease, it's time to pump the brakes, not negotiate. In any relationship, the lowest comfort level should be the one adhered to; meeting in the middle is not respecting a boundary.

**Gut Check:** Dylan ends virtual class one day and finds that he has 20 texts from his boyfriend, Hayden. Dylan texts back that it's hard for him to focus on school when he feels pressured to read and respond to texts during class. He offers to read them, but maybe not respond until class is over. Hayden replies that Dylan doesn't need to read them if it will ruin his focus. What might have happened if Hayden agreed to the compromise and expected Dylan to read texts during class?

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### An explanation isn't owed.

Sometimes our first instinct is to ask "Why?" When it comes to boundaries, it's better to take someone's word for it. They may have trouble expressing their reason or they may not feel comfortable telling you yet. Everyone is entitled to their privacy, and you can build trust by accepting someone's decision at face value.

**Gut Check:** Sarah is legally blind and gets frustrated when her older sister tries to guide her across the street. One day when she does it, Sarah says, "Can you stop holding my elbow, please?" Her sister lets go and walks beside her as they cross. How could Sarah's sister have expressed her concern differently?

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### Listen (to what they're not saying!).

Of course you should always listen to what someone is telling you, but sometimes the answer is in what they're not saying. Honesty can be difficult, especially when it comes to saying 'no.' Paying attention to nonverbal cues—tensing up, looking away, fidgeting, tone of voice—can help you determine whether the 'yes' you're getting is genuine.

**Gut Check:** Kelsey and Sam meet up for a socially distanced walk. When Kelsey asks Sam if they want her to wear a mask, they say "Um...no, it's okay..." but seems hesitant. Kelsey puts her mask on anyway, knowing it would make Sam more comfortable. If Kelsey hadn't picked up on what Sam wasn't saying, how might it have affected their time together?

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### Be aware of power dynamics.

Think about your situation critically: are you a senior asking a freshman to hook up? Are you the captain of the varsity team asking a JV player to carry your bag? Imbalanced power dynamics can make someone feel pressured to consent. Even if you don't feel powerful or intimidating, try seeing the situation from the other person's perspective.

**Gut Check:** Markus is a senior on the Varsity basketball team. One day when it's his turn to clear away the balls after practice, he calls over to a sophomore player, Joey, to help him. He knows Joey's been trying really hard during practice, hoping to make the Varsity team, and will do anything that will give him a better shot. Markus notices Joey eyeing the locker room as they clean up and checks himself. He tells Joey not to worry about it and to go get changed. Why do you think Markus changed his mind?

7

### Take responsibility.

We all do unhealthy things sometimes. If you ever disrespect someone's boundary, the best thing to do is make sure it doesn't happen again. Own up, apologize, and change your behavior to prevent a future miscommunication or betrayal. Everyone makes mistakes, but it's never okay to excuse the hurt you've caused someone.

**Gut Check:** Camila takes a picture of her best friend, Ximena, while the two of them are on a hike and posts it when she gets home. Ximena Facetimes her immediately, telling her to take it down. When Camila asks Ximena why and she says, "Because." Camila says she's going to keep it up until Ximena can give her an actual reason.

Later, Camila feels bad about how things went down. She calls Ximena to apologize and tell her she took down the post. Moving forward, how can Ximena rebuild trust with Camila?