

Healthy Boundaries

Boundaries are a critical part of a healthy relationship. Having clear emotional, physical and sexual boundaries creates an atmosphere of respect and understanding. As you work on building and maintaining boundaries in your relationship, consider the following steps:

1. **Name your limits.** You can't set boundaries if you don't know what you want. Identify your limits (physical, emotional and mental). Ask yourself what you can tolerate and accept. Consider what makes you stressed or uncomfortable.
2. **Tune into your feelings.** There are two key feelings that are a sign that you are overreaching your boundaries: discomfort and resentment. Pay attention to these two emotions and, if you feel uncomfortable or resentful too often, you may want to pull back.
3. **Be direct.** It is important to be clear about what you need and what you are feeling. Having direct dialogue with your partner about your needs takes the guesswork out of the equation.
4. **Give yourself permission.** Fear of your partner's response, guilt about speaking up for yourself or self-doubt about whether you deserve to have a say can stand in the way of creating healthy boundaries. Boundaries are a sign of self-respect, so give yourself permission to have and maintain them.
5. **Seek support.** Setting boundaries can be challenging, so if you are having a hard time, don't be afraid to reach out for help. Talk with good friends, meet with an MCC counselor or turn to a supportive group (i.e., a student organization on campus).
6. **Be assertive.** Once you set boundaries, it is important to follow through with maintaining them. Your partner isn't a mind reader, so respectfully address it if you are feeling hurt.
7. **Start small.** Assertively setting boundaries takes practice. Start with a small boundary that isn't threatening to you, and slowly increase to more challenging boundaries.

This content was adapted from the following sources:

- The Center for Human Potential:
www.yourpotential.net/3/5/A_Checklist_on_Boundaries_in_a_Relationship.html
- LoveisRespect.org: www.loveisrespect.org
- Tartakovsky, M. (2011) 10 Ways to Build and Preserve Better Boundaries. Psych Central. Retrieved on August 10, 2013, from <http://psychcentral.com/lib/10-way-to-build-and-preserve-better-boundaries/0007498>