



## Establishing and Maintaining Boundaries

This is a brief introduction to key points about boundaries. If, after you read this, you find that you would like more detail, and some great worksheets to guide you in establishing stronger — yet still flexible — personal boundaries, I recommend the terrific materials you can find at the [boundary section of the Positive Psychology website](#).

**1) You have to the right to decide who touches you in any way.** For people you choose to allow to touch you, you have the right to determine what level of intimacy they touch you with. This is an inalienable right; you can't lose it. So no one has the right to say, "Well, I get to go ahead and touch you because of something you did or said, or because you owe me money, or because I'm angry at you, or because you owe me something emotionally." You can never owe anyone your body.

**2) You have a similar and equally powerful right to decide who enters other realms that are private to you;** who knows your inner thoughts and feelings, who reads your diary, who looks through your belongings, who is in your house or car or bedroom. In other words, someone doesn't have to touch you to violate your boundaries. Demanding to know what you think or feel when you don't want to share that, or telling you what you (supposedly) think or feel, are violations of your boundaries.

**3) Children whose boundaries are respected, and who are supported to set the boundaries they want and need, learn to establish the boundaries they crave and to know when they're being violated.**

**4) On the other hand, people who have grown up having their boundaries frequently or severely violated can lose their sense of where their boundaries are and where they want them to be.** They can develop difficulty recognizing when their boundaries have been violated. They may blame themselves when they feel violated by others. They may start to feel a generalized mistrust toward everyone and, for example, may come to dislike being touched even by trusted people.



These effects can become even more severe for people who not only grew up with boundary violations, but were blamed for those violations (“It’s your own fault I’m invading you”) or who had to listen to those violations being justified (“This shouldn’t bother you, there’s nothing wrong with what I’m doing to you”).

**5) Boundaries are like a gate to our inner world.** *When we have strong, healthy boundaries, we feel in control of who comes close to us and who doesn’t. We feel like our gate is working well to let the right people in and keep everyone else out. When we have unclear boundaries or feel that we don’t have the right to defend our boundaries, the gate doesn’t work well; we end up having people coming into our inner world that we don’t want there. And we may also end up shutting certain people out that we later wish we had made more room for or had let in closer.*

**6) It isn’t healthful for us to allow intimacy, physically or emotionally, that we don’t really want.** *At the same time, it isn’t healthful for us to keep intimacy away that we would have benefited from. However, no one has the right to tell us which intimacy would be good for us, or to pressure to accept intimacy we don’t want. It’s entirely up to us to decide when and how we want to make that gate open more, if that’s one of our goals.*

**7) Healing well depends on safety.** *Therefore it’s very important in the Peak Living Network that we respect each other’s boundaries, and that no pressure ever be used on anyone to open up more than they choose to. Awareness and knowledge about boundaries needs to be shared and spread through our network.*

**8) If you feel that your boundaries have been violated during a co-counseling session, don’t split time with that person again until you’re fully confident that the violation will not be repeated.** *If you believe that the violation was deliberate, please tell what happened to at least one other trusted person in the network, and consider together how best to confront the behavior. If you feel that your boundaries have been violated in any other PLN activity, the same principles apply.*

**9) If anyone you meet at a PLN event, or with whom you meet to co-counsel, asks you to get together socially, whether the intention is romantic or not, that is inappropriate during at least the first few months they have known you and been interacting with you in the network.** *PLN is not to be used to seek partners; we are not*



*a dating club. Anyone who is repeatedly approaching other people in the network for social contact or for dates should be asked to leave the network.*

**10) People who were already friends before becoming part of PLN are of course welcome to continue their social connection, and the same goes for romantic partners.** *People who come to know each other through PLN and decide mutually that they would like to have a friendship or become dating partners should consider doing so only after they have worked together within the network for several months and have had a substantial connection over that time. We have to ask people to respect this guideline so that we can trust that everyone in PLN is participating in the network to pursue their own healing and not for other purposes.*

In *The Healing Partnership* you can find a longer discussion of why maintaining good boundaries is important to the healthful functioning of the Peak Living Network.

**One point I wish to reiterate:** You do not, under any circumstances, owe your body or other aspects of your privacy to *anyone* for *any reason*. Anyone who tries to convince you that you owe them intimacy or access, or who tries to convince you that intimacy with them will help your healing, is behaving *exploitatively*. Get distance between yourself and that person as quickly as you can, and don't keep a secret about what the person said or did; find at least one trusted person that you can talk to about what happened, and consider whether you should take further action, including telling other people.