




Setting and maintaining boundaries

Developing healthy online relationships is just as important as nurturing the ones we have in person. Whether you are chatting with old friends, connecting with family on social media, or meeting new people in interest groups, the digital world should be a place where you feel respected and at ease. Setting boundaries is a wonderful way to ensure your online interactions remain positive and that you stay in control of your time and energy.



In an online context, boundaries are the "rules" or limits you establish to protect your well-being, privacy, and personal space. They define what you are comfortable with and how you expect to be treated by others. Just as you might have boundaries about people visiting your home unannounced, online boundaries help you decide when, where, and how you engage with the digital world.

Boundaries are essential because they prevent "digital burnout" and help protect you from individuals who may not have your best interests at heart. By being clear about your limits, you preserve your mental peace and ensure that your online life complements your "real world" life rather than intruding upon it. They help build mutual respect in any relationship, ensuring that everyone feels safe and valued.

Tips for setting your boundaries

-  **Decide Your "Online Hours":** You are not required to be available 24/7. It is perfectly alright to decide that you won't reply to messages after 8:00 pm or during your morning coffee.
-  **Be Selective with Friend Requests:** You do not have to accept every request you receive. It is your digital space, and you have every right to only connect with people you truly know and trust.
-  **Communicate Your Preferences:** If a friend is sending too many forwards or jokes that you don't find helpful, a warm note saying, "I'm trying

to cut back on my messages at the moment, so please don't worry if I don't reply," can set a gentle limit.

-  **Keep Your Personal Life Private:** Decide early on what you are happy to share. You might choose to share photos of your garden but keep photos of your grandchildren private.
-  **Trust Your Instincts:** If a conversation or a request for information makes you feel slightly uneasy, that is your intuition telling you a boundary is needed. It is always okay to say "no" or to stop a conversation.



What it looks like when boundaries are crossed



It can sometimes be subtle, but a boundary has likely been crossed if:

- Someone continues to message you after you have asked them to stop or told them you are busy.
- A person asks for personal details, such as your address or financial situation, that you aren't comfortable sharing.
- You feel pressured to do something, like join a video call or send a photo, when you don't want to.
- Someone shares information or photos of you without your permission.

What to do when boundaries are crossed

If you feel your limits are being ignored, remember that you are in the driver's seat. You can take these steps to regain control:

-  **State Your Limit Clearly:** A simple, firm message such as, "I am not comfortable discussing this," is often enough to stop the behaviour.
-  **Take a Break:** You can silence notifications or step away from the device. You do not owe anyone an immediate explanation for taking some space.

-  **Use Digital Tools:** If the person persists, do use the 'Block' or 'Mute' functions. These are not "mean" tools; they are safety features designed specifically for these moments.
-  **Speak to a trusted person:** If you feel upset or unsure, talk to a trusted friend or family member. They can offer a fresh perspective and help you decide on the next best step.