

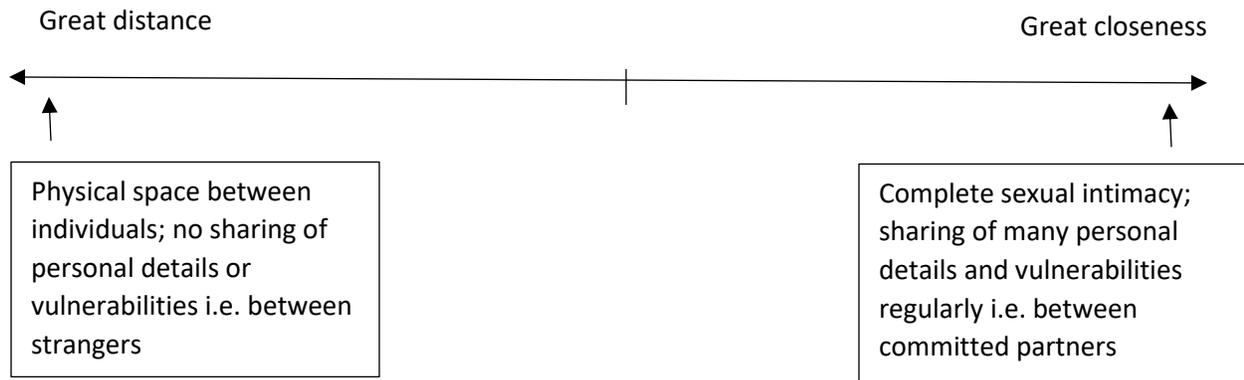
Boundaries: What are they?

Boundaries are:

- Where I end and another person begins
- The limit to my physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual capacity
- The expectations I set on interacting with others so that I can build and maintain my own personal identity, uniqueness, and independence

Boundaries are like an invisible line around you that say to other people “This is my limit! Go no further!” They are limits that are flexible and **are there to protect treasured aspects of your lives: your integrity, identity, relationships, time, home, energy, spirit, wellbeing, children, money, health, priorities, etc.** They are held in place by your actions and decisions.

Boundaries happen on a continuum:



Boundaries are flexible: *It is your right* to change your boundaries depending on what your needs are at any given time. For example, your boundaries are likely to be a lot closer to an intimate partner after you’ve had a successful date night than after you’ve had a big fight.

Main categories of boundaries:

Physical – you have the right to dictate who touches you and how; your skin is your most basic physical boundary; a physical boundary is essentially everything involving your physical well-being. Examples:

- What types of touch you are comfortable with, from who, and when
- What types of touch you need from others you are in relationships with and when
- Whether your basic physical needs are being met and how
- How you are treated when you need medical care

Emotional – emotional boundaries define our sense of self; an emotional boundary is essentially everything involving your emotional/mental well-being. Examples:

- How you spend your time and what is asked of your time
- How you are treated in relationships with others
- What you share, what you are asked to share, and what is shared with you in relationships with others
- How you talk to and treat yourself
- How you spend or are asked to spend your money
- Whether your basic emotional, spiritual, and mental needs are being met and how
- What is important to you in your life and how you prioritize

Boundaries are strengthened by:

- The right to say “no”
- The right to say “yes”
- Respect for how you feel
- Respect for your personal process
- Acceptance of your differences/uniqueness
- Permission to express yourself
- Support for exploring your selves, passions, and interests
- Support for personal growth and development
- Support for your emotional, mental, and spiritual needs

Boundaries are hurt by:

- Ridicule
- Contempt
- Derision
- Mockery
- Scorn
- Sarcasm
- Heavy judgements
- Stifling communication/expression
- Belittling feelings or telling someone how they feel
- Abuse
- Abandonment
- Threat
- Insecurity
- The need to overpower
- Insistence on conformity

You weaken your boundaries when you:

- Pretend to agree when you disagree
- Conceal your true feelings
- Don't state your preference and always go along with activities you don't want to do
- Decline to join an activity you really want to engage in
- Push yourself beyond your limits
- Work too hard and/or too long
- Do too much for others
- Don't rest when you're tired
- Ignore your emotional, relational, spiritual, mental, physical, etc. needs

- Don't eat regular, healthy meals
- Get insufficient sleep
- Spend too much or too little time alone
- Engage in too much or too little exercise
- Withdraw from people who care about you
- Withdraw from or overdo leisure activities
- Use chemicals or compulsions to avoid yourself (e.g. eating, video games, sex, sports, shopping, drugs, alcohol, nicotine, sugar, etc).

*Note: if you are unable to set boundaries because the person you would like to set them with is unsafe/abusive/violates your boundaries regularly, this is not an example of you weakening your own boundaries, but is an example of abusive/violating behaviour on the part of the other person.

In ideal situations boundaries are:

- Distinct enough that your values and beliefs are clear to yourself and others
- Flexible enough to adapt to new situations accordingly, consider new ideas, and think critically
- Strong enough to withstand being challenged by thoughtless or rude people

Boundaries in Healthy Relationships:

- We have the freedom to disagree and still be treated with respect
- We can say "no" once without having to respond to coercion or questions such as "are you sure"
- We can make our feelings known when someone has hurt us or insulted us
- We can speak up without fearing backlash