

LEARN TO LIVE BULLETIN

Your guide in wellness and mental health

Boundaries, Not Barriers:

Using CBT to Create Healthy Limits

When people hear the word boundaries, they often imagine walls that are rigid, distancing, or even cold. They may recall a time when they felt rejected or left out. But healthy emotional boundaries aren't barriers that shut others out, they're guidelines that help us stay connected to ourselves and others in a balanced way.



What is an emotional boundary? It's like an invisible line that defines where our feelings end and someone else's begin. We can imagine it like a bubble wrapped around each of us representing all our individual thoughts and feelings, including our deepest values, beliefs, and preferences. When our bubbles are close but not overlapping, we're more likely to get along well without experiencing conflict. When our bubbles overlap, we might feel anxious, disrespected, or controlled, as if others' needs matter more than our own.

Although many people struggle with emotional boundaries, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) can help us develop healthier boundaries by becoming more aware of how our thoughts and feelings are connected and learning how to confidently and compassionately communicate our needs.

Start by tuning into your own emotional signals. Notice moments when you feel overwhelmed, irritable, resentful, or full of dread, as these can be clues that our boundaries need attention. Could these feelings be related to any situations where you have not communicated your needs clearly? Are you trying to meet someone's expectations that aren't right for you? Would it really be rude if you say "no" to that invitation?

Many of us automatically assume responsibility for other people's emotions. Even in moments where we know exactly what we need, we may still wait and study the other person for evidence of how they will react before we express ourselves. We wonder if they will be hurt or delighted, if they will consider us generous or selfish, and we try to manage their thoughts and feelings as if they were our own. And after all of this, we may still feel like we were the one being pushed around because our needs weren't addressed.

Healthier boundaries don't require us to stop caring about other people but to accept that despite our caring, we cannot control the contents of another person's bubble. The most generous action is not to study other people so we can anticipate and manage their feelings, but to study ourselves so that we know and can communicate our needs while still conveying our full respect and compassion.

Get Started Today

Boundaries aren't walls meant to create barriers between you and others. Boundaries help create a more honest, sustainable connection that supports both your well-being and your relationships. If you'd like to learn more about your overall emotional health and wellbeing needs, you can take a quick assessment. Do this by scanning or visiting learntolive.com/partners and entering access code **MMHG**. Learn to Live is available to you and your family members, ages 13 and older at no cost.

