

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Setting healthy boundaries

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA's education team have developed a range of tips to help support you during the COVID-19 outbreak. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

COVID-19 has brought about unprecedented disruption, loss of control and increased levels of stress. In some cases it has produced separation and isolation, in others it has brought people into closer proximity than before. During times such as these, it is important for us to maintain some sense of identity and control.

We can do this by setting boundaries. Boundaries are guidelines, rules or limits that we create for ourselves to define where we end and the 'other' begins. They help us decide what types of communication, behaviour and interaction are acceptable.

Here are some tips to enable you to set appropriate boundaries that will provide support in the months to come:

- **Assess your needs and limits**

Examine the current situation. Ask, what do I need and what don't I want? Remember, it is important to have realistic expectations. When considering the situation, be sure to include the following areas:

1. physical - space, noise, routines
2. emotional - management and expression of feelings
3. mental - thoughts, values, beliefs, information

- **Decide that it is our responsibility to act**

In times of difficulty it is very easy for us to get caught up in the blame game. This is when we spend all our time thinking about how unfair things are and how we are powerless to make any changes. Even though this may feel somewhat true in the current COVID-19 climate, thinking this way is not helpful. It is true that we can't do much about the situation in the world, however we can determine where and how we can act that will be of benefit.

- **Share boundaries respectfully**

It is important to let others know about our boundaries. The best way to do this is with a respectful and neutral tone. For example, *"I need to get some work done, so I've decided to close my door to minimise interruptions"*. Being firm, respectful and direct adds impact to our position.

- **Back up the boundary with action**

When a boundary is crossed, remind the person involved of the boundary and ask for their help in maintaining it. If they continue to violate the boundary, consider what natural consequence you need to put in place in order to maintain the boundary. For example, *“If the interruptions continue, I won’t be able to finish my work and then I will need to work later this evening instead of spending time with you”*. It is important to follow through on what we say we are going to do.

- **Show gratitude to those who respect our boundaries**

When others honour our boundaries, it is affirming for us to notice and say thank you. Not only does this reinforce our position, it also acknowledges the efforts of others. This kind of positive behaviour makes it more likely that our boundaries will be honoured in the future.

- **Be adaptable**

Setting a boundary is not like building a brick wall. Healthy boundaries are flexible. This means that we can stick to them when we need to and let them go when the situation demands. It is always our decision to make this choice.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you’d like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team will continue to facilitate Relationship Australia WA’s seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face once government guidelines allow. You might like to like us on Facebook to keep up to date with support information and details of services we can offer during this time.

If you’d like to register your interest in attending a course on **Setting Healthy Boundaries** once available, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipswa.org.au or call 6164 0200.