How to control your anger by setting personal boundaries

Imagine a country without borders. There are no fences, no restrictions, no warning signs. Anyone can cruise through, set up camp and exploit its natural resources. If a land as this existed it would likely be trashed in a few years. No real country would allow this to happen yet we – people – permit anyone into our space to waste our time and energy. We allow others to push us around, use us, and abuse us whenever they feel like it. Why do not we have our boundaries?

Actually, we all have limits. They are those tipping points that send us over the cliff into an ocean of mental agony. Problem is, most people suffer because they have not defined their boundaries and are not even aware of them.

You may feel your boundaries violated in a variety of ways: someone spreads divisive rumors, publicly flirts with your partner, diminishes your social status, does not respect your privacy or personal property, make decisions on your behalf without consulting, makes their problems your problems, asks you to do things that they can easily do on their own (or vice versa), gets physical in a verbal argument, etc.

Boundaries and Anger Management

Even though the threats have evolved, our instinct to respond to them remains just as powerful as in the old ages. Either way, the frustration of lack of respect for your boundaries simmers inside and builds steam, pressure cooking your internal organs with discontent and misery. It can feel as if someone robbed you of your power and dignity. Heck, you even willfully handed it over to them. Recognize the pattern? No wonder this is a spicy recipe for boundless frustration and anger.

Why people do not set boundaries?

- **Fear of confrontation**: we would rather cross the street then bump into an old nemesis walking towards us on a busy boulevard. Most people would do anything to avoid even a slightly uncomfortable situation.
- **Fear of disappointing people**: you might have built your image around being a perfectionist or you maybe naturally inclined to please people. Either way, these are noble character traits but a feeling of letting someone down could be your biggest nightmare.
- **Fear of not being liked by others**: believing that when you say “no” to someone, they will have a strong reaction and not like you anymore.
- **Self-defeatist mindset**: the beliefs that other people’s needs and opinions are more important than your own.
Five reasons you should not live without your personal boundaries

- Believing your assertiveness hurts another person can keep you from meeting your own physical and emotional needs. As a result, you may feel hurt, anxious, and bitter about life.
- You will find that none of your above fears will materialize if you assert your boundaries kindly and firmly. In fact, one of the “side effects” of boundary setting is improved relationships. Clear boundaries and a strong set of values always command more respect. (In our household we have an agreement to never argue in front of the baby – this is an absolute taboo.)
- It is OK to disappoint people. By “disappoint” I mean – not to please them all the time, especially if it does not truly benefit them long term. You will also notice that most people will get over their disappointment very quickly.
- If you do not set and affirm your boundaries, other people will do it for you. Its not that they do not respect you, they just test how much they can get away with for their own benefit. If you clearly know your boundaries you will take more steps to protect your dignity.
- You may have people in your life that manipulate you and exert their control over you without even you being aware of it. Maybe you have even turned away from your authentic identity and morphed into a person that your partner wants you to be.

The Do’s the Don’ts and how to’s of effective boundary setting

Effective boundary setting can be as simple as saying “no” but it requires a bit of finesse. To be most effective, it has to be done at the right moment and with the right tone. Below are a few guide points that maybe helpful:

- **Don’t** have so many personal boundaries that one would need a map to navigate this maze.
- **Do** be clear as to where your boundaries lay. Be it work, family, relationships, you have got to be very precise as to what your boundaries are and what behaviour you are willing to put up with.
- **Don’t** make boundaries like the Great Wall of China. If they are too big or unreasonable they maybe impossible to respect.
- **Do** strategically structure your boundaries so that they can prevent a conflict but not in the way that it blocks communication.
- **Don’t** make your boundaries too selfish and insensitive to the basic needs of others.
- **Do** make sure your boundaries respect your ‘neighbour’s rights. A good litmus test would be a question whether most of your impartial friends would find this boundary as fair.
- **Don’t** make it sound like a complaint: “I don’t like this, or I don’t like that, I’m afraid of this or I hate when you do this…”
- **Do** be assertive, state it as a matter of fact and explain your motivation: “This behaviour is hurtful and insults my dignity. I kindly ask not to be treated this way; I will not tolerate it.”

Establishing your boundaries may feel very uncomfortable at first, however facing your fear (and acting in spite of it) will bring about profoundly positive results. Any good life coach will tell you – personal growth starts when you step out of your comfort zone. The key is to start small – think baby steps. Draw a small line and share it with someone. Once you see that work out, go bigger and start setting other boundaries.
There will be moments when someone has blatant disregard for your boundaries; especially people closest to you. They may even feel threatened by your newly discovered self-empowerment. This is where you have to be strong as a Spartan. If your antagonist realizes that breaking your boundary upsets you he may try doing that every time he feels like exerting his power over you. However, do not become upset and defensive. It would be like handing an axe to a madman. Stay cool and collected. Breathe deep into your belly to ease the tension and hang on! Go into “doctor-patient” mode. He may try another time or two. It is very important not to allow him to latch on to breaking your boundary as your hurting point. Eventually, he will have no choice but to respect it.

**Enforcement**

Borders of the country are only as solid as the border patrol that is guarding them. Be courteously persistent protecting your boundaries and always gently remind people when they have crossed them. Be vigilant and take pre-emptive action when possible. If you see the “enemy” approaching, it is always easier the issue a warning shot than to engage into a full-on confrontation at the border line. If your arguments have become frequent and excessive, it is time to speak to a health care provider about evaluating and treating underlying emotional conditions. In addition, it can be helpful to talk with you partner about the changes you are undergoing and the feelings you are experiencing. Let your partner know that some mood changes are normal and that you need support and tenderness. Identify areas of stress in your relationship and deal with them honestly.

**Your life is in your hands**

Setting personal boundaries is a powerful measure you can take to contain your own anger and improve your relationships. Being assertive does not dismiss or ignore the needs of others. On the contrary – it defines your space in the social environment and establishes an example of healthy set of values for everyone around you. When you do this, you should find yourself with a new sense of self-empowerment and having more control over your life as a whole. I wish you courage and success.