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Ground Rules

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Setting Boundaries

You may have had a difficult time setting boundaries so far, but they are good for you and for your interactions with others. Boundaries can also help your self-esteem, so let's learn how not to be afraid of them.

There is nothing wrong in setting boundaries. Good, decent people set boundaries. Establishing boundaries makes you a safe person. Imagine a small child who doesn't know his place in the world. If an adult shows them what they can and cannot do, they will have a clearer idea of what's expected of them, which makes them feel more secure.

To set boundaries is a way of taking care of ourselves and others. Boundaries allow others to know where they stand with you. We have both a right and a duty to protect and defend ourselves. Generous people set boundaries. If you don't set boundaries you are, in a sense, giving yourself away.

Consider this: with boundaries you only give what you want which means you can afford to be generous to more people over a longer period of time.

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How Can Boundaries Improve Your Relationships?

Boundaries allow others to grow. When boundaries are made clear, other people become more conscious of their behaviour and more able to change it. Boundaries allow you to get more of what you want, and less of what you don't.

For example, you say you will only answer your phone after school or work hours, then people are less likely to try to contact you inappropriately. You will feel more in control of your life and feel better about yourself. Having clear boundaries creates a space for better communication.

Stand Your Ground!

The first rule of setting up boundaries is to stick to your guns. In order for boundary setting to work for you, you must develop a commitment to uphold what is right and true for you. You must act consistently in upholding your boundaries. If you have asked people to contact you only after school or work, then it is no good to answer your phone during the day.

Practice, practice, practice!

The second rule is to remember that practice makes perfect. If this is not familiar behaviour it will feel awkward and unnatural at first, but anything worth doing may be done badly at first. If people are used to getting their own way with you, they may not like it at first. That is their tough luck. Keep going with your boundaries. With practice you will become more skilful and graceful in your assertiveness.

You Only Control Yourself

Rule number three is to bear in mind that we cannot set limits on others. We need to limit our exposure to people who are behaving poorly. Don't debate, defend, or over-explain. In the beginning, it may help to have someone to support you easily available on the side-lines.

Examples of Boundaries

Here are some examples of boundaries to help you get started in creating your own.

- If there is someone very angry in your life, consider saying: "You may not continue to yell at me. If you do, I will leave the room and end this meeting."
- If there is someone who pressures you for things to be done immediately: "I have a policy of not making snap decisions. I need time to think and reflect on what I want to do. If you need an immediate answer it will be no." Don't let someone else's poor planning become your personal emergency!
- If you are facing criticism, perhaps you can modify this sentence. "It's not okay with me for you to make comments about my weight. Please stop. If you don't, I won't be able to continue this conversation."
- If you feel overwhelmed with having too much to do, you can say: "Although this is an important issue to me, I must decline your request for my help at this time" or "I need to

honour my family's needs."

You don't have to use these exact sentences, but they can help you come up with your own responses.

Key Points

- Boundaries can be physical or invisible.
- Our boundaries start forming from infancy.
- We can learn to set boundaries at any age.
- Not knowing your boundaries means others can take advantage of you.

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