CLIENT HANDOUT

Personal Boundaries

From the original “Personal Boundaries.pdf” · 27 pages

What this is. The original handout (27 pages) reproduced page for page inside the house frame, unaltered, so that every word, line, table and illustration is exactly as its author set it. It replaces the September 2026 redesign of this file, which re-set the text and chopped it.

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PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

UNDERSTANDING AND MAINTAINING PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

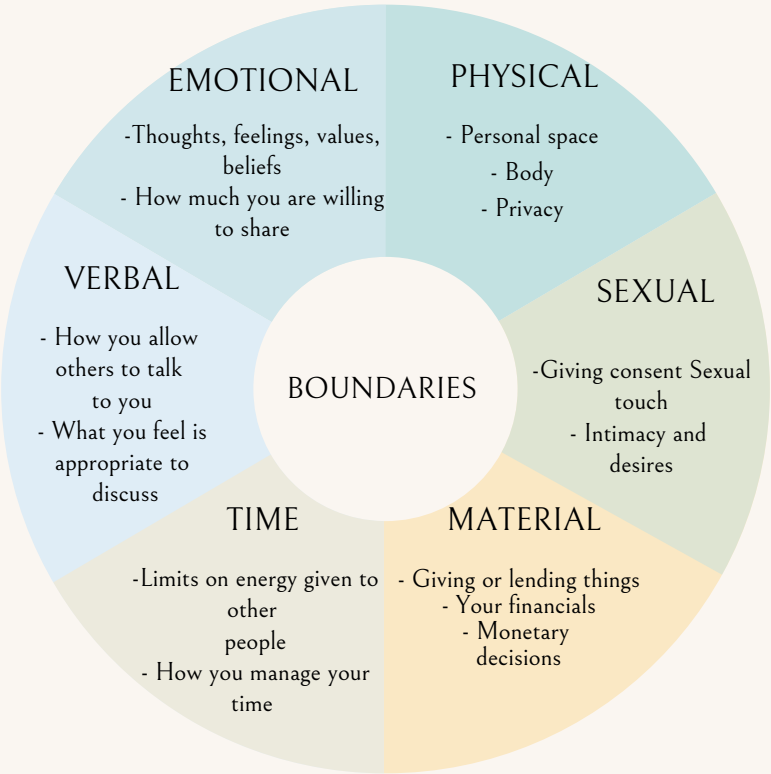
WHAT ARE BOUNDARIES?

Boundaries are simply the limits, rules, or lines we set for comfort. Boundaries are a set of physical and mental guidelines that are established to help protect ourselves when we are around other people and in relationships.

Having healthy boundaries is an essential personal skill to help you thrive and communicate your needs. It is vital to set limits so that others don't take advantage of or manipulate you. For example, a person with solid personal boundaries will feel comfortable saying 'no' when asked to do something they are uncomfortable doing without feeling the need to apologize.

Everyone's boundaries are different, so once you set yours it shows others how you expect them to behave around you and vice versa.

TYPES OF BOUNDARIES



WHY ARE PERSONAL BOUNDARIES IMPORTANT?

1. Self-Respect. Setting boundaries is a form of self-respect. It shows that you value yourself and your needs.
2. Healthy Relationships. Healthy boundaries help in forming intimate and caring relationships while preventing dependency, manipulation, and passive-aggressiveness.
3. Stress Reduction. When you know and enforce your boundaries, you reduce stress by avoiding overcommitment and preserving your energy.
4. Self-Care. Boundaries are essential for self-care, as they allow you to prioritize your well-being without feeling guilty.

HOW DO PEOPLE VIOLATE BOUNDARIES?

Unfortunately, others often violate our boundaries, sometimes unknowingly but occasionally with full awareness. Here are common ways boundaries can be breached:

- Physical Intrusion. Standing too close, unwanted physical touch.
- Emotional Manipulation. Guilt-tripping, belittling emotions, or oversharing personal problems without consent.
- Time Overcommitment. Assuming availability without asking, overstepping agreed timings.
- Intellectual Overreach. Disrespecting someone's opinions or forcing your own beliefs.
- Material Exploitation. Borrowing or using someone's property or finances without proper consent or respect.

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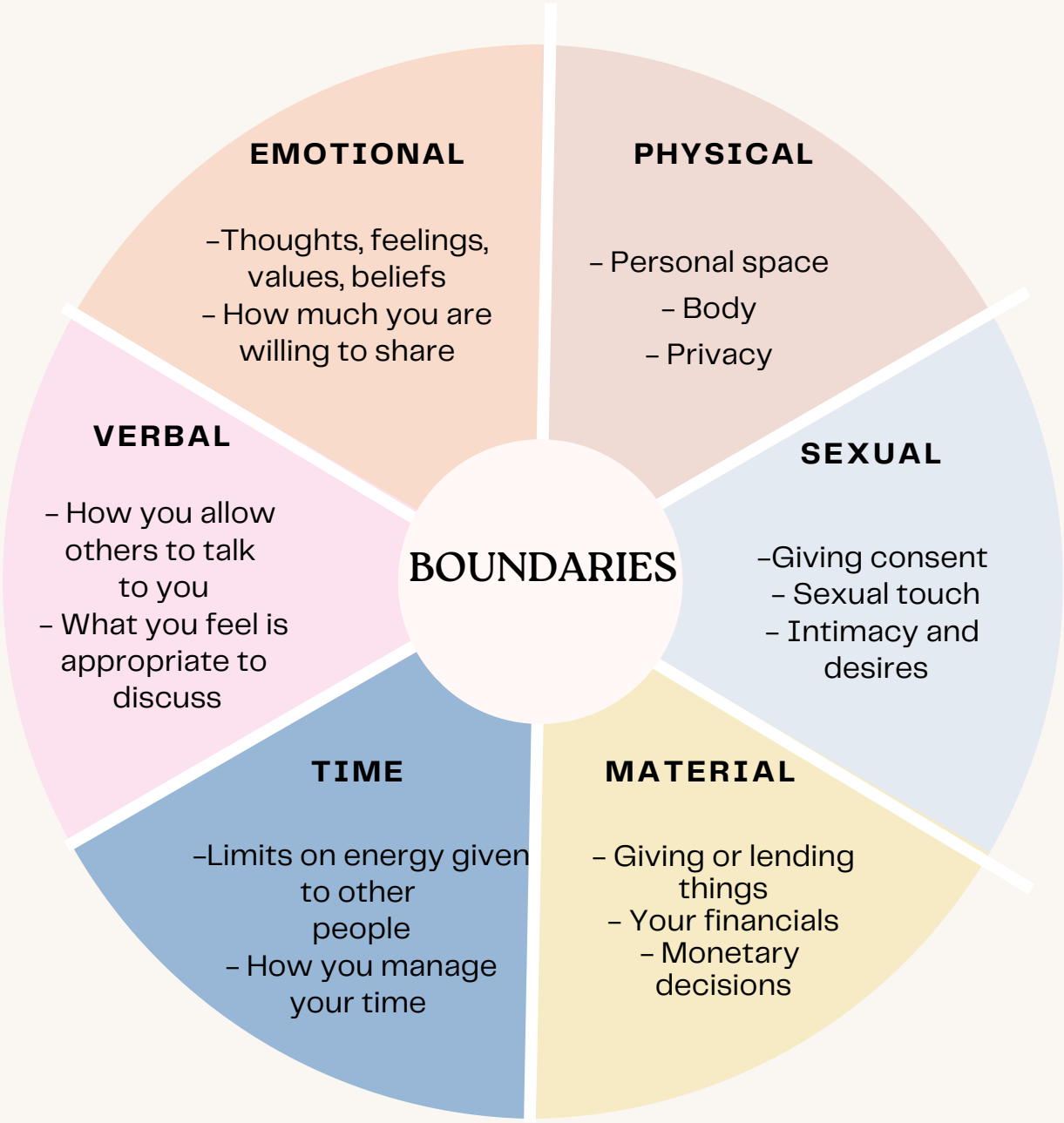
TYPES OF BOUNDARIES



Boundaries = the limits, rules or lines we set for our own personal comfort

FINDING THE SWEET SPOT

By now, you are familiar with boundaries, the imaginary line separating you from others. However, finding the right balance with personal boundaries can be difficult and a work in progress for many people.

Personal limits of boundaries can be divided into three different categories: rigid (hard), porous (soft), and healthy (the right balance between the other two).

Individuals with porous boundaries find it hard to say no to people and often feel mistreated and taken advantage of.
On the other hand, individuals who constantly wall themselves off and don't allow people to get close to them have hard, rigid boundaries.

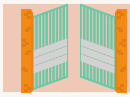
Understanding your boundaries is essential as they allow you to be assertive, protect you from mistreatment, and help you develop meaningful relationships. If you recognize your boundaries as either soft or rigid, you can adjust them and move them in the right direction to find the right balance that works for you.

RIGID

- Doesn't ask for help
- Avoids close relationships
- Closed off
- Seems detached from others
- Protective of themselves and of personal information
- Has only a few close relationships

POROUS

- Finds it difficult to say no
- Overshares too much personal information
- Accepts disrespect
- Too involved in other peoples information
- Dependent on other peoples opinions
- Feels responsible for other peoples happiness



HEALTHY

- Values their opinion
- Doesn't compromise their own values for others
- Shares personal information appropriately
- Is comfortable saying 'no' to others and accepting 'no' from others.

PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

Physical boundaries refer to your body, physical touch, personal space, and privacy. For example, you may enjoy receiving physical affection and not mind public displays of affection, or you may be the opposite. A violation of your physical boundaries may be if someone touches you inappropriately and makes you uncomfortable.
Someone with healthy physical boundaries would also know what is appropriate and what is not, such as greeting someone with a handshake rather than a kiss on the hand if you have just met them.

UNHEALTHY	HEALTHY
– Touching someone in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable	– Touching someone appropriately, such as knowing when to kiss on the cheek, hand shake or hug
– Sitting too close to people	– Allowing an appropriate distance between yourself and other's when talking
– Talking too close to people	– Speaking up when you feel uncomfortable
– Going through someone's personal belongings without their permission	
– Kissing in front of other people when it makes them uncomfortable	

Physical boundaries are the invisible lines that define each person's space as their personal territory. These boundaries differ from person to person and can be influenced by culture, personal experiences, and individual comfort levels. They include:

1. Personal Space: The distance we keep between ourselves and others.
2. Touch: What kind of touch is acceptable, and under what circumstances?
3. Possessions: Respect what belongs to someone else, whether it's their smartphone or their vehicle.
4. Privacy: The need for individuals to have spaces and times where they can retreat and feel secure about not being disturbed.

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WHAT ARE YOUR PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES?

Am I comfortable being touched by others?

Who am I comfortable with being touched by?

Do I let other's know when I feel uncomfortable?

What are my physical boundary needs?

SEXUAL BOUNDARIES

Sexual boundaries help create limits around anything to do with sex. They are essential for everyone to have, whether you are in a current sexual relationship or not. Sexual boundaries include consent, understanding of someone's privacy, preferences, and agreements. Violations of your sexual boundaries might include allowing someone to do something that you are not comfortable doing, allowing someone to get angry at you if you say "no" to having sex, getting punished, unwanted touch, abuse, or assault, and someone lying to you about their sexual health and history.

UNHEALTHY	HEALTHY
– Not discussing consent	– Discussing privacy with your partner (such as not discussing your sexual experiences with others)
– Not feeling as though you can discuss contraception and protection	– Asking the male to use protection
– Allowing people to take advantage of you sexually	– Discussing your desirable needs and wants
– Not saying "no" to things you are uncomfortable in doing	– Not being afraid to say "no"

Remember, conversations about sexual boundaries might seem daunting, but they are necessary. Maintaining open, ongoing dialogue about comfort levels and consent can lead to deeper connections and a healthier love life. Respecting both your own and your partner's boundaries is not just about the moment; it's about building a lasting, respectful relationship where each person feels valued and safe.

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WHAT ARE YOUR SEXUAL BOUNDARIES?

Do I know what my sexual boundaries are? (What am I willing to do or try?)

Am I comfortable discussing my boundaries with my sexual partner?

What are my values and beliefs with contraception and protection?

What are my sexual boundary needs?

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MATERIAL BOUNDARIES

Material boundaries refer to your personal belongings and possessions, including your home, car, jewelry, clothes, and furniture. Setting healthy material boundaries ensures you know how comfortable you feel with others borrowing your things and knowing what you will allow to be borrowed and what you will not allow to be. It also includes communicating to others your expectations and limits on when you lend things to them, such as how you expect them to treat your things and the time limit you have on your borrowed items. For example, a violation of your material boundaries would be that someone took something of yours without asking and returned it broken.

UNHEALTHY	HEALTHY
– Allowing people to take your things without asking	– Setting a time limit on your things being borrowed
– Not asking for your things back	– Ensuring that people ask being taking your things
– Allowing things to be returned in a bad condition	– Knowing what things you feel comfortable with being borrowed
– Not knowing who you have lent your things to	– Not being afraid to say "no"

Material boundaries are indispensable in maintaining healthy, respectful interactions with those around us. They help define our ownership, sharing limits, and financial responsibilities, ensuring clarity, respect, and mutual understanding. Through clear communication, consistency, and respect for each other's limits, we can create a balanced and harmonious environment, whether in personal relationships or professional settings.

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WHAT ARE YOUR MATERIAL BOUNDARIES?

Do I know what my material boundaries are?

Has someone ever borrowed something of mine and never returned it?

Who would I not allow to borrow my things, why?

Does it bother me when people return my things in a bad condition?

TIME BOUNDARIES

Your time is valuable, and you must know how to protect it. Time boundaries refer to how you use your time, prioritize it, and ultimately help you find the right balance with time spent between people and yourself. When you understand your priorities, you can dedicate the right amount of time to other people and other facets of your life, such as work, study, relationships, hobbies, and self-care. For example, a violation of your time boundaries would be when someone expects you to chat with them when you have told them that you need to study or do not set aside enough time to study for your exam and leave it to the last minute.

UNHEALTHY	HEALTHY
– Getting upset if people don't text you straight back	– Prioritizes time for yourself
– Calling people early in the morning or late at night	– Sets time aside for work or study
– Giving up your own plans to be with someone else	– Has good time management
– Studies the night before the test	– Doesn't over commit to one person or one thing

Time boundaries are a fundamental aspect of a balanced and fulfilling life. By setting and maintaining clear limits on how we use our time, we can protect our personal moments, enhance our productivity, and foster a healthier, less stressful lifestyle. Reflecting on our priorities, control over our schedule, sources of stress, and communication methods can provide valuable insights into managing our time more effectively.

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WHAT ARE YOUR TIME BOUNDARIES?

Do I know what my time boundaries are?

How Much Control Do You Have Over Your Schedule?

When Do You Feel Most Stressed or Overwhelmed?

How Do You Communicate Your Time Needs?

VERBAL BOUNDARIES

Verbal boundaries refer to how you talk to and allow others to speak to you. Firm verbal boundaries will help you communicate your needs to others and set the tone for how you expect others to treat you. Using "I" statements will help you express your feelings, for example, "I felt upset when you said that to me because…."

Violations of your verbal boundaries include people interrupting you, lying, being sarcastic, or saying put-downs.

UNHEALTHY	HEALTHY
– interrupting, lying	– Talking in a respectful tone
– Screaming, raising their voice	– Allowing other people to talk and contribute to conversations
– People not allowing you to talk	– Using "I" statements
– Not allowing you to be heard	Being honest with people

Reflecting on your comfort levels regarding language, sensitive topics, communication styles, and responses to boundary violations can provide valuable insights into managing your interactions more effectively. In doing so, you not only enhance the quality of your communications but also foster a more respectful and supportive environment for everyone involved.

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WHAT ARE YOUR VERBAL BOUNDARIES?

What Language Makes You Uncomfortable?

How Do You Want to Handle Sensitive Topics?

What Is Your Preferred Communication Style?

How Do You Want to Respond to Boundary Violations?

EMOTIONAL BOUNDARIES

Emotional boundaries refer to your ability to protect your feelings, ideas, values, and beliefs. Therefore, you would be able to separate your emotions from another's feelings. Individuals with healthy emotional boundaries will have a strong sense of self-identity and embrace their differences and uniqueness. It also involves paying attention to your needs, listening, and attending to your body.

Emotional boundary violations may include taking responsibility for someone else's feelings, letting them dictate your own, blaming others for your problems, and telling others how you feel.

UNHEALTHY	HEALTHY
– Dismissing and criticizing feelings.	– Letting go of the need to fix others
–Asking people to justify their feelings	– Accepting yourself
– Assuming we know how other people feel.	– Not needing to depend on others approval
Manipulative behavior	– Speaking up when you disagree with someone

By recognizing and asserting your emotional boundaries, you take a definitive step towards preserving your emotional health, leading to deeper self-awareness and more fulfilling relationships. Maintaining these boundaries ensures that your emotional well-being remains a priority, allowing you to thrive in a world that demands much from our hearts and minds.

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WHAT ARE YOUR EMOTIONAL BOUNDARIES?

What Are Your Emotional Limits?

How Much Emotional Energy Can You Invest in Others?

How Do You Respond to Emotional Intrusions?

What Support Do You Need?

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PERSONAL BOUNDARY QUIZ

	YES.	NO
1. I find it difficult to say no to others, even when I want to.		
2. I feel guilty when I set boundaries with friends or family.		
3. I agree to do things that make me uncomfortable to avoid conflict.		
4. I often feel overwhelmed by others' demands on my time and energy.		
5. I feel responsible for other people's happiness and well-being.		
6. I hesitate to express my needs or desires in relationships.		
7. I find it hard to ask for help when I need it.		
8. I often allow others to make decisions for me, even when I have a preference.		
9. I feel anxious thinking about setting boundaries with coworkers or classmates.		

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PERSONAL BOUNDARY QUIZ

	YES.	NO
10. I let people take advantage of my generosity and kindness.		
11. I frequently postpone my own needs to take care of others first.		
12. I find myself resentful when I feel my limits are not respected.		
13. I struggle to maintain a balanced personal and professional life.		
14. I often feel drained after interacting with certain people.		
15. I ignore my feelings in order to keep the peace in relationships.		
16. I apologize excessively, even when I haven't done anything wrong.		
17. I struggle to separate my feelings from those of the people around me.		
18. I worry about how others will perceive me if I enforce my boundaries.		

QUIZ REFLECTION

1. Looking at my responses, what patterns do I notice about how I handle boundaries?

2. How do I feel after often agreeing to things I'm uncomfortable with?

3. How might my relationships improve if I started to set more boundaries?

4. What small step can I take this week to assert one of my personal boundaries?

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DEAR MAN ACTIVITY

When you understand your boundaries, you can better protect yourself from crossing them; however, sometimes, boundaries can be unintentionally crossed. If this happens, it is up to you to express your needs and boundaries to ensure it doesn't happen again.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) uses an interpersonal effectiveness skill called 'DEARMAN' to help people resolve conflicts respectfully and effectively.

The acronym can be divided into two parts: the "DEAR" describes what to do when setting a boundary, and the "MAN" helps you set a boundary.

D

DESCRIBE

Describe the situation simply. stick to the facts by avoiding opinion and interpretation.

E

EXPRESS

Express how you are feeling by using an “I” statement. Don’t assume that the other person knows how you feel.

A

ASSERT

Say what you need. don't beat around the bush. be firm and clear.

R

REINFORCE

Reward people who respond well, and explain the positive effects of getting what you want or need.

M

MINDFUL

Maintain your position and keep your mind on your goals. Don’t steer ofF from the objective of the interaction.

A

APPEAR

Use a confident voice, body language and make good eye contact, this will help you appear confident.

N

NEGOTIATE

Remember that you aren’t demanding anything, you are asking for something. be open to negotiation.

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DEAR MAN ACTIVITY

D — DESCRIBE

E — EXPRESS

A — ASSERT

R — REINFORCE

M — MINDFUL

A — APPEAR

N — NEGOTIATE

BOUNDARY AFFIRMATIONS

1. "I am deserving of respect, and my boundaries are valid."
2. "It is okay to prioritize my own well-being and say no."
3. "My needs and feelings matter, and I have the right to express them."
4. "I am not responsible for others' feelings and reactions to my boundaries."
5. "Setting boundaries is a healthy way to care for myself and my relationships."
6. "It is not selfish to protect my energy and mental health."
7. "I trust myself to know what is best for my own comfort and safety."
8. "I have the right to change my mind and adjust my boundaries as needed."

BOUNDARY RESPONSES

"let me check my diary and get back to you."
"I don't like that. Can we try something different?"
"I would like to come, but I have already committed myself to something else at that time."
"I can only stay for a little bit."
"I really can't talk about that right now. It isn't the right time".
"I am sorry you are having such a tough time. However, right now, I am not in a place to take in all of this information."
"I'm happy to lend you my dress, but I'll need it back in 2 days."
"I can't lend you my car, as it is only insured for me."
"We can not give you money, but maybe there is another way I can help you?"
"I can't come this weekend; I have already committed to something else."
"i can't talk right now as i am in the middle of something, can i call you in an hour?"

Can you write some of your own boundary responses?

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TAKE ACTION

THE BOUNDARY THAT WAS CROSSED	ACTIONS THAT I CAN TAKE

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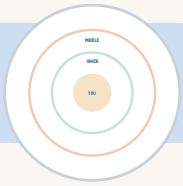
BOUNDARY CIRCLES



The boundary circle is designed to help individuals identify whom they feel safe and comfortable enough with, to allow into their inner circle, and ultimately make meaningful connections with.

This process will help you explore and clarify your boundaries and what characteristics you look for in others.

Could you write down the names of people that fit into each circle?

INNER CIRCLE

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

MIDDLE CIRCLE

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

OUTER CIRCLE

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

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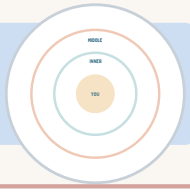
BOUNDARY CIRCLES



Your boundary circles can help you decide what type of relationships you have with the people you know. The people you consider yourself to be very close to and share personal or intimate details about yourself would be in your inner circle because you trust and feel comfortable with them. The middle circle may include people you still enjoy spending time with and feel comfortable with but probably wouldn't share personal details with. Therefore the time you spend with these people would be less than those in your inner circle. Lastly, the outer circle would consist mainly of acquaintances, people you only invest a little time to. Generally, you would like these people but don't know them well.

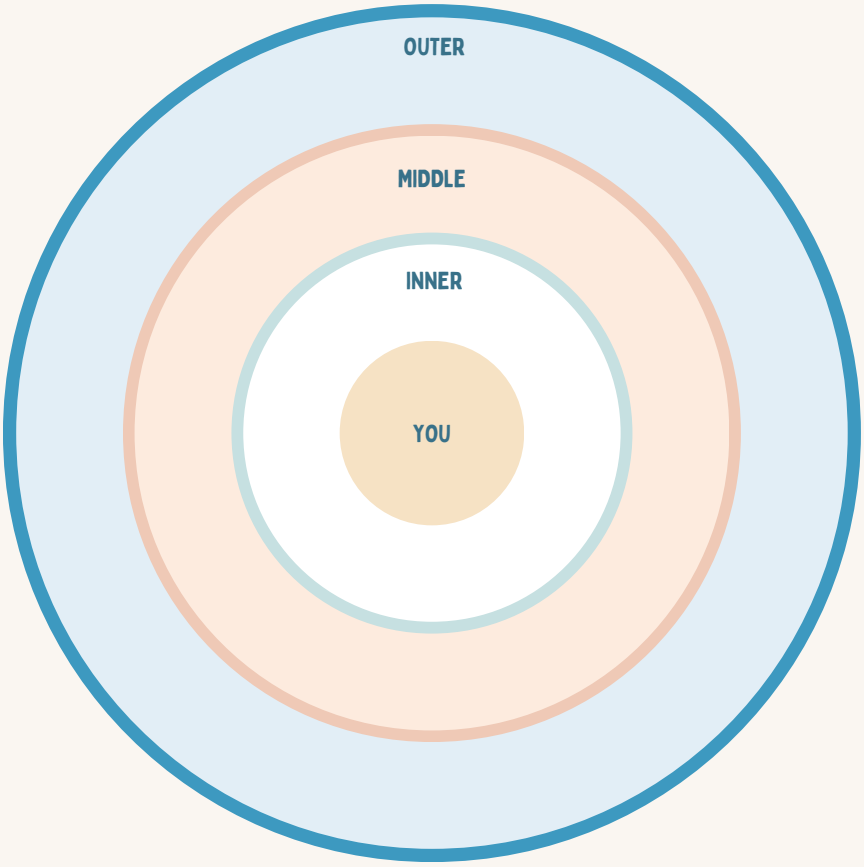
QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

How does a person move from one circle to another?

What are the characteristics and traits of the people in the inner circle?

What is something that would make you move someone to the outer circle?

How much time and energy would you spend on a person in each circle?



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