

How to Set Boundaries

Saying “yes” when you mean “no” is common when you lack boundaries. And when you lack boundaries and self-confidence, saying no is next to impossible.

When you have healthy boundaries, you know that you, and others, have the right to say “no,” “stop,” “that’s wrong,” “I’m not comfortable with that,” and “I do not agree.” Learning healthy boundaries starts in childhood. But, if you grew up in a home that would not allow you to have a different opinion, and to espouse only the views of your parents, then you didn’t become skilled at displaying healthy boundaries.

Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend published an informative book called, “Boundaries.” In this book, they categorize several types of boundary problems. These include *compliant*s, *avoidant*s, *controllers* and *nonresponsives*.

If you are a **compliant**, then you feel uncomfortable disagreeing with others. Your boundaries are so blurred that you often do not know how you feel about anything. You say “yes” when you want to say “no.” There are several different reasons why you may be a compliant. Most of those reasons are fear based. They include fear of making others angry, fear of abandonment, fear of hurting someone’s feelings, fear of being independent, fear of feeling bad, or even, fear of being punished.

Next are the **avoidants**. If you are an avoidant, then you say, “no” when you would benefit by saying “yes.” You are most likely incapable of being vulnerable because you do not know how to let the good in and the bad out. Your boundaries look more like walls, not fences. If you are an avoidant, then you miss out on getting close to others because you refuse help from them.

You may be what the authors define as **compliant/avoidant**. If so, then you give, give, give, but you are unwilling to receive. You often use all of your energy helping others and end up exhausted because you will not ask for help. If you are compliant/avoidant, you have boundaries where you shouldn’t have them, and lack boundaries where you should.

Nonresponsives hold back love from others. You refuse to show empathy and compassion. Whether you are unable to allow yourself to be less than perfect, and project this onto others; or are narcissistic and are accustomed to making everything all about yourself, you are incapable of responding to others’ pain.

Then there are the **controllers**. If you are a controller, then you believe that “no” means “maybe” and “maybe” means “yes.” Controllers are either, manipulative/controllers or aggressive/controllers. As a manipulative/controller, you attempt to make your own desires appealing, so you can get others to do what you want. You will perform favors for people because you want something in return. If you are an aggressive/controller, you will walk all over people because you refuse to see the word “no.” You may be verbally and/or physically abusive.

If you lack boundaries, whether you are compliant, avoidant, nonresponsive or controlling, you are incapable of recognizing and accepting boundaries for yourself and for others. A trained professional can teach you healthy boundaries, which will enhance your odds of developing healthy relationships.

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