

The Difference Between Boundaries and Control

A boundary describes what you will do. Control tries to decide what someone else will do.

WHAT IT MEANS

A boundary communicates your own limits and the action you will take to care for yourself. Control attempts to direct another person's choices.

KEY IDEAS

- A boundary is about your own actions: what you will and will not do.
- Control is an attempt to decide another person's choices.
- Clear, specific requests are easier to hear than criticism or demands.
- Boundaries work through consistent, calm follow-through rather than force.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- Self-determination theory identifies autonomy as a basic psychological need; relationships that respect each person's choices tend to support well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000).
- Skills-based approaches teach people to describe a situation, state needs, and make clear requests while keeping respect for themselves and others (Linehan, 2015; Rosenberg, 2015).
- Relationship research associates harsh criticism with conflict escalation, and gentle, specific requests with more constructive conversations (Gottman & Silver, 2015).

TRY THIS

- Start small and specific.
- Use “I” language that names your action.
- Follow through gently and consistently.

REFLECT

- Where do I want something to change, and what part of it is actually mine to decide?
- How could I phrase this as what I will do, rather than what they must do?
- What would kind, consistent follow-through look like for me?

This guide is educational and is not therapy, diagnosis or medical advice. If feelings or relationships feel unmanageable or unsafe, please reach out to a licensed professional. In a crisis in the U.S., call or text 988.

SOURCES

- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268.
- Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (2015). *The seven principles for making marriage work* (Rev. ed.). Harmony Books.
- Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training manual* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Rosenberg, M. B. (2015). *Nonviolent communication: A language of life* (3rd ed.). PuddleDancer Press.

Prepared by Renee Escalante, Mind ♥ Body ♥ Soul ♥ Studio.