

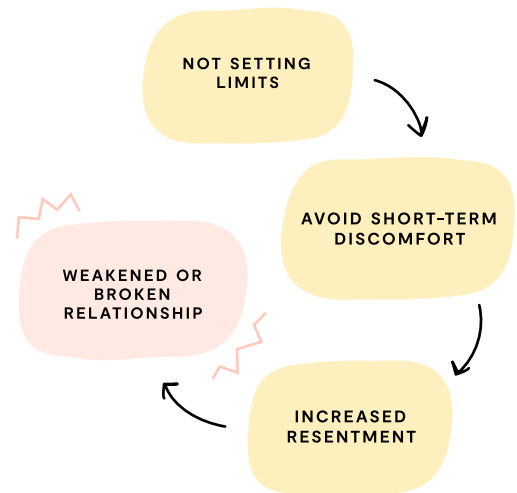
How to Set Limits with Others

Build stronger relationships through clearly communicated boundaries.

Boundaries define what we will and won't allow in our lives. They help protect our time, energy, and other resources for what matters most. We can set limits with ourselves and others, but a lot of us avoid doing so because it feels uncomfortable. However, not setting limits can hurt our well-being and relationships over time. By understanding the costs of not setting boundaries and improving our communication skills, we can build the courage to set limits effectively.

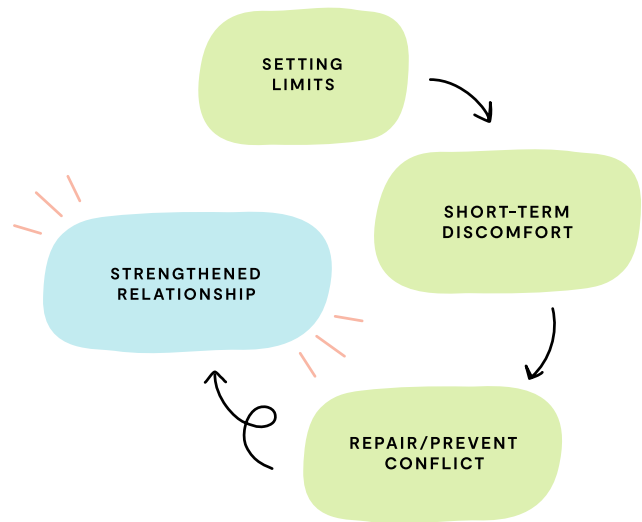
✔ The costs of not setting limits with others

Strong relationships are built on a foundation of shared enjoyment, mutual support, trust, and clear expectations. When we avoid setting limits or ignore others' limits, we might be able to avoid feelings of discomfort in the short term. Over time, however, resentment can form and increase, leading to cracks in our relationship foundation. Most relationships can sustain small cracks from time to time. If the cracks grow in size or number over time, our relationships may suffer from more conflict, resentment, disconnection, and separation.



✔ Setting limits is an investment in our relationships

Many of us fear that setting limits will harm our relationships by upsetting others or seeming “mean” or “selfish.” However, boundaries are crucial for strong relationships. They prevent future conflict by making expectations clear and avoiding misunderstandings. Being honest about our limits is kinder—it removes the need for others to guess our needs. While setting limits may feel uncomfortable at first, it ultimately strengthens and sustains relationships.



✔ Communicating limits to others

For others to know our limits, we need to clearly and respectfully state where they are. We then need to ask other people to change their behavior to respect those limits. This process may look different for each relationship and can be influenced by culture, identities, and preferences.

Planning what you’ll say ahead of time and rehearsing it aloud can help you feel more comfortable with having the conversation.

1. Decide on an appropriate place, time, and manner.

Being thoughtful about where, when, and how you’ll assert your limit can support a smoother discussion. Examples:

- “I’ll bring up my limit with my roommate when we’re shopping.”
- “I’ll talk to my partner after the kids go to bed so that we won’t be interrupted.”

2. Clearly state your limit.

Use as few words as possible, and be as specific as you can (when, who, how, what, why) to decrease confusion. Examples:

- “I need quiet in our apartment to study. I’m not OK with having people over late on weeknights.”
- “Having personal time separate from parenting is important to me. I need your support with that.”

3. Respectfully ask the person to change their behavior.

Be specific about what behaviors are acceptable within your limit. Using “I” statements helps steer the conversation away from blame, which can help others better hear your perspective. Examples:

- “I can’t focus when it’s loud in our apartment. Can you please not have friends over after 8pm on weeknights?”
- “I would like to join a book club on Wednesday nights. Could you support me by watching the kids then?”

4. Make changes to your environment to help others respect your limits.

Examples:



Close doors to show you don't want to be disturbed.



Block time on shared calendars to show you aren't available.

5. Remove yourself from the situation.

If your limits aren't being respected, give yourself permission to leave the situation.

Examples:

- Leave when a friend is saying hurtful things and refuses to stop.
- Take a timeout during a heated conversation with your partner.

6. Thank others when they respect your limits.

Thanking someone for respecting your limits makes it more likely that they will continue to do so. Examples:

- “Thanks for not having friends over on weeknights. I’ve been able to focus much better.”
- “I appreciate you watching the kids so I can go to the book club. Your support means a lot.”

7. Know that setting and adjusting limits is a continual process.

Over time, you may need to change or restate your limits. Examples:

- Someone enters your life and doesn't know your limits.
- People forget your limits and need to be reminded.
- Your limits change and need to be communicated.

8. Ease yourself in.

Consider starting with limits that feel easier, like asking a friend to arrive on time. This can help you gain confidence with setting limits that feel harder, such as asking your manager to arrive on time.

9. Respect others' limits.

Changing your behavior to respect others' limits is also crucial for maintaining strong relationships. If you're unsure of their limits, you can ask. For example:

- “What are you OK with in terms of having friends over?”
- “What time do you need me to be home by?”



Get personalized support

Setting limits with others is essential for our well-being and strong relationships, but it can be challenging. Lyra's mental health coaches and therapists can help you troubleshoot obstacles, stay encouraged, and practice new communication skills.

Get matched with a mental health expert today at care.lyrahealth.com.