

Relationship Boundaries, Expectations, and Standards

Understanding the Interrelation of Standards, Boundaries, and Expectations

Standards are the qualities and values that you expect from yourself and your partner in a relationship. **Boundaries** are the limits you set on behaviors that are acceptable and unacceptable. **Expectations** are the anticipated behaviors or outcomes in various situations within the relationship.

These elements overlap and reinforce each other, forming a comprehensive framework for relationship health and satisfaction. Effective communication and mutual understanding of these concepts can significantly improve the quality of a relationship.

Step-by-Step Guide for Couples

Step 1: Identifying Core Values and Desires

1. Individual Reflection:

- Each partner should independently list their top five values that they hold in life and in relationships (e.g., honesty, respect, compassion).
- Write down why each value is important to you and how you expect it to manifest in your relationship.

2. Shared Discussion:

- Exchange lists with your partner and discuss each value.
- Identify common values and note any differences, exploring why each is important to the other.

Step 2: Establishing Standards

1. Definition Exercise:

- Together, decide what each value looks like in action. For example, if both value honesty, discuss what honest communication means in daily practice.

2. Application to Daily Life:

- Create scenarios where these values might be tested and discuss how you expect each other to act, ensuring these standards are realistic and mutually agreed upon.

Step 3: Setting Boundaries

1. Boundary Mapping:

- Discuss past experiences where boundaries were felt to be crossed. What behaviors were uncomfortable or unacceptable?
- Instead of just labeling actions as unacceptable, delve into the beliefs or feelings triggered by these behaviors. For example, if one partner feels upset when the other spends too much time on their phone during meals, discuss what that behavior signifies (e.g., disinterest, neglect).

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2. Belief Exploration:

- Each partner should explain their interpretation of the behaviors that cross boundaries. For instance, one might see staying late at work as a necessity for career progress, while the other might view it as neglectful.
- Discuss the underlying beliefs and feelings associated with these behaviors. This conversation should aim to build understanding about why certain actions impact each partner differently.

3. Expectations for Boundaries:

- Agree on how to express discomfort with certain behaviors early and respectfully.
- Establish agreed-upon ways to address these feelings and manage boundary crossings constructively, ensuring both partners feel heard and valued.

Step 4: Clarifying Expectations

1. Situation Analysis:

- Think about different aspects of your life together, such as finances, family interactions, leisure time, and intimacy.
- Define clear expectations for each area, ensuring both partners know what to expect and how to meet these expectations.

2. Outcome-Based Focus:

- For each expectation, dig deeper to understand the underlying desire or need. For example, if one partner expects the other not to cheat, discuss what behaviors build trust and a sense of significance in the relationship.

Step 5: Regular Review and Adjustment

1. Periodic Check-Ins:

- Schedule regular sessions (e.g., monthly or quarterly) to revisit your values, standards, boundaries, and expectations.
- Discuss what's working and what needs adjustment, keeping the lines of communication open and active.

2. Adaptive Changes:

- Be willing to adapt your standards, boundaries, and expectations as your relationship grows and changes. Life events such as career changes, parenthood, or health issues might require adjustments.

Relationship Development Worksheet

Relationship Boundaries, Expectations, and Standards

This worksheet is designed to guide couples through the process of establishing standards, boundaries, and expectations within their relationship. Each step should be completed together, fostering open communication and mutual understanding.

Step 1: Identifying Core Values and Desires

1.1 Individual Reflection

- **Partner A & B:** Independently list your top five values that you hold in life and in relationships (e.g., honesty, respect, compassion).
- **Why These Values?** Write down why each value is important to you and how you expect it to manifest in your relationship.

1.2 Shared Discussion

- **Exchange Lists:** Share your lists with your partner.
- **Discussion Points:**
 - Identify common values.
 - Discuss differences and explore why each value is important to the other.

Worksheet Section:

Partner A's Values	Importance to A	Partner B's Values	Importance to B

Step 2: Establishing Standards

2.1 Definition Exercise

- **Together:** Decide what each shared value looks like in action. For example, define what "honesty" means in your daily interactions.

2.2 Application to Daily Life

- **Scenarios:** Create scenarios where these values might be tested.

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- **Expected Actions:** Discuss how you expect each other to act in these scenarios.

Worksheet Section:

Value	Definition of Value in Action	Scenario	Expected Actions
Honesty			
Respect			

Step 3: Setting Boundaries

3.1 Boundary Mapping

- **Discuss Past Experiences:** Where have you felt boundaries were crossed? What were the behaviors and the associated beliefs or feelings?

3.2 Belief Exploration

- **Interpretation of Behaviors:** Each partner explains their view of the behaviors that cross boundaries.
- **Underlying Beliefs:** Discuss the beliefs and feelings associated with these behaviors.

3.3 Expectations for Boundaries

- **Expression of Discomfort:** Agree on how to express discomfort respectfully.
- **Management of Boundary Crossings:** Establish how to address these situations constructively.

Worksheet Section:

Behavior	Partner A's Interpretation	Partner B's Interpretation	Agreed Action on Discomfort
Phone at meal	Neglect/Disinterest	Downtime	Discuss need for attention

Step 4: Clarifying Expectations

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4.1 Situation Analysis

- **Life Aspects:** Think about different areas like finances, family, leisure, and intimacy.
- **Define Expectations:** What are the clear expectations for each area?

4.2 Outcome-Based Focus

- **Desired Outcomes:** For each expectation, discuss the underlying desires or needs.

Worksheet Section:

Life Aspect	Expectations	Desired Outcome
Finances		
Family		
Leisure		
Intimacy		

Step 5: Regular Review and Adjustment

5.1 Periodic Check-Ins

- **Schedule:** Set dates for regular reviews (e.g., monthly).
- **Discussion Points:** What's working and what needs adjustment?

5.2 Adaptive Changes

- **Life Changes:** Be open to adapting your standards, boundaries, and expectations as your relationship and personal circumstances evolve.

Worksheet Section:

Review Date	Topics Discussed	Adjustments Needed

Instructions: Print this worksheet and complete each section together during dedicated couple's time. Use this as a living document to revisit and update as your relationship evolves.