



# solutions

# BOUNDARIES

## SETTING YOUR LIMITS DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Holiday stress can affect many things, including your closest relationships. Mutual respect should be the motivating factor for every interaction within a relationship. The holidays can tax this notion though, so out of respect — for yourself and others — you may need to communicate your boundaries with friends and loved ones.

Often, family members and long-term friends have difficulty seeing that you have changed and grown. Some may feel that they can treat you in the same way as they did when you were younger. By expressing the limits of acceptable behavior you can help maintain your self-respect and self-esteem.

Contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for support when dealing with holiday stress.

### Be clear

Boundaries may be different for each relationship. For example, you may be willing to drop everything when a close friend or family member needs something. On the other hand, with a recent acquaintance, you may feel that calling you late at night to pour out all their problems is too much.

Even with close friends and family, you may have to skillfully set limits. Some people may unknowingly take advantage of your kindness. It is healthier for all your relationships if you are clear and consistent about what your boundaries are.

The quickest and best way to contact  
the EAP is by calling **1-800-222-0364**



PSC

EAP



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### **Be specific**

What are some limits you may need to make during the holidays?

- No lecturing about your choice of significant other, friends, career, etc.
- No manipulation about the things you can and cannot get done for the holidays (For example, you may not be able to bake the traditional cookies this year, because you are too busy.)
- No disrespectful or belittling language toward you
- No maneuvering to persuade you to change your schedule to stay longer

### **Be firm**

Be firm, but gentle, when you have a conversation about what behavior is acceptable to you. For many relationships, you may have a strong trust that no boundaries will be crossed. If something does happen though, be prepared to have a one-to-one discussion about how the boundary was crossed, how it made you feel, and how you do not want it to happen again.

### **Use “I statements.”**

Some people may have difficulties adjusting their behaviors to your request for limits. You may need to explain this more than once. “I statements” can help the other person understand how, when someone crosses a boundary you’ve set, it causes you to feel disrespected, or disappointed, or frustrated.

Using “I statements” may also help them see that you are not trying to control them — your request is for yourself and your emotional health. In an “I statement,” you begin with:

1. How something made you feel
2. Behavior that triggered the emotion
3. Your thoughts about what the behavior means to you

*(Be aware that this is just your interpretation; the other person may experience it differently)*

4. What new behavior would be acceptable

For example: “I feel slightly irritated when you call me ‘Mikey’ when I asked you to call me ‘Mike.’ It makes me think — and I may be wrong about this — that you do not care about my feelings and you do not see me fully as an adult. I wish you would call me ‘Mike,’ instead.”

Mutual respect should be at the forefront of your mind when you explain yourself. You would like to maintain your dignity and have the other person keep his or hers. So, be kind, yet firm, as you voice your limits and give the person the opportunity to change.

### **Be skillful**

You need to be assertive and give a clear message with your boundaries, but presenting it in a skillful way can work to your benefit. A quiet one-to-one conversation can be a more productive and impactful way to present your request that your boundaries are honored. Making a statement in front of others can make the person defensive and less open to your request.

### **Be forgiving**

Forgive those who did not understand what your boundaries were before you communicated them. Sometimes, it is simply ignorance of your needs that kept them from changing their behavior towards you.

### **Be consistent**

Changes in behavior rarely happen overnight. You will likely need to reiterate your initial request to be treated respectfully a number of times before the other person is able to adjust to the new way of relating to you.

Setting healthy boundaries can make the difference between an enjoyable visit with loved ones or a disappointing and energy-draining encounter.

## **Employee Assistance Program**

**24**  
HOURS A DAY

**1-800-222-0364**

TTY: 1-888-262-7848

**FOH4You.com**