Boundaries with People

In the Queen's Philosophy, boundaries are the limits you set with the people around you: what you will and won't take on, accept or give. The 120Reign™ Guide treats them as a skill you practice and revisit, not a one-time decision.

BOTTOM LINE

Setting boundaries with the people in your life draws on two well-studied areas: speaking up for your own needs, and giving to others without losing yourself. In randomized trials, assertiveness programs helped adults express their needs, with gains still present a year later, and were linked to lower stress and anxiety. Habitually silencing your own thoughts and needs to keep the peace has been consistently linked to depression across more than 100 studies, and in four studies it came before later depression. Caring for others was not the problem: what researchers call "unmitigated communion," caring for others while neglecting yourself, was linked to distress, while healthy caring was not. Together, the research suggests boundaries are a learnable skill linked to wellbeing, with the honest caveat that others don't always respond well to them.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

Speaking up for yourself is a skill you can learn

In a randomized trial, 210 adults were assigned to an eight-week online assertiveness program, either guided or self-guided, or to a wait-list (Hagberg et al., 2023). Both program groups became more able to express their needs and stand up for themselves than the wait-list group, and the gains were still present at a one-year follow-up. In another randomized trial with college students, an assertiveness program was linked to greater drops in stress, anxiety and depressive symptoms than a control group (ElBarazi et al., 2024). That was a single study in one student population.

Silencing your own needs is linked to depression

A narrative review of more than three decades of research covered 126 studies of "self-silencing": holding back your thoughts and feelings and putting others' needs first to avoid conflict (Jack et al., 2026). Self-silencing was consistently linked to depression, and four studies that followed people over time found it came before later depressive symptoms. It was most common in relationships with conflict, unequal power and little give-and-take. An earlier review of women's health research reached similar conclusions (Maji & Dixit, 2019).

Caring is healthy; caring without limits is not

Across four studies, researchers separated two ways of being other-focused (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998). "Communion," a warm

and caring orientation toward others, was not linked to distress. "Unmitigated communion," focusing on others to the exclusion of yourself, was linked to a more negative view of the self, overinvolvement in others' problems, self-neglect and psychological distress. A later review linked unmitigated communion to receiving less support, being reluctant to ask for help and poorer health habits (Helgeson & Fritz, 2000). The issue was never kindness; it was kindness with no limits.

Others may not always welcome a boundary

A meta-analysis of studies on how people react to assertive or dominant behavior found that women who made explicit, direct demands were rated as somewhat less likable than men who did the same, though not as less competent (Williams & Tiedens, 2016). The effect was small, and less direct forms of assertiveness carried no penalty. This research is about other people's reactions in mostly workplace settings, not about whether boundaries are good for you, but it helps explain why holding a boundary can feel hard.

DISCLAIMER

This summary is for educational purposes only and is not medical or mental health advice. It describes published research on the principles behind the guide; the guide itself has not been tested in a clinical study. If a relationship feels unsafe, or you're dealing with ongoing stress, anxiety or low mood, please reach out to a licensed healthcare or mental health provider.

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