



DIRECTORATE OF PREVENTION, RESILIENCE AND READINESS

Boundary Setting: Saying No in a Positive Way

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“Sometimes people can get confused on what a boundary is, so I think, when it comes to setting boundaries and saying no in a positive way, it pays to be very clear,” says Joy Ingram, a workshop facilitator at Resilience for Advocates through Foundational Training (RAFT).

RAFT’s mission is to support organizations and advocates in a way that cultivates human-centered workspaces through foundational wellness, practices, resources and training in order to build resilience and to promote a positive gender-based violence advocacy ecosystem. “So basically, we work with advocates who help survivors in order to keep them well so that they can continue to do the hard work,” Ingram says.

Boundaries are a major component of saying no in a positive way. Ingram explains boundaries as guidelines, rules and limits that people create for themselves. “Boundaries should be reasonable, safe and permissible ways for other people to treat them as well. Boundaries also include how that person will respond when someone steps outside of those limits.”

She continues: “When you set these limits, you know, sometimes people will try and cross your boundaries, and so you have to be able to say no as a barrier to them crossing your boundaries. And the way that we talk about saying no in a positive way helps you maintain relationships with people, and it also helps you maintain your power in those relationships with people.”

There are three types of boundaries: physical, psychological/mental and spiritual. Physical boundaries pertain to personal space, your personal bubble and privacy. An example of this boundary is, “I am so glad to meet you! I don’t shake hands—let’s elbow bump instead.” According to Nina Brown, author of *Coping with Infuriating, Mean, Critical People*, there are four types of psychological boundaries: soft, rigid, spongy and flexible.

Ingram says, “When your boundaries are soft or spongy, people don’t take you serious.” According to Ingram, flexible boundaries are the best type in most situations. Flexible boundaries can change, but they change for a reason and in certain situations. The person setting the boundaries understands why those boundaries changed. The person adhering to the boundaries also understands why the boundaries changed.

Psychological boundaries pertain to beliefs, emotion and intuition. It’s your right to have your own feelings, thoughts and opinions. An example of this boundary is, “I love partnering on projects with you. Because I’m stretched too thin right now, I cannot help at this time.”

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Spiritual boundaries pertain to self-esteem, identity and faith. It's protecting your right to believe in what you want to and who you are. So you might say, "I value your spiritual beliefs. To respect my own, I will not be joining you in that practice."