



Dear CCNY Community,

This week we present:

Letters to Home - Conversations of Boundaries

Practicing social distancing has paradoxically decreased our “distance” from the people we live with. With the present situation, individuals are facing new challenges with establishing boundaries while maintaining relationships. Setting boundaries can be hard, especially if we’re not used to expressing our needs. However, healthy boundaries are essential features of any meaningful relationship. Now, more than ever, boundaries are necessary for maintaining harmonious relationships and emotional wellbeing as we continue to cope with the uncertainty that accompanies a pandemic. Think of setting boundaries as a form of self-care: a process that protects your time and energy, and honors your needs.

- **Check in with Yourself:** Before asking people to respect your boundaries, you need to know what your boundaries are! Take some time to understand and prioritize your needs before you speak with your family, friends, partner, or roommate(s). Try to reflect on your experiences over the last few weeks: which interactions felt good and respectful of your limits and which felt instructive and frustrating? Use this information to create a list of needs and then decide which ones are the most pressing. Be mindful that this process also includes assessing your own capacity for social interactions, particularly if they have changed during this period.
- **Express Your Needs Clearly:** This may seem obvious but it is important to explain the rationale behind your request and why it is important to you. Spending extended periods of time together may lead to you expecting others to know how you feel. But no matter how close, expecting others to read your mind can result in disappointment and frustration. While expressing your needs can be difficult, it makes it easier for others to understand what you want from them and thus, increases your chances of having needs met. Be clear, concise, and assertive when setting boundaries. For example: *“I find myself feeling distracted when we work in the same room. How about we work in different rooms during the day?”*
- **Request a House Meeting:** Plan a time for everyone living in the same space to come together and discuss their individual needs through this period. This can help you

collectively come up with a plan that works for the group. You may even receive helpful advice that improves your plan.

- **Be Prepared to Negotiate:** Any meaningful social relationship is a two-way street. Establishing boundaries shouldn't have to compromise the quality of the relationship. Express curiosity about how others feel about your requests and consider their wants and needs in turn. Ask for alternative solutions when appropriate or offer to do something they want in return. For instance, suggesting watching a movie with your partner after you get some time for yourself.
- **Communicate, Communicate, Communicate:** You may find that even after expressing your needs, others may not respect them or forget them entirely. You may have to remind people of your prior conversations. If they still don't seem to understand, it may be helpful to have a one-on-one conversation about how their behavior impacts you and to try and generate ways to help them respect your boundaries. Try not to get defensive or aggressive and instead, use this opportunity to learn more about the person you're spending so much time with.
- **Be Mindful of Your Emotional State:** It is hard to get your point across in conversation when you're feeling overwhelmed. Keep track of your mood and try to engage in discussions with others when you are in a calm or neutral emotional state. If you begin to feel overwhelmed, it is perfectly fine to excuse yourself from the conversation and pick it up at another time.
- **Set Work Hours:** More people living together means more schedules to account for and coordinate. Make the process easier for everyone by drawing up and posting a weekly chart that indicates your work hours. This can also come in handy with the allocation of shared spaces.
- **Use Actual Physical Boundaries:** An "at work" or "do not disturb" sign that you put on a door or near you makes your status clear. Wearing headphones, especially noise-cancelling ones, can also help communicate that you're "at work."
- **Put It in Writing:** People handle conflict in different ways. For some, it may be more beneficial to put some of these requests in writing. A letter addressed to the members of the household containing such boundaries may be a good alternative.
- **Role-Play:** Enlist a friend to role-play upcoming conversations. You can work through various scenarios and practice asserting yourself.
- **Be Firm and Confident:** This one can be difficult, but appearing confident conveys that your request is important and should be respected. This can include adopting a firm tone of voice, postures that make you feel confident, and maintaining appropriate eye contact through the discussion.
- **Be Gentle with Others:** This means being gentle and considerate in your approach. A respectful approach is always a good strategy, and in these stressful times even more so. People are struggling in different ways and may not be able to make changes as quickly as you'd like. Be patient, forgiving, and try to understand their perspectives.

Remember to express appreciation after anyone does something consistent with your requests.

- **Be Gentle with Yourself;** Finally, be kind to yourself! Developing these new skills and communication strategies can take a long time. Remember, like all skills, these require practice. Try them individually or group them together until you find what works best for you.

Additional resources:

Couples and Boundaries

Youtube - Building and Dissolving Boundaries Clip

[Healthy Boundaries - Worksheets and Examples](#)

If you are worried about your safety or the safety of a loved one, **call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 800-273-TALK (8255).**

If you or a loved one is confined to an unsafe home, call the **National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE (7233)**; if you're unable to speak safely, visit thehotline.org or text LOVEIS to 22522.

For immediate mental health support please call NYC Well 1-888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355). NYC Well provides free, confidential services to support mental health concerns. NYC WELL is available 24/7 and can provide assistance in over 200 languages.

You can also text WELL to 65173 or access the NYC WELL website at <https://nycwell.cityofnewyork.us/en/> to chat with a counselor.

Stay safe and take care of each other,
The Counseling Center