

# Owning My Space

*A Teen's Guide to  
Physical, Emotional, and  
Digital Boundaries*

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Boys Town, Nebraska

## Owning My Space

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# **CHAPTER 1**

*Let's Talk Boundaries*



Boundaries are like your personal rules. They're the invisible lines that help you decide what's okay and what's not when it comes to your body, your feelings, your time, and your space. When you set healthy boundaries, you're protecting yourself – your thoughts, your emotions, and your privacy – from stuff that doesn't feel right.

Simply said, boundaries define “where I end and you begin.”

Boundaries that make you feel safe, boost your confidence, and protect your mental health can help you grow into someone who knows their worth, stands up for themselves, and doesn't let others define them. When someone, whether it's a stranger, friend, classmate, sibling, or even someone you game with online, crosses your boundaries, your mind and body usually let you know. You might feel uncomfortable, unsafe, anxious, guilty, or even angry. That's your signal that something's not okay.

You might not always be able to stop someone from crossing the line, but you can choose how you respond – and set boundaries that protect you, your feelings, your values, and your self-respect.

## **Types of Boundaries**

**Physical/Sexual** – These boundaries protect your body. You decide who can touch you, how they can touch you, and where. These boundaries help you answer questions such as “Do I offer a hug or just a handshake?” Physical boundaries also protect the private areas of your body. When starting a romantic or dating relationship, having clear boundaries is essential. If your physical boundaries are disrespected, that is a relationship red flag.

**Emotional** – These boundaries protect your private thoughts and emotions. You decide what deep thoughts and feelings you will or will not share with others. Talking about these thoughts and feelings can make you feel vulnerable and should only be shared with people who have earned your trust.

**Digital/Technology** – These boundaries protect your online self. You decide what you share, what you do, and what content you consume when using apps, participating in chat rooms, and exploring other digital spaces (gaming platforms, forums, and livestreams). These boundaries can help protect your privacy, your time, and your mental health.

## Talia's Story

Talia was a “people pleaser” who always worried about how other people felt. She first met Silas in the high school counseling center. She was there to get information about college nursing programs. Silas was there to finalize his class schedule, as his family had just moved from Massachusetts. While the two of them waited for a counselor, they made small talk. Talia asked Silas what he thought of the town and if he had any other siblings at the school.

It turned out Talia and Silas had a couple of the same classes, so they started eating lunch and studying for tests together. He shared a lot about growing up in Boston and about his messy family situation, including times when he saw his dad hurt his mom. These confessions worried and upset Talia. She felt so sorry for him that she almost cried.

After a few weeks, Silas started messaging Talia – all the time – and sending Snapchat pics. His messages annoyed her because they just never stopped. A lot of them were way too personal, or just plain thirsty, as she called it.

Talia thought she had made it clear she only wanted to be friends, but Silas was becoming more and more flirty toward her. She wasn't interested in dating him or hooking up. But that didn't stop Silas from sending shirtless mirror selfies and asking personal questions: *PJ check lol...what u sleepin in 2nite? Do I turn u on?*

Talia started to feel anxious and unsafe, which were signs that her boundaries were being crossed. She also felt trapped because she didn't want to hurt Silas's feelings. She knew he was really sensitive. But she hated all the pics, texts, and DMs. They freaked her out. She tried to talk to Silas face to face – in a nice way – to back off and chill. But he didn't pick up on the signal (or ignored it). Talia decided that she needed to tell him straight up to stop sending selfies, and hooking up was never going to happen.

The following day, as they were eating lunch together, Silas began asking personal questions again. Talia thought this was the perfect time to tell him what she was feeling.

“You know, Sy, we've done a lot of stuff together...”  
He interrupted her: “You're gonna dump me, aren't you?”

Silas looked and sounded hurt and sad, which made Talia hesitate. She took a deep breath and said, “Well, no, not really. It's just that some of the things you do can be so extra, it makes it weird. I'm not comfortable talking about that sort of stuff.”

Whew. She finally told him exactly how his actions made her feel. Talia had always had trouble saying anything that might hurt someone. She usually tried to be indirect and diplomatic instead of telling someone the straight truth. Silas wrinkled his face and asked, “What do you mean? Like what?”

Talia told him she didn't like talking about personal and private things, and then she showed him some of the texts he had sent. She said she didn't like the questions about sex, her underwear, and stuff like that.

“Come on! You know you like it, T. I'll be good to you and give you whatever you want. It'll be fun. Trust me, girl,” Silas teased.

Talia was shook. She realized she should've been more up front with him from the start and not let things drag on like they did. She also knew she needed to work on setting boundaries and making sure people understood what her limits were.

It was clear to Talia now that Silas knew what he was doing. He had grown up seeing his dad talk to his mom and others in similar ways, and he was copying that behavior. Silas acted like making someone feel embarrassed gave him control. Talia realized this wasn't just about mixed signals. It was about someone ignoring her boundaries on purpose.

Talia and Silas broke up, and Talia is happy they did. It was hard, but Talia feels proud that she stood up for herself and clearly defined her boundaries.

## **You Can Say ‘Stop’**

If you noticed that Silas was doing and saying things that disrespected or embarrassed Talia—good for you! That means you’ve got a solid understanding of what personal boundaries are. You probably also picked up that Silas’s own boundaries were weak. So weak that he was overwhelming Talia. And if you thought Talia should have spoken up sooner or asked a trusted adult or friend for help, you’re showing that you understand how important it is to let people know where your boundaries are.

It’s not shady or rude to say “stop” when someone makes you feel uncomfortable or tries to pressure you into doing something that’s not okay. If someone crosses your boundaries, it’s not your fault. If they won’t stop, talk to someone you trust who can help – a parent, teacher, counselor, coach, spiritual mentor, or friend. And keep speaking up until the problem gets solved.

When people don’t have clear boundaries, they can end up hurting others, especially if they act in aggressive or pushy ways. If someone crosses a boundary you’ve set, it’s normal to feel uneasy or uncomfortable. That feeling is your brain and body telling you something’s not okay. Think of your own experiences:

- Has a stranger ever stood so close to you that it made you nervous?
- Has anyone ever touched you or messaged you in a way that was “overly friendly”?

- Has anyone ever “love bombed” you with compliments and attention?
- Did someone you didn’t know very well ever sneak up behind you and pinch you or grab you?
- Has anyone ever asked you to create and send sexual videos, pictures, and messages?
- Has anyone offered you online game credits or other gifts and told you not to tell anyone?

Those are all boundary issues. People who do these kinds of things are, at best, acting careless. At worst, they are being abusive and manipulative.





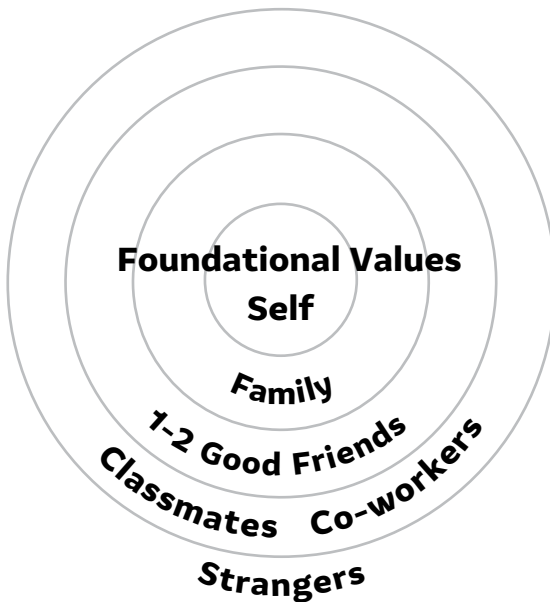
## **Boundaries Are a Life Skill**

Setting appropriate boundaries is a skill, like learning to drive and standing up for yourself. You just need to learn how to do it. You can start by taking these four steps:

- 1.** Imagine a series of circles radiating out from you. Each represents a boundary.
- 2.** Picture people you encounter in one of the circles, depending on the level of closeness with which you and another person are comfortable.
- 3.** Disclose personal information only to those in the closest boundaries.
- 4.** Touch others only in ways appropriate to your boundaries. Also respect the boundaries of others.

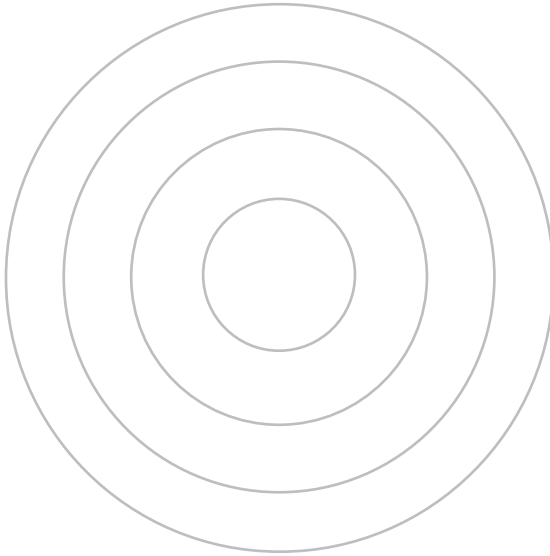
## **Create Your Boundary Wheel**

Now let's see what appropriate boundaries can look like in your life using a boundary wheel. Imagine a series of circles forming a wheel around you. These circles can help you picture how close you will let someone get to you physically and how much emotional or digital sharing you will do with this person.



Everyone you meet fits somewhere along your boundary wheel. Family and good friends are within the innermost circles. Casual acquaintances, classmates, online/gaming friends, and co-workers are farther out, while strangers are the farthest away from you.

*Where do the various people in your life fit within your boundary wheel? Write their names in the appropriate circles.*





# **CHAPTER 2**

*Boundaries 101:  
Respect Yourself, Respect Others*



Did you know your brain is still under construction? It's growing and changing, especially the part called the prefrontal cortex. That's the area that helps you make decisions, control impulses, and think through consequences.

Your brain will continue to grow and develop into your twenties, and that's totally normal. But it also explains why some teens might get tricked into thinking someone is a friend when they're not, or miss the signs when their boundaries are being crossed. It can also make it harder to know what to do when someone doesn't respect those boundaries.

As you get older, your ability to read other people's emotions, understand their actions and intentions, and make smart choices about who to trust will get stronger. In the meantime, there are lots of things you can do right now to protect your boundaries – whether it's your body, your feelings, your friendships, or your digital life.

Pages 19-127 are not included in this excerpt.

*Own your space. Protect your peace.  
Build stronger relationships.*

*Owning My Space: A Teen's Guide to Physical, Emotional, and Digital Boundaries* is your go-to resource for taking control of your life. Written in a respectful and relatable way, with real-life examples throughout, this book helps you spot when something feels off – and respond with confidence.

From demanding friendships to sketchy online interactions, you'll learn how to set boundaries that protect your body, your emotions, your values, and your time. Packed with reflection questions and activities, this guide gives you the skills and mindset to communicate clearly, stay safe, and make choices that feel right for you.

Whether you're navigating school, family, dating relationships, or social media, *Owning My Space* helps you build self-respect, emotional strength, and healthy connections.

This is more than a book – it's your roadmap to speaking up, standing strong, and owning your space with clarity and courage.



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