

RESILIENCE TIPS

How to Set Boundaries

Boundaries protect what's important. Setting boundaries on how we expend our energy, attention and time allows us to sustain these resources for the different arenas that matter in our lives. Health care culture tends to promote values like self-sacrifice and perfectionism, and though there are valid reasons for these values, we also need values such as self-care, support and compassion to promote safe, quality care. Setting healthy boundaries, communicating with ourselves and others “what's ok and not ok” is an important key to sustaining professional and personal well-being.

5 TIPS ON HOW TO SET BOUNDARIES

- 1. Identify the big why.** Health care professionals can do hard things when they understand the big why of meaning & purpose. It can be hard to say no even if we want to; in this case, focus what you're saying yes to: authenticity, health, family, joy, adventure... It's not that you don't care about your team or your work; it is about remembering what else you care about.
- 2. Be clear on what you need and communicate it.** Identifying what you need and asking for it feels vulnerable and takes courage. It can also be an act of kindness to let people know how you would like to be treated, instead of expecting them to do the guesswork and get it wrong.
- 3. Identify the resistance to not having boundaries.** What emotions do you experience when you try to set your own boundaries? Acknowledge these feelings and thoughts; slow down and perhaps answer a few of the “What ifs” to assess their realistic impact. There may be beliefs and habits that you, your family and your team may hold that limit boundary setting. Acknowledge them and ask yourself if they still serve you.
- 4. Ask what happens if boundaries aren't set.** Resentment? Conflict? Burnout? Effects on team relationships, patient care, and turnover?
- 5. Focus on what you can control and let go of what you can't,** especially people's reactions and judgments. Take care of your own feelings, as the process may be uncomfortable, and allow people to take care of their feelings. It's not your responsibility to make others feel ok with your requests.

TRY IT OUT WITH YOUR TEAM

Team culture and leaders are important players in supporting the practice of boundary setting. Sharing examples and discussing boundaries in team meetings can be helpful. Check in with questions such as “When was a time you set a boundary? What was challenging and supportive of you doing it? What did you learn?”

Thank the person for their willingness to let you know what they need and their vulnerability.

BOUNDARY SETTING TIPS AND SCRIPTS

- Practice, practice, practice. (Start small. Practice doesn't make perfect, but practice makes for more ease)
- Consult with colleagues and mentors; seek the support you need.
- I need/want/would like: I would like to take on that assignment and do it justice; what can I take off my plate?
- No, thank you.
- I don't have the capacity right now.
- Thank you for inviting me. It means a lot, but I can't say yes at this time.
- Give me a few days to think about it taking on that project. (Try slowing down the habitual urge to say yes)
- I said yes, but I have reconsidered. I'm sorry to disappoint you. (Give yourself permission to change your mind.)
- Would you be completely opposed to me changing my schedule?
- Is it ridiculous to request a week/day off in the midst of all of this?
- If I can't take a week off, how about a 4-day weekend this month and could we plan for a week off in 3 months? (Recognize and avoid stress reaction's tendency for tunnel vision or all or nothing thinking; negotiate).