

KNOW YOUR LIMITS!

How to Mindfully Observe & Describe Your Limits

Excerpted from *LOVING SOMEONE WITH BPD*
by Shari Manning

When you pay attention to and label your experience, your emotion immediately begins to regulate. But you also know more about how uncomfortable this situation is making you feel. And that tells you something important that you need to know to respond effectively to a person with BPD: what your limits are and when they are being crossed.

Identifying your limits and knowing when they are being crossed is something that I prefer to call *observing limits*, because I want to stress the need to observe yourself and the circumstances objectively. It's far too easy to view people with BPD as demanding and "manipulative" and therefore deserving of ultimatums, boundary setting, and "drawing the line." When you turn your full awareness to your physical sensations, thoughts, and urges, and then label your emotions, you gather information over time about where you have a true limit. And then you also have enough information to know when that limit is being crossed. You no longer have to subject

yourself to seething and stewing until suddenly you've "had it" and impulsively throw up a brick wall against your loved one with BPD.

Observing limits adroitly is a skill developed over time, but it's an important one to cultivate since important personal preferences often seem to get lost in emotionally charged interactions.

All of us have personal limits, and it's our job to maintain them. The crises in the lives of people with BPD and the lengths that we will go to help the people we love often result in our limits being stretched and crossed, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Unfortunately, research is really clear that there is a point of no return with limits. When they are pushed too far, they and the relationship are irreparable. So that that doesn't happen, we have to know where our limits are. The tough thing is that we don't know where our limits are until someone/something pushes up against them. For this reason, we need to observe to know our limits.

5 STEPS TO EFFECTIVELY OBSERVE & DESCRIBE YOUR LIMITS

1. Observe & Describe your emotions, sensations, thoughts and urges.
2. Identify and validate your limits (hint: they can be found inside of you, not outside).
3. Observe when a limit is crossed (or when you over-extend to your regret).
4. Do a Pros/Cons on whether and how to express your limits.
5. Express your limit with DEAR MAN and Validating (having regulated your emotion to increase accurate expression and self-validated your experience).

Based on *Loving Someone with Borderline Personality Disorder*, Shari Manning, Guilford Press, 2011, pp. 80-91.

Worksheet: 5 Steps to Effectively Observe & Describe Your Limits

1. Observe & Describe your experience of the emotions, sensations, thoughts and urges that indicate you have found one of your limits.
2. Identify your limits (hint: they can be found inside of you, not outside). Validate that you have limits and can express your limits.
3. Observe when a limit is crossed (or when you over-extend to your regret). What are the typical signals in your body, your emotions, your thoughts, your urges?
4. Do a Pros/Cons (DT HO 5) to decide whether to express your limits. You may also evaluate the relevant factors (IE HO 8) to assess how intensively you express your limit.
5. Express your limit with DEAR MAN GIVE FAST (IE HO 5, 6, 7) and Validating (IE HO 6A) -- after having again regulated your emotion and validated your experience to increase accurate, effective expression.

Describe.

Express.

Assert.

Reinforce.

*If needed, how can you one-mindfully, firmly, and non-defensively restate your limits (see IE HO 5: MAN, for stay Mindful using "broken record")?

*If the other person becomes dysregulated, what can you validate about their experience?