



How do you set a boundary with family as a couple?

Cut out the card along the dashed line (6 by about 4 inches). Say one line, then stop and listen. Use your own words when they come.

Setting a boundary with family

1. Agree as a couple first, then tell the family together.
2. Say what you'll do, not what they must do.
3. Warm opener, one clear line, no long list of reasons.
4. Pushback: "I hear you're upset. My answer is the same."
5. Follow through calmly, and offer a yes alongside the no.

All the lines, and when to use them

Before we answer your dad about the lake house week, can we decide what we actually want, just the two of us? (Before any family conversation. Agreeing as a couple first means neither of you gets caught between your partner and your parents.)

Mom, I love that you want to help. We're going to handle bedtime our own way, and I'd rather not go back and forth about it. (Your own parent keeps offering advice on something you have decided. Warmth first, then the line, then a clear end to the debate.)

We'd love to see you. Please text before you come by, even an hour ahead is fine. If we don't answer, it's not a good time. (Drop-in visits. It tells them how to get what they want (time with you) on terms that work for you.)

I'm not going to talk about my weight at dinner. If it comes up, I'll change the subject. (A recurring comment you are done hearing. A boundary about your own behavior does not need their agreement to work.)

We can't lend money this time. That's a decision we made together, and it isn't about how we feel about you. (Requests for money. "We decided together" keeps a relative from lobbying the partner they think is softer.)

When your mom asks me about having kids, I'm going to say "that's between us" and look at you. Can you back me up when I do? (To your partner, about their family. You are asking for a specific signal of support, not asking them to confront their parent.)

I hear that you're upset. I've given my answer, and I'm not going to argue it again tonight. (They push back a second or third time. A short repeat holds better than a fresh round of reasons.)

We said we'd head home if the arguing started. We're going to go now. Thanks for dinner, we'll call you Sunday. (Following through on a limit you set in advance. Leaving calmly, with a plan to reconnect, is what makes the next boundary believable.)

I know the holiday plan disappointed you. We still want you close to the kids. Can we put a weekend in January on the calendar? (After the boundary has landed and things are cool. Offering a yes alongside the no shows the boundary is about the arrangement, not the relationship.)

Phrases to avoid

"My partner won't let us come.": It puts your partner in the line of fire and makes the boundary look like a rule you are being forced to follow. Say "we decided."

A long list of reasons: Every reason is something to argue with. One sentence of reasoning, or none, is easier to hold.

"If you do that again, you'll never see the kids.": Ultimatums made in anger are hard to keep and hard to take back. Set consequences on a calm day, and make them proportionate.

Announcing it in the family group chat during the holiday: A public, heated announcement turns a limit into a scene, and everyone reacts to the scene instead of the limit.

"Fine, whatever you want." when it isn't fine: Giving in to end the discomfort tends to come back as resentment, often aimed at your partner rather than the relative.

If you are afraid of your partner, scripts are not the answer: call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or text START to 88788. In danger, call 911.