Setting boundaries in recovery

Ask for what you need and decide what you can do

A boundary guides your own actions

You can explain what you need and what you will do if a situation becomes difficult. You cannot control another person's response. Keep the action realistic and within your control.

Use simple, specific words

Example: "I want to see you, but I will not stay while people pressure me to drink. If that continues, I will leave." Or: "I can talk tomorrow. I need to rest tonight."

Practise without over-explaining

Try: "That does not work for me," or "My answer is still no." Feeling guilty or uncomfortable does not automatically mean the boundary is wrong. Talk it through with a trusted person if you are unsure.

Plan for safety and support

If you fear violence, intimidation or retaliation, seek specialist safety advice before raising a boundary. Do not practise confrontation in an unsafe setting. Ask a counsellor to help you plan an appropriate next step.

Before you change your drinking

If you drink heavily or regularly, need alcohol to feel steady, or have had withdrawal before, speak with a doctor before stopping or sharply reducing. Alcohol withdrawal can be life-threatening. Shaking, sweating or feeling unwell after cutting down needs prompt medical advice. Call 000 for seizures, severe confusion or hallucinations.

Australia: Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline 1800 250 015 (free, confidential advice). Lifeline 13 11 14 (24/7 crisis support). Call 000 if there is immediate danger or a medical emergency.

Make it personal

Write a few words. You can leave questions blank or talk them through with someone.

The situation where I need a boundary...

What I need to protect or make space for...

The words I will use...

The action I can safely take if the boundary is ignored...

Who can help me practise or plan safely?

You do not have to do this alone.

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Safety and support sources: healthdirect.gov.au/alcoholism; adf.org.au/insights/safely-withdrawing-alcohol/; lifeline.org.au/131114; medicarementalhealth.gov.au/provider/national-alcohol-and-other-drug-hotline-16469. Checked 1 October 2026.