

Establishing Healthy Boundaries by Carol Perry

Do you sometimes agree to do things that you don't really want to do?
Do you have a hard time standing up for yourself?

When you say the word "boundaries," many people automatically think of words like restrictions, selfishness, and no fun." But boundaries are anything but those things! Boundaries encourage love, respect and freedom.

A boundary is a healthy barrier between you and other people -- like a strong golden rope that you weave through the areas of your life -- with a banner attached that reads "STOP, that's not accepted here". It's a line in your life, where you have determined that others can not cross.

If you grew up in a family where personal boundaries were non-existent, or not respected, you may have come to believe that you are not worthy of having boundaries. Now, as an adult, your partner, boss, friend or neighbor may be taking advantage of you -- using, abusing, or overworking you, leaving you feeling depressed, anxious, resentful or angry. You can empower yourself by setting personal boundaries.

Set boundaries for your personal and business life, including boundaries governing your own behavior, and for your relationships with a partner, family, friend, and employers. Write down your boundaries so that they are clearly formulated in your mind, and easy to refer back to. You can begin to create your own boundaries by filling in the blanks of these two basic statements:

- 1. I have a right to _____.**
- 2. People may not _____.**

For example:

I have a right to:

1. Receive help around the house
2. Change my mind
3. Spend my time/money as I choose
4. Say 'no' when I decide
5. Say "yes" when I decide

People may not:

1. Interrupt me and talk over me
2. Invade my space
3. Make decisions for me
4. Bring drugs into my home
5. Verbally abuse me

Boundaries that are clearly defined and defended will let others know what you expect from them, and what they can expect from you. A relationship with boundaries invites comfort and security, and will grow strong. Likewise, a relationship with no boundaries will surely end in pain and resentment, or worse. Setting boundaries teaches others how to treat you. Some tips for your boundaries include:

1. Plan your boundaries in advance of needing them.
2. Draw your line. Decide what behavior is and isn't acceptable.
3. When a situation arises, clearly and patiently explain your boundary and your feelings about why you set this boundary.
4. When your boundaries are tested, defend them. You have a right to have your boundaries respected.
5. Practice saying NO, kindly but firmly.
6. If someone continuously refuses to acknowledge and respect your boundaries, remove yourself from their presence.

To develop your new boundaries, it's very important to have safe, supportive, helpful people in your life. Safe people will not try to discourage you, or tell you that you are being selfish. Safe people are important to have in your life always, but especially at this stage, when you are walking in unfamiliar territory. They will help you to build confidence to set boundaries with others, including unsafe people.

Many people have distorted boundaries. We learn boundaries as children, and certain behaviors from our parents may distort normal boundary development. For example, a controlling parent may raise a child who has no clear boundaries as an adult. Also, children raised by lax parents often grow into adults who are controlling, doing their best to make others responsible for them.

Learning to set healthy boundaries can be very difficult at first, but is well worth all effort! People can't control someone with a healthy sense of boundaries, and someone with a healthy sense of boundaries will not be controlling.

People with a healthy set of boundaries take full responsibility for themselves, and encourage others to do so as well. This encourages people to be the best they can be.

Once your boundaries are set, and others know which lines they cannot cross, it's time to recognize and put in place your internal boundary. An internal boundary acts as an invisible coat of armor that prevents and shields you from verbal hurts. It stops you from automatically taking in or accepting another's hurtful words. For example, if someone accuses you of being overbearing, your internal boundary stops the accusation in its tracks, and gives you the opportunity to examine it. When something hurtful is directed towards you, you'll want to acknowledge your internal boundary and ask yourself the following three questions:

- ✓ Have I displayed behavior that would validate their statement?" Be honest with yourself.
- ✓ Is this really about me, or is it about them? Often times, we accuse others of traits that we dislike in ourselves. Your accuser may have a problem of being overbearing.
- ✓ What can I say or do to stand up for myself? When someone disrespects you, it's important that you defend your boundaries by letting them know. Each time you defend a boundary, your ability to defend your boundaries becomes stronger.

When you first start setting and defending your boundaries, some people in your life may not like it. They may call you selfish, unreasonable or worse, because you are now not willing to allow them to treat you poorly, bend to their whims, or rescue them from their own messes. That's okay! In time, most reasonable people learn to accept and respect your boundaries, and often even learn to set their own, by following your example. And as for those who don't? Well, it may be time to rethink the relationship.

<http://www.gbonkers.com/PDF%20Docs/1Healthy%20boundaries.pdf>

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