

Boundaries (II)

Healthy vs. unhealthy boundaries review

HEALTHY BOUNDARIES allow you to:

- Have high self-esteem and self-respect.
- Share personal information gradually, in a mutually sharing and trusting relationship.
- Protect physical and emotional space from intrusion.
- Have an equal partnership where responsibility and power are shared.
- Be assertive. Confidently and truthfully say “yes” or “no” and be okay when others say “no” to you.
- Separate your needs, thoughts, feelings, and desires from others. Recognize that your boundaries and needs are different from others.
- Empower yourself to make healthy choices and take responsibility for yourself.

UNHEALTHY BOUNDARIES are characterized by:

- Sharing too much too soon or, at the other end of the spectrum, closing yourself off and not expressing your need and wants.
- Feeling responsible for others’ happiness.
- Inability to say “no” for fear of rejection or abandonment.
- Weak sense of your own identity. You base how you feel about yourself on how others treat you.
- Disempowerment. You allow others to make decisions for you; consequently, you feel powerless and do not take responsibility for your own life.

Barriers to Boundary Setting

It seems obvious that no one would want his/her boundaries violated. So why do we allow it?

Why do we NOT enforce or uphold our boundaries?

- FEAR of rejection and, ultimately, abandonment.
- FEAR of confrontation.
- GUILT.
- We were not taught healthy boundaries.
- Safety Concerns

If you are dealing with someone who is physically dangerous or threatening to you, it may not be safe to attempt to set explicit boundaries with them. If you are in this situation, it can be helpful to work with a counsellor, therapist or advocate to create a safety plan and boundary setting may be a part of this.

Tips for Setting Healthy Boundaries

When you identify the need to set a boundary, do it clearly, calmly, firmly, respectfully, and in as few words as possible. Do not justify, get angry, or apologize for the boundary you are setting.

You are not responsible for the other person's reaction to the boundary you are setting. You are only responsible for communicating your boundary in a respectful manner. Remember, your behaviour must match the boundaries you are setting. You cannot successfully establish a clear boundary if you send mixed messages by setting a boundary and then apologizing for it.

At first, you will probably feel selfish, guilty, or embarrassed when you set a boundary. Remind yourself you have a right to self-care and boundary setting can be an important form of self-care. Setting boundaries takes practice and determination. Don't let anxiety, fear or guilt prevent you from taking care of yourself.

When you feel anger or resentment or find yourself complaining, you probably need to set a boundary. Listen to yourself, determine what you need to do or say, then communicate clearly.

Learning to set healthy boundaries takes time. It is a process. Set them in your own time frame, not when someone else tells you. Develop a support system of people who respect your right to set boundaries.

References:

Adapted by *the Violence Intervention and Prevention Center* from *PositivelyPositive.com*, *outofthefog.net* and the book *Boundaries: Where You End and I Begin* by Anne Katherine.