

## Healthy Boundaries and why we need them.



Personal boundaries are the limits that you decide work for you on how people can treat you, how they can behave around you, and what they can expect from you.

If you find the concept of healthy boundaries difficult to understand, think of other sorts of boundaries. Property lines, garden fences, lines in the sand.... do you have any such markers,

limits, or 'stop signs' in your personal life?

### Why do I need boundaries?

If we don't set healthy boundaries, we are likely to constantly be at the mercies of others. This means allowing others to tell us how to think, act, and feel. It also means we tend to spend our time and energy doing what others want us to do, rather than make our own choices about what we honestly wish to do.

Long term this can lead to feelings of frustration and depression due to feeling unfulfilled or lost. At its worse, not setting boundaries can allow others to do things to you that are upsetting or even harmful.

If we don't set boundaries, people won't know how to act around us, leaving us feeling disrespected. The other side of this coin is that without boundaries we may be less likely to recognise the boundaries set by others and might unwittingly be disrespecting them.

### Some Key Signs that you lack strong boundaries

#### You feel socially anxious –

It is usual for someone with weak emotional boundaries to walk into a room and believe everyone notices or cares. You may even think you know what others are thinking about you, what judgments they cast and so forth. This can lead to terrible self-consciousness and social anxiety. Responding as if you know what is in the minds and hearts of other people is a fundamental boundary confusion issue.

#### You're easily overwhelmed emotionally.

This can happen if you don't instinctively know where to draw the lines of emotional responsibility between self and other. You may be carrying the burden of others' emotions for which you aren't responsible. For the most part,

if you are clear about where to take responsibility and where your responsibility ends, you can usually manage your emotions without getting overwhelmed.

### **You seek approval**

Unable to distinguish your emotions (that you can control) from the emotions of others (that you cannot control) you seek to win over others by pleasing them by *meeting their needs* or casting yourself in a favourable light. When we do this, we are putting other people's values, opinions and needs above our own, depending on their approval to make us feel ok. When we seek the approval of others, we sacrifice our *own needs* – in order to feel safe within the relationship. Long term this is a heavy price to pay – seeking the approval of others and living your life trying to please them may well leave you feeling unfulfilled and unhappy. Your own approval is what matters.

### **Your relationships tend to be difficult or dramatic.**

Having few or no boundaries give others a signal that you don't know how to take care of yourself. Healthy relationships are based on honesty and compromise. If you are saying "yes" to something when you would rather be saying "no" or spending all your time doing what the others want will eventually lead to feelings of resentment.

This often leads to you trying to manipulate back the energy and power you lost by nagging the other person or complaining, or even punishing them in little ways. In other words, a bad case of passive aggression. You might also blame others all the time, which is a way of not facing up to the fact that really, you didn't set a boundary, and that you are the one who is responsible for your life.

### **You believe that to say 'No' is the same as letting someone down.**

Do you hate letting friends and family down or feel anxious about not being able to meet the needs of others? Or do you often change your plans to meet the needs of others? People without boundaries tend to go along with other people's plans, or worry about letting other people down to the extent they just say yes even when they would prefer to say no.

### **Two words – guilt and anxiety.**

Do you think that you are responsible for others' happiness? If you lack boundaries you may suffer from ongoing guilt and fear, and probably feel responsible if others aren't happy. Each individual is responsible for their own life choices and happiness.

### **You often feel exhausted.**

Do you feel constantly busy with little or no time for yourself? Always doing what others want means you are left to cram your own life in the time leftover, which is exhausting. The more time you spend doing things for others, the less time you have for yourself. And this means you have less time to get done what you need to, leaving you constantly experiencing stress as you try to 'fit in' what you need to do or rush through things you meant to enjoy or at worst ignoring your own needs. Setting boundaries, on the other hand, tends to be enlivening freeing up time that you can use for your self-care and well-being.

### **You often don't know your true self.**

Even if you don't realise it, you are probably often doing what others want instead of what you want and basing your opinion of yourself on what others think of you. This can leave you feeling angry or annoyed with yourself and constantly worried about how others view you.

### **Your secret fear is of being rejected or abandoned.**

Lacking boundaries can often be traced back to a childhood where you took on the message that to not do what others want you to do results in being rejected or abandoned.

Both the seeking approval and the socially anxious boundary issues are self-sabotaging behaviours that are derived from a rejection attachment. A rejection attachment gets triggered when we unwittingly seek out rejection from others.

When we are feeling that others are rejecting us, we are in fact, rejecting ourselves. When we seek to over-please people because we fear being rejected, we are inviting rejection from them.

We aren't consciously aware this is what we are doing, yet the result proves this attachment to rejection because the result is ultimately ending in rejection. Understanding this self-sabotage allows us to make other choices on how to behave where we are no longer seeking rejection but getting what we consciously want to receive, acceptance.

### **Boundaries are not ...**

Boundaries are not something that makes you unhappy. So many of us are scared to set boundaries, worried we won't be liked, and our life will then be

miserable. The reverse tends to be true. If you set boundaries, you then attract people who are willing to respect you and want good things for you.

Boundaries are not to limit your joy, but to protect your joy. Your relationships get better, and you enjoy the things you choose to do because they match your values.

Boundaries are not set in stone. As you learn more of who you are and experience personal lessons in life, you will change. So, too, will your boundaries.

Boundaries are not about right or wrong. Healthy boundaries are based on our value systems and perspective and might be different than someone else's. This also means that you don't have to explain or defend your boundaries. You just need to set them. If someone doesn't want to abide by them or refuses to accept them, then question if you need that person in your life anymore.

### How can I set healthy boundaries?



What we are striving for is healthy interdependent relationships. We want friends who are allies. With alliances, it is necessary to negotiate boundaries. Here is what I am willing to do, and here is what I need from you. We want a romantic relationship with a partner who will share our journey with us.

To make that possible it is necessary to communicate, share feelings, and negotiate agreements about behaviour. By setting boundaries, we are communicating with another person. We are telling them who we are and what we need. It is much more effective to do that directly and honestly than to expect them to read our minds - and then punish them when they cannot.

One of the first steps is in realising that the purpose of having boundaries is to protect and take care of ourselves. Setting healthy boundaries involves taking care of yourself and knowing what you like, need, want, and don't want.

Learning how to set boundaries is a necessary step in learning to be a friend to ourselves. It is our responsibility to take care of ourselves - to protect ourselves when it is necessary. It is impossible to learn to be loving to ourselves without owning our self - and owning our rights and responsibilities as co-creators of our lives."

Changing our relationship with ourselves is vital to make any long-term changes in our relationships with others. It is vital to learn to respect and honour our selves, so that we can awaken to the need to have boundaries that let other people know that we deserve and demand respect.

If certain situations and people aren't matching your truth, they will either adjust their behaviours or depart from your reality. Boundaries can be a gift to others as well as protection for your time and resources. Saying "no" to someone no can be a sign of trust and respect. Setting boundaries with others permits them to do the same.

We need to start learning how to be emotionally honest with ourselves, how to start owing our feelings, and how to communicate directly and honestly. Setting personal boundaries is vital part of healthy relationships - which are impossible without communication. It is important in setting boundaries to identify your basic human rights

### Some basic rights

- I have a right to say no without feeling guilty.
- I have a right to be treated with respect.
- I have a right to make my needs as important as others.
- I have a right to be accepting of my mistakes and failures.
- I have a right not to meet others' unreasonable expectations of me.
- I have the right to change my mind.
- I have the right not to be responsible for others' actions, feelings, or behaviour.
- I have the right to make decisions based on my feelings.
- I have the right to determine my priorities.

Once you identify your rights and choose to believe in them and live by them, you'll find respecting them easier. When you respect your rights, you'll stop spending energy pacifying or pleasing others who disrespect you.

### Tips for setting boundaries

**Learn how to say No.** Saying no is not easy but it's necessary if we are to put in strong boundaries of self-care.

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means being able to  
say "Yes" to other  
possibilities

### **Saying “No” when you don’t have the time...**

- I’m not taking on anything else right now.
- I’m booked into something else.
- I’m not taking on new things.
- I don't have any openings in my schedule.
- Thanks for thinking of me but no thanks, I have other commitments

### **Saying “No” to an invitation or offer...**

- I appreciate the offer, but I have no spare time at the moment.
- I’d love to, but I can’t.
- I appreciate the invitation, but I am completely booked.
- Thanks for thinking of me, but I can’t.
- Regrettably, I’m not able to.
- You’re so kind to think of me, but I can’t.
- Thanks for the offer, but I can’t.
- Thanks, but no, maybe another time.
- Sounds great, but I can’t commit.
- No thank you, but it sounds lovely.
- Thanks, but no thanks.

### **How to say “No” when it’s not of interest to you...**

- It doesn’t sound like the right fit.
- I’m not sure I’m the best for it.
- I believe I wouldn’t fit the bill, sorry.
- It’s not a good idea for me.
- I don’t think I’m the right person for that.
- Thanks for thinking of me, but it’s not something that I would want to be involved with.

Sometimes it's a good idea to say, "leave it with me and I'll get back to you". This allows you to reflect on the request and question your reasons for feeling that you have to say "Yes". Is it because you want to do something or that you don't want to let others down by saying “No”? If this is the case the person you are letting down is yourself. And remember if the person you are saying no to cares about you, they will understand.

By saying no to something that you don’t want to do you are freeing up time to spend time doing things that are important to you or trying out new opportunities. Saying no ultimately means saying yes to other possibilities. It



forms a boundary that shows you clearly that you can't do it all and shouldn't. When you are clear on purpose, you can say no without guilt and mean it. Another way of maintaining boundaries is in clear communication of our needs and wants.

**Use "I" statements - "I" statements "help you own your feelings** and allow others to feel more at ease and less defensive." Rather than saying, "You need to do this," or "You should always," use phrases such as: "I feel," or "I would appreciate," or "I would like it if"

For more information on boundaries and assertiveness techniques the following books are very useful...

- Assert Yourself by Gael Lindenfield
- Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How To Say No by Henry Cloud & John Townsend

And remember...Counselling can provide the opportunity to explore and understand the reasons that you have weak boundaries and help you take responsibility for living your life according to your needs and beliefs.