

WHAT IS A BOUNDARY, ANYWAY?

A boundary is something that sets a border or limit. That border or limit can be physical, emotional, or intellectual.

Physical boundaries refer to your body: your ability to control how and when others approach you, see you, or touch you. Refusing a hug from someone you do not like is an example of setting a physical boundary, as is locking a door on your bedroom, shutting a curtain in your window, and building a fence between your home and your neighbor's property. You are responsible for your body, not others. This includes what you eat, how much sleep and exercise you get and how you behave.

Emotional boundaries have to do with your feelings: your ability to recognize, accept, and express your feelings, separate and distinct from those of others. When your emotional boundaries are well-developed, you – not other people – are in charge of your moods, feelings, and problems. You can be compassionate toward others without taking on their problems or feelings and making them your own. You also are able to handle your problems yourself instead of placing blame on everybody else for your troubles.

Intellectual boundaries allow you to have your own thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and values. You can speak for yourself, express your opinions, recognize ideas belonging to you, and separate out ideas coming from other people and sources. When you assert your intellectual boundaries, you recognize and affirm your mental independence. When you force your ideas on others, you are violating their boundaries.

Other boundaries include resources such as time and money. We each have a certain amount of time to complete tasks. It is our responsibility to recognize that time doesn't wait for us. If we are late, or we don't finish a task on time, it is our responsibility to accept that situation, not to blame it on time. Time is a constant. It will never change. Money, like time, is also limited. Money doesn't grow on trees. You are responsible for earning your money, and you decide how to spend it. Others cannot be blamed for our lack of discipline when it comes to work or spending irresponsibly.

Boundaries can be spoken or unspoken. Your actions (walking away from a person who is insulting you) speak as loudly as your *words (I won't stand for this!)* Both can be effective ways of communicating your boundaries.

The purpose of setting boundaries is to take care of yourself. Boundaries are ways to appropriately protect yourself, not create walls. Refusing to go rock climbing with friends when you are not properly trained for this sport can be a life

saving boundary. Saying no to obligations that make you feel miserable or cause you unbearable stress are ways to protect your health, not isolate you from people.

Setting a boundary means you respect yourself. When you respect yourself, you protect yourself from inappropriate behavior. For example, you do not get drunk or take dangerous drugs to impress others. By protecting yourself this way, your self-worth is likely to remain high or grow.

Boundaries should be clear, specific, reasonable, and enforceable. For example, you tell your friend you will hang out on Saturday, but you insist that you must do homework on Sunday and will not go out that day. You not only set this boundary, but you keep it. Boundaries are worthless if you don't stick to them.

In healthy relationships, people respect each other's boundaries. Each person respects the needs, values, thoughts, and feelings of the other, regardless of how they differ from their own. When respect is mutual, the self worth of *both* people will probably increase.

There are two types of people with poor boundaries. Which one are you?

The Victim. This person never says how they truly think or feel because they are afraid of the feelings of others. They are afraid to speak their mind, say no, or set a limit because they might hurt someone's feelings or they might make someone mad. As a result, The Victim is always being stepped on, made to feel guilty, and doing things out of obligation instead of a true desire to do that activity. Victims blame others for violating their boundaries, claiming they had no control over the situation. In reality, victims violate their own boundaries.

The Intruder. This person tends to feel as though everyone is entitled to *his* opinion. The thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of others are not different, but wrong. The Intruder feels that his way is the best way and therefore, the right way. The Intruder will often feel hurt or upset, even rejected when he is told "no." He might not take "no" for an answer at all. Intruders do not like the fact that others have limits and will resent it when people enforce them. They often do not like to follow rules and will get into fights with others, claiming they had "nothing to do with it." Intruders will rarely take responsibility or admit fault. When they do, it's because the other guy "made them do it." Intruders violate the boundaries of others.

Let's take an inventory of ten key areas to see how well you have defined your boundaries.

- 1) *Your Body*. Our most basic boundary is our body. Whenever this boundary is crossed, we feel more like objects than people.
- 2) *Your Feelings*. Your feelings, whether good or bad, are your property. They fall within your boundary and are your responsibility. Other people's feelings are their responsibility. We should always be sensitive to the feelings of others, but we should never take responsibility for them.
- 3) *Your Attitudes*. Often we do not own our own attitudes. We take responsibility for the attitudes of others and allow their expectations of us to shape what we do.
- 4) *Your Behaviors*. Being able to own our behavior is critical for having a sense of power and control over our lives. We must reap what we sow, and not allow someone or something else to act as a buffer for the consequences of our actions.
- 5) *Your Thoughts*. We can not be responsible for the thoughts of others. If someone is thinking good or bad about us, we must accept it. We should listen to what people are saying and evaluate it, but if we are convinced that how we are living is right, we should do what we want and allow people the freedom to think whatever they want. Boundaries are also crossed when we expect others to know what we are thinking. People can not read our minds. Do not hold others responsible for your thoughts.
- 6) *Your Abilities*. We should never compare ourselves to others! We should recognize our abilities and make the most of them, not criticize ourselves for what we *can't* do.
- 7) *Your Choices*. The hub of responsibility is choice. Boundaries are crossed whenever we make someone else's choice for them or whenever we allow them to make our choices for us. Methods commonly used include threats, the silent treatment, "If you love me you will" or "How could you do this to me" statements.
- 8) *Your Desires*. When have you blamed others for your deprivation rather than seeing your desires as your responsibility and then working to fulfill them? When have you owned someone else's desire and, out of a sense of obligation rather than love, tried to fulfill it for them?
- 9) *Your Limits*. Our time, energy, or money, knowledge, and ability is limited. If we extend too far, it's our fault. At the same time, we cannot decide where someone else's limits are. Know where to draw the line.
- 10) *Your Negative Assertions*. You have the right to say no. Use it! Boundaries are crossed when we feel guilty over saying no.

YOU

BODY

FEELINGS

ATTITUDES

BEHAVIORS

THOUGHTS

ABILITIES

CHOICES

DESIRES

LIMITS

OTHERS

BODY

FEELINGS

ATTITUDES

BEHAVIORS

THOUGHTS

ABILITIES

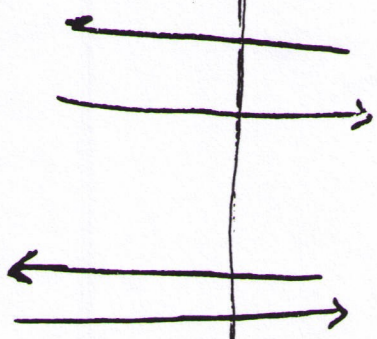
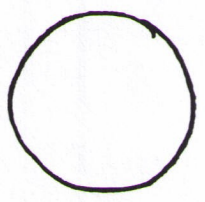
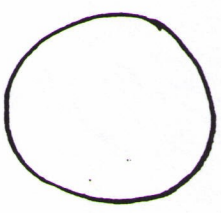
CHOICES

DESIRES

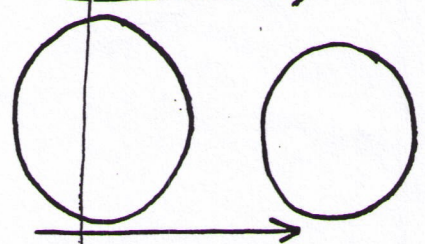
LIMITS

OTHERS

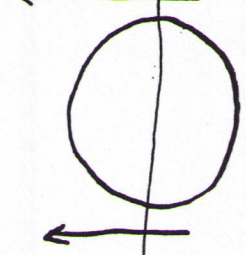
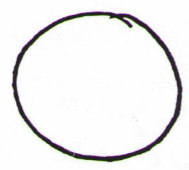
YOU



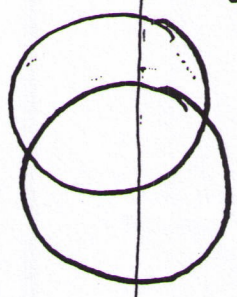
victim / poor boundaries



Intruder / poor boundaries



Enmeshed / caretaking



Isolating

