



Healthy Boundaries Create Healthy Relationships.
Unhealthy Boundaries Create Dysfunctional Ones.

It is no exaggeration to say that almost every client I meet eventually realizes that they're in serious need of a Healthy Boundary tune up - or even a complete overhaul! For this reason, I thought it may be helpful if I share a few tips on how to establish healthy boundaries – and explore why we need them.

Those of us raised in dysfunctional families have probably had very little experience with healthy boundaries. In this case, learning how to establish them must be an important goal in our personal growth. However, in order to achieve this, we must overcome low self-esteem and passivity. We need to learn to identify and respect our rights and needs and become skilled at taking care of ourselves assertively in relationships.

Unhealthy boundaries cause emotional pain that can lead to dependency, depression, anxiety, and even stress-induced physical illness. A lack of boundaries is like leaving the door to your home unlocked: anyone, including unwelcome guests, can enter at will. On the other hand, having too rigid boundaries can lead to isolation, like living in a castle surrounded by a mote. No one can get in, and you can't get out.

What Are Boundaries?

Boundaries are rules or limits that we create to define for ourselves what are reasonable, safe and appropriate ways for other people to behave toward us and around us. They are guidelines on how we will respond when someone steps outside those limits. Crossing our boundaries is like ignoring a “No Trespassing” sign – there will be consequences!

Personal boundaries define where you end and others begin and they are determined by the amount of physical and emotional space you allow between yourself and others. Personal boundaries help you decide what types of communication, behavior, and interaction are acceptable to you.

Why is it important to set boundaries?

- To practice self-care and self-respect
- To communicate your needs in a relationship
- To make time and space for positive interactions
- To set limits in a relationship in a way that is healthy

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 other people's happiness
- The inability to say “no” for fear of rejection or abandonment.
- A weak sense of your own identity wherein you base your personal worth on how others treat you.
- Disempowerment - you allow others to make decisions for you and consequently, you feel powerless and do not take responsibility for your own life.

Here are some 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. If it upset them, know it is their problem. Some people, especially those who are controlling, abusing, or manipulating you, might test you. Plan on it, expect it, but remain firm. Remember, your behavior must match the boundaries you are setting. You cannot successfully establish a clear boundary if you send mixed messages by apologizing.
- At first, you will probably feel selfish, guilty, or embarrassed when you set a boundary. Do it anyway and remind yourself you have a right to 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 whining or complaining, you probably need to set a boundary. Listen to yourself, determine what you need to do or say, then communicate assertively.
- 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. Eliminate toxic persons from your life— those who want to manipulate, abuse, and control you.

Creating healthy boundaries is empowering. By setting and enforcing our personal limits, we are protecting our self esteem, our self-respect, and we are ensuring that we have the skills needed to enjoy healthy relationships.