

BOUNDARIES

A boundary is a personal limit that allows me to love you without resentment. It allows me to give to you and receive from you without compromising my own integrity. A boundary enables my inner child to feel safe and nurtured.

I can not ignore a boundary without paying a price. I can not have a boundary of mine violated without it affecting the connection between us.

Setting my boundaries clearly is what allows me to be in charge of my peace. The focus is on my behavior, not on controlling your behavior.

I often do not set clear boundaries because I fear I will hurt you, I fear I will get rejected by you, or I fear I will feel foolish, embarrassed or ashamed.

Setting a boundary always creates the risk of finding out a truth about myself, about you or about our relationship.

The lower my pain tolerance, the shorter my reaction time will be to letting you know when you have violated my boundaries. The higher my pain tolerance, the more prone I will be to exploding before setting my boundaries.

Before I knew how to take care of myself, I focused on controlling you so I could be comfortable.

When I was not aware of my true boundaries I did a lot of things I did not want to do with people I did not like.

Sometimes I discover my boundary after it has been violated. When this occurs I often feel angry, I blame you, and I resent you.

Other times, I discover my boundary as it is being violated. With this discovery, I may not take action, even if I am aware of not liking how I feel. Over time and with practice, my ability to take action is gradually catching up with my awareness. I am getting better.

I can also set my boundaries pro-actively. This is the ideal and it saves time, and it prevents chaos, crisis and pain. It is what I am working towards.

There are times when I inadvertently violate my boundaries because I do not know what to do. The situation might have taken me by surprise or the situation was imperfect and there just was not a good solution. The most important thing for me to remember is for me to forgive myself and to use the situation for learning. The better I become at setting my boundaries, the fewer times I find myself in awkward situations because I am able to nip a lot of these situations in the bud before they become painful.

When I discover that my boundaries have been violated I first discharge my feelings (writing and burning) and I forgive myself. I talk to my inner child and pin point the moment that I started to feel violated. I identify as much as possible exactly what made me feel uncomfortable. I also look at what kept me from speaking up. I look for habitual patterns that keep me from setting my boundaries on a consistent basis. I then create a different scenario. I make up different responses I could have given. I concentrate on making earlier interventions. I role play different responses in my mind, or I dialogue on paper, or I role play with a friend.

Sometimes I take a "time out." It is okay for me to delay setting a boundary if I am not sure what I feel or if I do not want to say it at the time. If this is the case, I will say: "I'm not sure what I feel about this, but I'll get back to you as soon as I do." "I'm not comfortable talking about this right at the moment, and need some time to think before I answer you." "Let me think about this first." "I will need to get back to you on this."

One way I discover what I want is by asking myself, "What do I want to get from this? Am I clear about what result I want from the boundary I am setting?" I want to discover what limits I have that will keep me feeling peaceful. I want to know what things I can do that will help me stay in the loving and out of resentment.

When I am ready to disclose my boundaries I use "I" statements, not "we" or "you" statements. I stay with my own experiences. I do not argue the merits of my case. I can say:

"My experience is _____."

"I am willing to _____. I am not willing to _____."

"What I would like from you is _____."

When I talk from my experience I stay out of power struggles and I stay centered in my own power. I do not weaken my position by having my attention diverted into unprovable points like: "You're not trying hard enough." "Yes, I am, you just can't see it."

I always speak from my heart and I use kind words. In the past, I have been so good at hiding my feelings, you might not even be aware that you have been violating me.

I know that it is vitally important for my words to match my actions, and as I continue to grow and expand I will revise, clarify, and update my boundaries. I will let you know my revisions so we will always be clear and so my actions will continue to match my words.

When I define my boundaries, I know that I must be prepared for your reactions. You may respond with anger, you may withdraw your loving, you may try to make me wrong, or you may not be willing to work out a solution with me.

The most gentle way for me to set my boundaries is to just let you know what I see. This intervention is useful when I am not clear on what I want to be different. I can say, "I don't know yet what I need to happen between us, but I am uncomfortable with what is happening."

When I know what I need to do in order to honor myself I will tell you in a non-shaming, non-manipulative, respectful way. I will say, "It's not ok with me that _____ is going on. I've thought it through and have decided to do _____ from now on. "I am not comfortable with _____ and _____ is what I'd like to have happen." "I know that I've done _____ for a long time, but I am changing and I've decided not to do that anymore."

I know that by setting new boundaries I may be changing my relationship with you. When I change my behavior, and act differently I know you might feel uncomfortable and threatened and demand that I change back to the way I was. However, these reactions are no longer sufficient reasons for me to abandon my boundaries. I also know that I do not need to make your reactions wrong.

If I need to take another step to protect my boundaries I will make "cause and effect" statements that are logical, non-punitive and realistically enforceable by me. I focus on actions that I am prepared to follow through on. I know you are free to do what you want to do, and at the

same time I am letting you know what actions I will be taking to keep myself safe. I have given up my need to control you. I only focus on what I can do to maintain my peace. I will say, "Your decision to _____ is your decision for _____ to occur." "Your choice to _____ is your choice for me to do _____." "Your choice to yell at me is your choice for me to leave." "Your choice to drink is your choice for us to separate."

As a last resort, in situations where there is physical abuse, or in a situation where neither one of us has a willingness to connect and learn, I will take action without words. I will just walk away. This is the most intense level of boundary setting because it does not seek resolution or mutuality.

SUMMARY

Before I confront you with my new boundaries (1) I write and burn as a way to vent my anger, resentment and blaming feelings. (2) I then write a letter that I can read you. (2a) I describe in factual detail the events and behaviors I remember happening without interpretations. (2b) I describe the feelings it brought up in me. (2c) I describe how this behavior/incident impacted my life. (2d) I make a clear statement about what was not okay with me. "It is not okay with me that you physically hurt me when I was too little to defend myself." "It is not okay with me that you made disparaging remarks to me about my sexuality when I was a teenager." "The way you addressed your remarks to me in the staff meeting is not okay with me." (2e) I clearly request what I want. "I would like an acknowledgement from you that this happened." "I want an apology from you." "I do not want you to speak to me in a threatening manner again." (2f) I clearly tell you what I am prepared to do to take care of myself. "If this happens again, I will leave and return when the circumstances are different." "Rather than staying silent in the future, you can expect me, in this type of situation, to ask you to hold your comments until we can talk privately."

When I am ready to share my new boundaries with you, I make an appointment at a time and place that I know we will not be disturbed. I prefer to tell you in person or by letter.

Sharing with you on this level is very scary and totally unpredictable so I prepare for anything to happen. We could come to an agreement and become closer, you could deny or minimize the issue, you could attack me with put downs or explosions, or we could sever our relationship. The purpose of sharing is to speak my truth, not to blame you for my problems.

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A Checklist on Boundaries in a Relationship

When you give up your boundaries in a relationship you:

- Are unclear about your preferences
- Do not notice unhappiness since enduring is your concern
- Alter your behavior, plans, or opinions to fit the current moods or circumstances of another (live reactively)
- Do more and more for less and less
- Take as truth the most recent opinion you have heard
- Live hopefully while wishing and waiting
- Are satisfied if you are coping and surviving
- Let the other's minimal improvement maintain your stalemate
- Have few hobbies because you have no attention span for self-directed activity
- Make exceptions for a person for things you would not tolerate in anyone else/accept alibis
- Are manipulated by flattery so that you lose objectivity
- Try to create intimacy with a narcissist
- Are so strongly affected by another that obsession results
- Will forsake every personal limit to get sex or the promise of it
- See your partner as causing your excitement
- Feel hurt and victimized but not angry
- Act out of compliance and compromise
- Do favors that you inwardly resist (cannot say no)
- Disregard intuition in favor of wishes
- Allow your partner to abuse your children or friends
- Mostly feel afraid and confused
- Are enmeshed in a drama that is beyond your control
- Are living a life that is not yours, and that seems unalterable
- Commit yourself for as long as the other needs you to be committed (no bottom line)
- Believe you have no right to secrets

When your boundaries are intact in a relationship you:

- Have clear preferences and act upon them
- Recognize when you are happy/unhappy
- Acknowledge moods and circumstances around you while remaining centered (live actively)
- Do more when that gets results
- Trust your own intuition while being open to other's opinions
- Live optimistically while co-working on change
- Are only satisfied if you are thriving
- Are encouraged by sincere, ongoing change for the better
- Have excited interest in self-enhancing hobbies and projects
- Have a personal standard, albeit flexible, that applies to everyone and asks for accountability
- Appreciate feedback and can distinguish it from attempts to manipulate
- Relate only to partners with whom mutual love is possible
- Are strongly affected by your partner's behavior and take it as information
- Integrate sex so that you can enjoy it but never at the cost of your integrity
- See your partner as stimulating your excitement
- Let yourself feel anger, say "ouch" and embark upon a program of change
- Act out of agreement and negotiation
- Only do favors you choose to do (you can say no)
- Honor intuitions and distinguish them from wishes
- Insist others' boundaries be as safe as your own
- Mostly feel secure and clear
- Are always aware of choices
- Are living a life that mostly approximates what you always wanted for yourself
- Decide how, to what extent, and how long you will be committed
- Protect your private matters without having to lie or be surreptitious