

## Boundaries - Protection for Heart, Mind, and Soul

We have met very few people who say:

- "My parents taught me how to take care of myself and get my needs met."
- "I know how to say no when I really mean it and how to stop people from hurting me in any way."
- "I know how to honor myself!"

If you're able to say any of those, you're indeed fortunate and definitely in the minority.

What we usually hear is people saying they don't know how to stand for themselves, or to get what they need from others. Most women don't even appreciate they have the right to say, "NO!", or "You can't treat me that way!"

While men have issues with boundaries, it's an especially big problem for most women. They've been taught to take care of others before themselves. Boundaries, strong or weak, impact you all the time, with or without your awareness. If you don't take care of yourself first you lose your edge and limit your ability to have a healthy, productive, and growth oriented life.

By coaching definition, boundaries are the invisible lines you draw around yourself to protect you from damaging and hurtful behaviors of others. They're not walls, they're filters that allow supportive and nurturing behaviors in while keeping out the rest. We all have boundaries, whether we recognize them or not. We want you to know your boundaries and know how to maintain them.

So where do you begin? How do you become stronger and take better care of yourself? There is a step-by-step process for strengthening your boundaries, including identification of damaging behaviors and changing your communication style. It's a simple process to understand though not necessarily easy to make part of your life. The process requires you to make some changes and change is seldom easy. (It's likely that many of the tolerations you've already listed involve other people and boundary issues.)

It's also important to be aware that as you make changes in your life, all the relationships you're in will change. Some people will leave your life and others will honor and respect your growth. Either way, what's most important is to keep your focus on how best to take care of YOU and your needs.

We say the same thing about standards in the next section of this report. The truth is many of the people in your life have a vested interest in you staying the



way you are. They don't want you to change and grow and it's likely these people, if they're not willing to respect your choices, will be leaving your life.

Identifying the boundary is, perhaps, the easiest part of this process. How do you know when your boundaries are being violated? It has to do with how you feel and respond/react when the behavior is happening. Do you cringe? Feel disrespected? Lash out? Boundary violations will not generate happy feelings. Pay attention to your feelings, your gut. Is your response because of what's being said or done, or is it a natural reaction to a distasteful topic? If it's the former, that's when you use the steps that follow to stand for yourself.

The next part is letting people in your life know when they're violating your boundary. Ultimately, the goal is to have them change their behavior when around you. (Note: We're saying "change their behavior" and not "change themselves.")

We teach our clients a series of responses for establishing and extending boundaries:

1. Inform. This response allows you to make somebody aware of the specific behavior that's violating you in some way. Often, we do things out of habit and are not consciously aware of what we're doing. This is a soft way to change that awareness. As an example, "Do you know that when you're late for our appointments, I feel disrespected?"
2. Request. This response allows you to let somebody know specifically what you want from them. We make assumptions that others know what we want and, if we've not told them specifically, our assumptions are probably incorrect. Example: "My request is that you be on time for our appointments."
3. Instruct. Similar to a request, this response allows you to teach another person what you need from them. People don't automatically know what new behavior you're asking for unless you tell them. Example: "What I need from you instead is to respect me by arriving on time for our appointments."
4. Warn. This response is harsher and requires you to be more firm in your message. Sometimes it's necessary to define a consequence attached to an undesirable behavior. Example: "If you can't keep our appointments, I'll no longer be willing to meet with you."
5. Leave. This is the final choice in responses and sometimes may be the only alternative allowing you to really protect your heart, mind, and soul. Even in its severity, you can use this response in a loving way to take yourself out of a situation. For failure to be on time for appointments, you can follow up with a 'leaving' message. "It's not okay for me to show up for meetings and



have to wait. I'm open to conversation about the situation, but right now, I'm no longer willing to schedule appointments with you."

This particular response works well with verbal boundaries and allows you to remove yourself from a situation by simply saying, "This doesn't work for me.", and leaving a room.

Request and Instruct are similar and vary mostly on the format of how you deliver your message. The first three possible responses are softer and often enough to effect change in another person.

There is no magic in the response you choose to use or in the order you use them. For most of us, our way of handling boundary violations is to let people treat us, and do to us, anything they want. We bury our feelings of being violated and the behaviors are repeated over and over again. Finally, we explode and either attack or walk away without explanation. Now you have more choices.

It's absolutely okay, even necessary for your well-being, to speak your truth, especially when it involves protecting yourself. Forget what you learned as a child; to be nice, always smile, share your toys, put other's feelings first, and all the other damaging lessons. Start standing for yourself and establishing your boundaries NOW.

And remember, boundaries can be communicated before they're violated. This often prevents violations from even happening.

Begin establishing your boundaries regardless of the consequences. Treat yourself well by respecting your own boundaries (and making others do so). Great change will occur in your life and you'll notice differences in the way people respond to you.

Be aware, also, this is a new way of behaving for you. Change doesn't happen quickly - give yourself plenty of time and space to learn how to stand for yourself and have your boundaries honored. It's a journey made up of many little steps.

Bear in mind that as you're learning to stand for yourself you're also teaching others in your life how you expect them to behave around you. They may not be willing students. Be persistent, consistent, and relentless in helping them to understand what you're asking of them. It helps a great deal to share the path you're on with the people you love. People who really care about you will support your efforts and help you. Others will drop out of your life. It's okay and a natural part of this process. At the end of the journey, when you've learned to establish and extend your boundaries, you'll be surrounded by caring and loving people who willingly support you, respect you, and honor the boundaries you've put in place. It's never too late to begin.

