Developing Boundaries

Sage publications, 1995, Boundaries

Boundaries are limits drawn by each of us that define our separateness, uniqueness and basic rights. They should not be overstepped. Each individual human being is unique and precious, possessed of a core self that deserves to be separate, sovereign and independent from anyone else. It is a private core of dignity, self-respect and a sense of one's own worth and identity. It belongs only to oneself. From her understanding of rights, each woman develops her own boundaries around this private territory.

Boundaries are not a wall against the world; they are an open door for loving yourself and healthy relationships.

Questions to Ask Yourself About Your Boundaries

1. How much physical space do you need? What is the comfortable distance between you and others?

2. What constitutes unwanted contact?

3. How do you react to unwanted contact?

4. How does one's body language say "Stay away." Or "Come close." ?

5. Does anyone ever come physically close to you when you do not want to be approached? What do you do if that happens?

6. Are their times when you need more space than at other times? What cues do you respond to? What happens when you need space?

7. What are the factors that go into feeling more comfort with someone?

8. Are boundaries different in different settings and with different people (e.g. at work, at church, with family with strangers)? In what ways are they different?

Healthy Personal Boundaries

Personal Boundaries are evident when:

You know who you are and treat yourself and others with respect. If you have healthy boundaries, you may:

Feel free to say yes or no without guilt, anger, or fear.

Refuse to tolerate abuse or disrespect.

Know when a problem is yours or another person's – and refuse to take on others' problems.

Have a strong sense of identity.

Respect yourself.

Share responsibility with others and expect reciprocity in relationships.

Feel freedom, security, peace, joy and confidence.

Characteristics of a Healthy Relationship

- The goal in a relationship is to feel calm, centered, and focused.
- Closeness needs to be safe, supportive, respectful, non-punitive and peaceful.
- One feels equal and part of something.
- One experiences forgiving and being forgiven, with little to no reminders of past offenses.
- There is a sense of order to the relationship.
- One feels free to be who they are rather than who one thinks they need to be for the other person.
- Feelings are more important than money and things.
- Personal growth and individuality are supported and encouraged.
- Intellectual, emotional, and physical independence is supported.

SIGNS OF UNHEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Trusting no one or trusting everyone.
Black and White thinking
Telling all or telling nothing (overly free with information or overly guarded).
Talking at an intimate level at the first meeting.
Falling in love with a new acquaintance.
***Being overwhelmed by a person.**
Acting on first sexual impulse.
Being sexual for a partner and not for yourself.
Going against personal values or integrity in order to please others.
***Not noticing when someone else displays inappropriate behavior.**
Accepting food, gifts, touch, sex that you do not want.
Touching a person without asking first.
***Taking as much as you can get for the sake of getting.**
***Giving as much as you can for the sake of giving.**
Allowing someone to take more than you want to give.
Letting others direct your life.
Letting others define who you are and how you feel. (false self)
***Believing others can anticipate your needs.**
Expecting others to automatically fill your needs.
Falling apart so someone will take care of you.
Sexual and physical abuse.

SIGNS OF TROUBLE TRYING TO MAINTAIN ONE'S OWN BOUNDARIES

- Difficulty making decisions.
- **Difficulty saying "no".**
- Difficulty asking others what they need.
- **Believe one's own happiness depends on others** (external locus of control).
- Difficulty looking others in the eye. (cultural differences excepted)
- **Often value other's opinions and ideas over their own.**
- **Find people take advantage of them by doing things like borrowing money or possessions without paying them back or returning said items.**
- Often feel ashamed, anxious, or afraid. Often feel bad for being different from others.
- **Spend so much time helping others, that they do not have enough time for their own needs, as if they themselves are not on their own hierarchy of needs, or totem pole.**
- Have a hard time knowing what they feel, believe, and think, they are used to others doing it for them.
- **Tend to take on feelings of those around them.**
- **Feeling of responsibility for others' feeling.**
- **Have a hard time keeping confidence.**
- **Are overly sensitive to criticism.**
- **Tend to get caught up in others' problems as if they are their own.**

Terms for Poor Boundary Setting:

- Fence Building- isolation, too much distance
- Chameleon- assuming position of whomever you are with at the moment, too flexible.
- Rigid- new ideas or experiences cannot get in.
- Intrusion- that's none of your business (inappropriate questions)
- Leaky- overburdening others with inappropriate information
- Absorbent- sponge like, picking up and assuming responsibility for others thoughts, feelings, and responses.
- Blanking Out- when a physical or emotional space is being violated, one tells oneself that it does not matter.
- Victimhood- one identifies themselves as the violated victim and becomes overly defensive to ward off further violations
- Chip on the Shoulder- "I dare you to come to close" because of one's anger over a past violation of space (emotional or physical) this is the attitude they exude.
- Invisibility- when one pulls so far in that they themselves, as well as others, have no idea how they feel about anything

- Aloofness/Shyness- one's insecurity of being or perceive themselves as being rejected or ignored in the past now their defensive posture rejects others before they can be rejected.
- Smothering- when one's interests are totally consumed by taking care of another's needs and interests.
- Lack of Privacy- when one's own thoughts feelings and actions seem to be their own business and they perceive that they must share everything and report back to their family or other people they are relationships with.

Boundaries emerge...

Setting boundaries is about learning to take care of ourselves, no matter what happens, where we go or who we are with.

Boundaries emerge from deep decisions about what we believe we deserve and do not deserve.

Boundaries emerge from the belief that what we want and need, like and dislike is important.

Boundaries emerge from a deeper sense of our personal rights, especially the rights we have to take care of ourselves and to be ourselves.

Boundaries emerge as we learn to value, trust and listen to ourselves, our wants and our needs. Some people are happy to respect your boundaries.

By our actions, we train people to ignore our boundaries and not accept when we say "NO".

10 Emotional Hooks in Relationships

Lack of Individual Identity

"I am nobody without somebody in my life."

"I am OK just the way I am, even if I do not have my relationship partners in my life."

Scarcity Principle

"Because the current status of our relationship is better than anything we have ever had before."

"I will focus on my own needs, my individuality and my identity. I will not become complacent in my relationships just because there are no conflicts or crisis in them at the time. I will work with my relationship partners to insure that the health of our relationships is ever growing and increasing."

GUILT

"I feel guilty if my relationship partners are not succeeding or thriving without my help. I feel overly responsible for the welfare of my relationship partners and cannot allow my partner to accept personal responsibility, to make choices and live with the consequences of these choices."

"My relationship partners and I are responsible for accepting personal responsibility for our own lives and to accept the consequences for the choices we make in taking care of our own lives. I am not responsible for outcomes which result from the choices and decisions which my relationship partners make."

Inability to Differentiate Love from Sympathy

"I feel sorry for my relationship partners and the warm feeling which this generates makes me think that I am in love with them. The bigger the problems my relationship partners have, the bigger the "love" seems to be.

"It is OK to have sympathy and compassion for my relationship partners, but that does not mean that I have to sacrifice my life to "save" or "rescue" my partners. Sympathy and compassion are emotions I know well and I will work hard to differentiate them from what love is. When I feel sympathy and compassion for my relationship partners, I will remind myself that it is not the same as loving them."

Helplessness and Neediness of Relationship Partners

"I find myself wanting to teach and instruct when my relationship partners demonstrate or admit ignorance of how to solve problems. I find myself hooked by verbal and non-verbal cues which cry out to me to "help" my relationship partners even though my partners have the competence to solve the problem on their own. I find myself wanting to rescue my relationship partners. I find myself feeling warmth, caring and nurturing

feelings which help to tear down any shred of boundaries I once had. I start to give and give and give. It feels so good."

"No one is helpless without first learning the advantages of being helpless. Helplessness is a learned behavior which is used to manipulate me to give of my resources, energy, time, effort and money to fix it. I am a good person even if I do not try to fix and take care of my relationship partners when my partners are acting helpless. I cannot establish healthy intimate relationships with others when I am trying to fix them or take care of them all the time."

Need to be Needed

"I find myself being depended upon or needed by my relationship partners. My relationship partners often tell me they are dependent upon me and they need me for their life to be successful and fulfilled."

"It is unhealthy for me to be so overly depended upon by my relationship partners who are adults. There is a need for me to be clear about what I am willing and not willing to do for my relationship partners. There is a need for my relationship partners to become more independent from me so that I can maintain my own sense of identity, worth, and personhood. It would be better for me to let go of the need to be needed than to allow my relationship partners to continue to have such dependency on me."

Belief that Time will Make it Better

"If I give it enough time things will change to be the way I want them to be. I don't want to give up too soon. I find myself giving more and more of myself and waiting longer and longer for something good to happen and yet things never get better."

"It is unhealthy for me to hold on to the belief that things will change if they have not in 1 or more years. It is okay to set time limits in my relationships. It is okay to put demands on my relationships so that I do not waste away my life waiting for something which in all probability will never happen. I will look at the fleeting moments in my relationships with an eye of reality and not see anything more in them than there really is."

Belief that It Must be All of My Fault that there are Problems in the Relationship

"If I change myself more things will change to become more like I want them to be in my relationships. I find myself needing to change the ways I think, feel, act, dress, talk, look, eat, work, cook, entertain, have fun, socialize, and etc. before I will be "good enough" for my relationships to work."

"I have to be real to myself and be the person I am rather than be the person my relationship partners want me to be. It is not healthy for me to give up my personhood and identity to please my partners just to maintain our relationships. I have a right to my own tastes, likes and dislikes, personal style, beliefs, values, attitudes, and etc. I am in control of my own thoughts, feelings and actions. I will not allow my relationship partners to take control of my basic rights.

Fear of Negative Outcomes for Relationship Partners

"I am afraid to LET GO of the control I have with my relationship partners for fear something very negative will happen to them. It feels better being sucked dry intellectually, emotionally, and physically than to Let Go and watch my relationship partners suffer these feared awful negative outcomes. I find myself powerless to keep from doing the healthy thing because of the intensity of the fear."

"I am responsible for my own life. No one can make me responsible for my relationship partners' lives. I am powerless to control other people, places and actions. I need to hand my relationship partners' problems and needs and the outcomes of their lives over to God or a Higher Power. It is okay for me to expect my relationship partners to accept the consequences for their own actions, choices, and decisions."

Idealism or Fantasy Thinking

"I have a dream of what the ideal relationship looks like. I put a great deal of time, energy, and resources into making my dream a reality. I am stuck on the belief that it is possible even though all of my efforts have not made it happen. I sometimes seem out of touch with reality when I discuss my relationship with others. I have become obsessed with acting and looking like the fantasy is real."

"I must accept reality the way it is rather than how I want it to be. I will give the people who support me permission to call me on it if I am hooked into fantasy relationships and lose myself in them. I will work hard to stay reality based and keep myself from losing my objectivity and contact with the way things really are. Once I give up the delusion that things are the way they are supposed to be, I will work with my relationship partners to try to correct the problems in our relationships."