

Strengthen Your Internal Boundaries

One of the reasons that we take things personally is because we have weak "internal boundaries." An internal boundary is like an invisible shield that prevents you from taking in a comment without checking it out first. For example, when someone accuses you of being arrogant, you stop and consider the statement *before* taking it in.

When you use this internal shield (especially with difficult people like an ex-spouse or critical parent) it gives you time to ask yourself the following three questions:

- How much of this is true about me?
- How much of this is about the other person?
- What do I need to do (if anything) to regain my personal power or stand up for myself?

Too often we neglect to stand up for ourselves by avoiding confrontation and end up weakening our internal shield, making it harder to set boundaries at all. So, if someone offends you, it may be necessary to let them know in order to protect and strengthen your internal boundaries.

The Internal Check: If I say YES, how much: time, energy, money, and/or self esteem will this cost me? You *can* go back and change your mind.



I Have Rights to Certain Boundaries

Self Awareness: Knowing self well; having a balanced and honest view of your own personality, and often an ability to interact with others honestly and confidently.

People may not _____.

I have the right to ask for _____.

To protect my time and energy, it's OK to _____.

I Have Rights to Certain Boundaries

People may not _____.

- * Go through my personal belongings.
- * Criticize me.
- * Make comments about my weight.
- * Take their anger out on me.
- * Humiliate me in front of others.
- * Tell off-color jokes in my company.
- * Invade my personal space.

I have the right to ask for _____.

- * Privacy.
- * A new hairstyle from an old stylist.
- * Peace and quiet while getting a massage.
- * Help around the house.
- * More information before making a purchase.
- * Quiet time to myself.

To protect my time and energy, it's OK to _____.

- * Turn the ringer off the phone.
- * Take my time returning calls or e-mails.
- * Change my mind.
- * Bow out of a volunteer activity.
- * Cancel a commitment when I'm not feeling well.
- * Reserve a place in my home that is off-limits to others.

More of My Rights

I Have the Right To:

- ☐ ask for privacy.
- ☐ ask for peace and quiet while getting a massage.
- ☐ ask for help around the house.
- ☐ know more information before making a purchase.
- ☐ have quiet time to myself.
- ☐ turn off the ringer on the phone.
- ☐ take my time answering my e-mails.
- ☐ change my mind.
- ☐ bow out of a volunteer activity.
- ☐ cancel a commitment when I'm not feeling well.
- ☐ reserve a place in my home that is off-limits to others.
- ☐ say "no" to people if it is an invasion of my space or a violation of my rights.
- ☐ take care of myself, and not have to be the only one holding my relatives and friends together.
- ☐ take the risk to grow in my relationships with others, while at the same time, protecting myself and my boundaries.
- ☐ do things that are uniquely mine so I keep my own identity intact.
- ☐ explore my own interests, hobbies, and outlets
- ☐ be visible, to be seen and heard
- ☐ stand up for my rights and assert myself so that others will learn to respect my rights

- **Anger, rage, complaining, whining and feeling threatened, suffocated or victimized, are clues to the probability that you need to set boundaries within a relationship. When you identify this need do it clearly, without anger, and in few words as possible.**

Tips to Setting Boundaries

Start setting simple but firm boundaries with a graceful or neutral tone of voice, then:

- Be sure you have support in place before and after each conversation.
- Vent any strong emotions you may have **before** having your boundary conversation.
- Rehearse in front of a mirror. Pay attention to your body language and your tone of voice.
- There is no need to defend, debate, or over-explain your feelings. If faced with resistance, repeat your request using the same words.
- Since you cannot simultaneously set a limit with someone and also take care of their emotions, they may feel hurt, angry, or disappointed. This is to be somewhat expected since, at times, you are changing the rules in the relationship.
- You may also have a variety of feelings, e.g.) guilt, fear, or shame. Setting boundaries is somewhat of a test of yourself and the relationship. There is also the good feeling of accomplishing something when you set boundaries.
- **Know yourself and your needs** – know what your expectations are from the relationship and also what you are willing to give to the relationship.
- **Clearly set your limits**- know what your limits are in regards to the amount of time, money, and emotional energy you are willing to spend. When you know them set rules for yourself about their expenditure and stand by them as your relationships proceed.
- **Communicate your limits compassionately but clearly**- in your relationships you should be clear and resolute, no one is a mind reader. People should be able understand your reasonable limitations and not try to wheedle or lead you away from them, use simple and direct language. Back up your boundary with action, stay strong. If you give in, you train people to ignore your needs.
- **Accommodate other's boundaries**- others have boundaries as well, ask them about their limits as well. Once you have both shared you can seek solutions into areas you know you may have future friction in, find a place where you both can bond and grow without crossing either you or their boundaries.

**You will set boundaries when you are ready, and not a minute sooner.*

**If you are sure you have set a clear boundary and the other person does not respect it, they have a problem. Ask yourself, "Are they controlling or abusive?" You may need to make a decision or change in the relationship.*

The Two Letter Word that is So Difficult to Say...

“NO”

- Just Plain No
 - “No, I’m not able to do that.”
 - “No, I’m not willing to do that.”
 - “No. I don’t want to do that.”
- No, with a Short “Because”
 - “No, I don’t want to go to a movie, because I’m tired and need to get to bed early tonight.”
 - “No, I’m not won’t be able to do that analysis, because we don’t have those figures on hand and it would take weeks to assemble them.
- Partial No
 - “No, I won’t be able to do A or B, but I can do C.”
 - “No, I won’t be able to do the dishes or laundry, but I can take the garbage out.”
- Not Now No
 - “No, I’m not able to do that now. I’m in the middle of the quarterly report for Randy. I will be able to get that to you by Wednesday afternoon.”
- Yes- but No
 - “Yes- but I can only help with the fundraiser until noon, then I have another appointment.”
- Empathetic No
 - “I can see you really want to go to that movie and I wish I were up to it, but I’m really tired and need to get to bed early tonight.”
 - “I understand that you are really in a bind and I wish I could help you out, but my back is to the wall with my own project.”

Assertiveness

Listen- Listening is what most of us pretend to do while we are waiting for our turn to talk. Our attention weaves in and out and our mind wanders, we fake attention. Active listening is to ensure that we understand what the other person is saying so we have a clear picture of the situation.

- * Active Listening-
 - paraphrasing the other's point of view
 - asking clarifying questions

Limit- Say No!

- * Suspended Response- *SLOW DOWN AND THINK!* Use postponement.
 - Ask for more information
 - Do not commit- buy some time. "I will think about it and get back to you. If you cannot wait for an answer I will have to say "No" right now."
- * Broken Record-
 - Pick one short simple phrase then keep repeating it with minor variation in a calm repetitive voice. "I beg your pardon."
 - Don't get sidetracked by his/her questions or statements- don't answer or respond to them. Stick with the original phrase. "Excuse me."
 - Hang in there- don't stop until you have made your response one more time that the other person. Usually the other person gives up after 3 or 4 times as they realize you are not going to budge.

Assert-

- * Ask directly for what you want
 - Focus Directly and exclusively on your request
 - Avoid irrelevant detail
 - Stick to the point
 - Don't add personal comments or associations
 - Used sentence frames stating What, When, and Why
 - I want _____ by _____ because _____.
 - Nonverbal behavior must match your message.
- * Deliver "I" messages- "I" enables you to speak up in an honest and objective manner and keeps you from being unduly emotional. You automatically take responsibility for your own feelings.
 - Three Part "I" Message-

- "When _____ I feel _____ because _____."
- * Fogging- a technique that allows you to handle criticism without being defensive, by making a noncommittal statement that acknowledges the other's point of view without actually agreeing or disagreeing.
 - "You could be right about that."
 - "I can see how it might seem that way."

Negotiate- Whether we identify it or not we negotiate all the time. Goal- to make some new arrangements or finding a solution to a current predicament. Negotiations make us self-conscious because there can be conflict. People often become defensive and close their minds to other opinions.

Practice Makes Perfect!

How would you: ???

- **Set a boundary with an angry person:**
- **Set a boundary with personal phone calls at work:**
- **Say no to extra commitments:**
- **Set a boundary with someone who is critical:**
- **Buy yourself time when making tough decisions:**
- **Back out of a commitment:**
- **Set a boundary with an adult child or family friend who borrows money:**
- **Set a boundary with a parent who interferes or give unsolicited advice:**
- **Using the preceding in mind, think of a scenario where you are setting a boundary.**

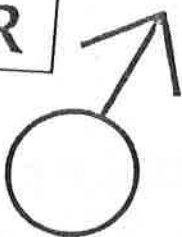
Changing Boundaries Exercise

Think of a situation in which you need to change a boundary, briefly explain the situation?

1. *Realization:* Why does this boundary need to be changed?
2. *Decision:* What is the new boundary?
3. *Practice:* What are possible consequences with this change?
4. *Consequences w/o cooperation:* What will happen if the boundary is violated?
5. *Outcome:* What do you want to happen as a result of this new boundary?

EVALUATE YOUR

RELATIONSHIP



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH AN IMPORTANT PERSON IN YOUR LIFE

(These questions are to help you think about what's going on in your relationship and how you feel about it. There are no right or wrong answers).

Can you name 5 things about him/her that you really like?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Can you name 5 things about him/her that you really dislike?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Do you think his/her relationships with family and friends are healthy? _____
Why or why not? _____

Does she/he encourage you to have other friends or discourage friendships? _____
In what ways? _____

Can you name 3 things that she/he is interested in besides you?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Can you name 3 activities that you participate in without him/her?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How does she/he respond that you are doing things instead of being with him/her? _____

Does she/he need to know where you've been and what you've been doing whenever you've been apart? _____ If so, how does this feel to you? _____

DESC PRACTICE WORKSHEET

Instructions: Think about a person—a family member, a health care professional, in-home helper, a staff member of a care facility or the care receiver—with whom you would like to communicate more assertively, set limits, or ask for help. Then:

1. Describe the situation to your partner.
2. Pretend your partner is the person you want to talk to.
3. Talk with this person using the DESC steps.
4. You may first want to write down ideas for what you will say, using each of the DESC steps. You can work on this together.
5. When you talk to your partner, use a calm, matter-of-fact voice similar to the voice you would use to ask someone to pass the salt.

You will have a total of ten minutes, five minutes each, to practice. We will tell you when to switch roles. Help each other to apply the four steps of DESC.

Describe observable behavior or problem. (Clearly state what happened or is bothering you. Do this *without* emotion, evaluation, or exaggeration. Focus on the behavior or the problem, *not* the person.)

Express how you feel. (State your feelings *without* blaming the other person and *without* giving your opinion about the reasons for the person's behavior. For example, state: "I feel _____ about what happened.")

Specify what needs to happen or to be done. (For example, state: "I want/I need _____.")

Consequence. (This includes what will happen if what you said under "Specify" does or does not happen. It's important *not* to blame, bluff, or threaten. You want to say something like, "If _____ happens, then I will _____"). Remember: A consequence can be negative, or it can be positive.