

Boundaries?

Have you ever met someone who has no boundaries? You know, a person who thinks that everything is their business? Or sometimes it's a person who just doesn't stand up for themselves. They can easily be pushed into doing something they don't want to do. Or, sometimes a person without boundaries is one who is controlling and constantly trying to get you to do what they want.

Boundaries are lines we set that define our responsibilities, our personal space, and our emotional responsibility. People with strong boundaries know who they are and will easily resist pressure to go against what they believe is right. When a person doesn't have strong boundaries (or none at all), she doesn't know how to have appropriate involvement with others.

What?

The need to have boundaries may sound like a strange thing, but boundaries are not very complicated. Having boundaries is simply the recognition that you are responsible for certain things in your life and you are not responsible for those same things in another person's life.

For example, it is your responsibility to keep your home clean. It is not your responsibility to keep your friend's home clean. Another example, is that you are responsible for your emotions, but it is not your job to make other people happy. Boundaries are knowing what you are supposed to do for yourself and not thinking it is your job to do the same for others.

When you look at the boundaries you have set in your relationships, you will quickly see that they affect almost every part of life. In the following situations, the green type represents appropriate boundaries, the orange questionable boundaries, and red is where those boundaries are being unhealthily crossed.

The Family Boundary

Alyssa and Jake decide it is time to start making their own family traditions. They tell Jake's mother that they will no longer be visiting for Easter. Jake's mother becomes very upset and tells them how sad that makes her. She makes Jake and Alyssa feel guilty for the next three months questioning their love, asking if they still care, and telling Jake that he doesn't appreciate all she did for him. Finally, Alyssa and Jake give in and go to her house for Easter.

The Boyfriend Boundary

Elise has been seeing Brad for two months. She likes her relationship and is happy when she is with him. Elise doesn't want to have sex until she is married, but Brad has been pressuring her to go further and further each time they make out. Just last week, Brad started making comments about not having sex. He gets angry, frustrated, and sometimes mean, and Elise, trying to make him happy, finally gives in.

The Fixer-Upper

Amanda and William met at a party one night. Amanda quickly saw that William was in need of some help. Amanda started reaching out to William, helping him by giving him rides to places he needed to be and doing favors for him when he needed them. Soon, Amanda threw herself into helping William by constantly doing what he needed and telling him what he needed to do to get out of his rut.

Where Are You?

Healthy boundaries are an important part of being a functional adult. Look at the lists below. Which best describes you?

A person without boundaries may be:

- Easily pushed to doing something they don't want to do.
- Overly involved in "helping" others.
- Constantly making bad decisions and blaming the consequences on others.
- Controlling of the actions of others (especially their significant other).
- Easily "hurt" when their friend or a family member wants to do something without them.

A person with good boundaries will be:

- Able to stand up for what they think is right.
- Able to help others without linking their own self-esteem to the success of others.
- Able to see when and where they make mistakes and take responsibility for the consequences.
- Able to let others be themselves without constantly getting into their business.

A healthy boundary is just a line that defines where you end and the next person begins.

Getting Help ...

If you have an issue with inappropriate boundaries, you need to get help. The first step in getting help is recognizing where your boundaries are unhealthy and setting them correctly. For example, if you are still living with your parent(s) and you are an adult, it is time to move out. If you are in a relationship where you are doing things you don't want to do because you are being pressured, get out. If you have a friend who has taken you on as a "project" or someone you are "working on," it is time to see this as the unhealthy relationship that it is.

Many times, there are hurts in the past that will cause a person to not develop proper boundaries. Setting new boundaries is a good start, yet this will be useless if you don't get help to heal the underlying issues. The next step must be looking for help with those issues. A good place to start is through your local Pregnancy Care Center. Ask if they have counselors or counselor recommendations for help with boundary issues. You can also try your local church to see if they offer counseling or can recommend a counselor.

It will always seem easier to ignore the issue of boundaries. But, in reality, it is much more difficult to live life in a tangle of dysfunctional relationships. It is time to make the decision to have appropriate boundaries. It is time to start right now! Don't wait for tomorrow or for your current relationship to run into serious trouble. Instead, get to work right now and discover who you are, where your responsibilities end and those of others begin, and how your life and relationships can be so much better.

When you have weak boundaries (or none at all), your life is a complicated web of relationships. Who YOU are is many times lost and you see yourself based on your relationships. It may just be one relationship with a friend, or you may have many relationships, but having weak boundaries will make it hard to know who you are without others.

When you have healthy boundaries, you will have good and appropriate relationships with others. You still know who you are apart from your relationships and you are able to be you.