

Setting Effective Boundaries

Why is it important to set boundaries?

If we have poor boundaries, we begin to feel responsible for the emotional wellbeing of others. We may also expect others to be responsible for our emotional wellbeing. In truth, everyone is solely responsible for their own emotional wellbeing. By learning to set healthy boundaries, we minimize frustration, guilt, and anxiety for both ourselves and others. Healthy boundaries keep others from manipulating us and help us to avoid the temptation to manipulate others.

Some signs that you may have poor boundaries with others:

- ☐ Conversations on emotional topics result in anxiety and discomfort
- ☐ You fear to speak up for yourself because it may lead to conflict
- ☐ You're afraid that if you do speak up for yourself it may lead to conflict
- ☐ You're afraid to say 'no'
- ☐ You feel guilty when you do say 'no'
- ☐ You sometimes feel like a victim when you stand up for yourself
- ☐ You sometimes feel that you're always giving and never getting back

Some statements that help you practice setting good and healthy boundaries:

- I care about you, but I cannot be responsible for your problems.
- I need time to be alone.
- I will not be the object of your hostility
- Just because I disagree with you, that doesn't mean I don't still care about you
- I enjoy spending time with you, but today I have other plans.
- I don't allow others to make me feel guilty about myself.

In any relationship, there are core issues and there are issues that can be compromised on. A core issue is one in which there can be no compromise. For example, refusing to accept physical or verbal abuse would be a core issue. A compromise issue, on the other hand, is an issue that you are willing to compromise on. An example of a compromise issue might be where to have lunch. You might have a lunch preference, but it is something that you would be willing to compromise on to some extent.

The way to distinguish a core issue from a compromise issue is that to compromise on a core issue you would have to give up who you are. Healthy boundaries mean refusing to compromise on your core values.

People without strong boundaries often feel used, disrespected, and walked on. It is easier to set very strong boundaries at the beginning of a relationship and then loosen them over time than it is to strengthen weak boundaries. If you find yourself saying, "I will do this just this one time . . ." then you probably need to strengthen your boundaries. You cannot force anyone else to be responsible for your happiness; likewise, you cannot be responsible for anyone else's emotional wellbeing. By setting and keeping good boundaries, you make life easier for both yourself and others.