Healthy Personal Boundaries
& How to Establish Them

Learning to set healthy personal boundaries is necessary for maintaining a positive self-concept, or self-image. It is our way of communicating to others that we have self-respect, self-worth, and will not allow others to define us.

Personal boundaries are the physical, emotional and mental limits we establish to protect ourselves from being manipulated, used, or violated by others. They allow us to separate who we are, and what we think and feel, from the thoughts and feelings of others. Their presence helps us express ourselves as the unique individuals we are, while we acknowledge the same in others.

It would not be possible to enjoy healthy relationships without the existence of personal boundaries, or without our willingness to communicate them directly and honestly with others. We must recognize that each of us is a unique individual with distinct emotions, needs and preferences. This is equally true for our spouses, children and friends.

To set personal boundaries means to preserve your integrity, take responsibility for who you are, and to take control of your life.

How do we establish
healthy personal boundaries?

Know that you have a right to personal boundaries. You not only have the right, but you must take responsibility for how you allow others to treat you. Your boundaries act as filters permitting what is acceptable in your life and what is not. If you don't have boundaries that protect and define you, as in a strong sense of identity, you tend to derive your sense of worth from others. To avoid this situation, set clear and decisive limits so that others will respect them, then be willing to do whatever it takes to enforce them. Interestingly, it's been shown that those who have weak boundaries themselves tend to violate the boundaries of others.

Recognize that other people's needs and feelings are not more important than your own. Many women have traditionally thought that the needs of their husbands and children are more important than their own. This is not only untrue, but it can undermine the healthy functioning of the family dynamic. If a woman is worn out mentally and physically from putting everyone else first, she not only destroys her own health, she in turn deprives her family of being fully engaged in their lives. Instead, she should encourage every family member to contribute to the whole as well as take care of himself or herself. Putting themselves last is not something only women do, but many men as well.

Learn to say no. Many of us are people-pleasers and often put ourselves at a disadvantage by trying to accommodate everyone. We don't want to be selfish, so

we put our personal needs on the back burner and agree to do things that may not be beneficial to our well-being. Actually, a certain amount of "selfishness" is necessary for having healthy personal boundaries. You do not do anyone any favors, least of all yourself, by trying to please others at your own expense.

Identify the actions and behaviors that you find unacceptable. Let others know when they've crossed the line, acted inappropriately, or disrespected you in any way. Do not be afraid to tell others when you need emotional and physical space. Allow yourself to be who you really are without pressure from others to be anything else. Know what actions you may need to take if your wishes aren't respected.

Trust and believe in yourself. You are the highest authority on you. You know yourself best. *You* know what you need, want, and value. Don't let anyone else make the decisions for you. Healthy boundaries make it possible for you to respect your strengths, abilities and individuality as well as those of others. An unhealthy imbalance occurs when you encourage neediness, or are needy; want to be rescued, or are the rescuer, or when you choose to play the victim.

Signs of Unhealthy Boundaries

- Going against personal values or rights in order to please others.
- Giving as much as you can for the sake of giving.
- Taking as much as you can for the sake of taking.
- Letting others define you.
- Expecting others to fill your needs automatically.
- Feeling bad or guilty when you say no.
- Not speaking up when you are treated poorly.
- Falling apart so someone can take care of you.
- Falling "in love" with someone you barely know or who reaches out to you.
- Accepting advances, touching and sex that you don't want.
- Touching a person without asking.

When we possess healthy personal boundaries:

✓ We have improved self-confidence and a healthy self-concept.

✓ We are more in touch with reality.

✓ Are better able to communicate with others.

✓ Have better more fulfilling relationships.

✓ Have more stability and control over our lives.

It is never too late to work on establishing healthy personal boundaries.

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