



Boundaries protect us, can be difficult to enforce

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Boundaries are abundant in our lives, but many of us have difficulty setting and or respecting them.

They evoke different reactions from people. Some may find boundaries to be comforting, while others may believe boundaries are restrictive.

What are boundaries? Boundaries are things used to protect ourselves or others.

In the book "Boundaries, When to Say Yes and When to Say No," Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend provide a word picture to describe it: Boundaries are like fences with gates. We decide who to let in, who to keep in and who to keep out.

The book also goes on to provide examples of boundaries. Boundaries are anything that helps to differentiate you from someone else, such as:

- Skin: Your physical self is the first way to learn that you are separate from others.
- Words: The most basic boundary-setting word is "no."
- Truth: Honesty about who you are gives you the value of integrity.
- Geographical distance
- Time
- Emotional distance: A temporary boundary gives your heart space it needs to be safe.
- Other people: A support system can provide strength to say no.
- Consequences: These show the seriousness of the trespass and the seriousness of our respect for ourselves.

As humans, we were made to be social. This means there are many interactions between us and others.

Boundaries work to promote positive relationships. They sometimes can be difficult to identify, until they have been crossed.

Because they are not always tangible, boundaries can be difficult to enforce. Cloud and Townsend point out other reasons why some have difficulty enforcing boundaries:

- Fear of hurting the other person's feelings
- Fear of abandonment
- Fear of someone else's anger
- Fear of punishment
- Fear of being shamed
- Fear of being seen as bad or selfish

There are three typical ways to enforce boundaries: passively, assertively or aggressively. A person exhibiting passivity permits others to do as they please without consideration for themselves.

Assertiveness is ideal. Assertiveness allows for mutual respect. Each person is treated with respect and given responsibility for aspect of his life. Assertiveness combines kindness and firmness, nurturing and limit setting (according to Drs. Matthew McKay and Kim Paley). We basically teach others how to treat us.

Boundaries are a skill that continues to be developed with each person met.

When people exhibit aggression, there are rigid rules they expect others to follow. What others want is rarely considered.

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