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Setting Boundaries

WHAT IS A BOUNDARY?

A boundary is an invisible “barrier” between you and other people – limits beyond which you will not go and beyond which others are not welcomed.

It is healthy to have a good sense of where your feelings and opinions start and stop, and where the other person’s feelings and opinions start and stop.

It is especially important to know how to set boundaries with “difficult” people – particularly with those individuals who are critical, controlling, manipulative, demanding or aggressive.

HOW DO I COMMUNICATE MY BOUNDARIES TO OTHER PEOPLE?

Here are some phrases to try using:

I have a problem with that
I don’t want to
I’ve decided not to
This is what I need
This is hard for me to say
I understand your point of view and
I feel uncomfortable about
I’d rather not
Yes, I do mind
I’d prefer not to
It’s important to me
I’ll think about it
That is unacceptable
We see it differently

WHO DO I NEED TO BE ESTABLISHING CLEAR BOUNDARIES WITH?

Often people who grow up in challenging family systems have difficulty setting boundaries and taking care of themselves. Setting a boundary means I respect myself and I will protect myself from inappropriate behavior. In a healthy relationship, people respect each other’s boundaries; and as a result, self-worth increases.



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GUIDELINES FOR SETTING BOUNDARIES:

1. The purpose of setting a boundary is to take care of yourself.
2. Set limits that you are willing and capable of implementing.
3. Do not set boundaries to manipulate. In a power struggle, both individuals and sides lose.
4. There are many alternatives and options in setting boundaries. Some boundaries may be more rigid than others, such as with physical abuse, for example.
5. Some people are afraid to set boundaries to take care of themselves because they fear abandonment. If you find that you are unable to set boundaries and follow through, seek professional help for yourself. You are worth it.

BOUNDARIES

- Something that sets a border or a limit
- Sets a physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual “space”
- Boundaries can be spoken/unspoken (verbal/nonverbal)
- Boundaries are a way to protect ourselves

FORMAT OF BOUNDARIES:

1. Specific
2. Reasonable (No threatening, bluffing, violence, shouting, judging, or moralizing)
3. Enforceable
4. Natural/logical

“If you (state behavior), I will (state your actions and share feelings).”

“If you (continue that behavior), I will (take care of myself by action).”

EXAMPLES:

If you verbally belittle me by calling me names like ..., I will identify and confront your behavior and share my feelings about this. If you continue the behavior, I will take care of myself by leaving the room.

If you drink alcohol or use drugs in my presence, I will identify and confront your behavior and share my feelings about this. If you continue to use or ignore my request to stop, I will take care of myself by leaving the house or asking you to leave.