

# Another Beautiful Life

## Boundaries

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A boundary is something you create for yourself, and it's commonly used in to achieve life changing results. It can be mistaken as a way to control other people, but that's really not the function of a boundary. An emotional boundary is very much like a property boundary—it delineates where one person ends and another one starts. It's a way of "drawing a circle" around our behavior and ourselves. It may seem that boundaries would separate us from others, but they really do quite the opposite. A boundary includes a request you make of someone to change a certain behavior and a consequence of what you will do to self protect if they violate the boundary again.

Because healthy boundaries promote self responsibility and empowerment, they lead to closer relationships with others. By contrast, weak boundaries promote enmeshment and emotional childhood behavior, which only distances us from others.

### WHEN AND HOW TO SET A BOUNDARY

Before setting a boundary, you must be clear to yourself about what your personal boundaries are. Most people have a clear line around their home, which makes it easy to know when someone has crossed it. However, many people aren't as clear about their personal boundaries, so others are often unaware that they have crossed one. For example, do you allow people to yell at you? If not, what do you do when this happens? Some people have a boundary in this area, and others do not.

Additionally, boundaries need to be communicated only when someone has violated them. For example, most of us have a boundary that involves not tolerating physical violence. However, we don't walk around saying, "By the way, don't hit me, or I'll run away or call the police."

Once a boundary has been violated, we need to communicate to the person that they have crossed a boundary, and clearly state the consequences if they don't stop.

If someone comes into your backyard, they have violated a boundary. You can either lose control and yell at them, or you can say, "Hey, you need to leave, and if you don't, I'm going to call the police." By saying this, you're letting them know they have violated a boundary and what action you will take if they continue to do so.

Use these two steps to effectively set an emotional boundary:

1. The request: Ask someone to stop doing the thing that infringes on your boundary (literally or emotionally).
2. The consequence: Tell the person what you will do if they do not comply with your request.

The boundaries you set are meant to protect you emotionally, so you need to clearly communicate when a violation has occurred. You may set a boundary with your boss who yells at you by saying, "Listen, if you continue to raise your voice at me, I'm going to leave the room until you can speak calmly. If it continues, I will go to HR to discuss the situation." This ultimately allows your boss to choose how they will behave, but clearly describes what you will do if the violation continues. You make the request, give them the option to do whatever they would like to do, and then you follow through on that request.

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Perhaps you have a friend who is always late. You could decide to interpret this behavior as wrong, bad, or disrespectful, and you could decide not to get together with her any longer. But you could also decide to set a simple boundary rather than shutting a friend out of your life completely. It might be something like, "Hey, listen, I really want to meet you for lunch, but I know you sometimes run late. I'll wait fifteen minutes for you, but then I'm going to leave. I'm not going to be mad or upset at you—I just don't want to wait around for more than fifteen minutes." Setting a simple boundary like this allows your friend to be who she wants to be and behave how she chooses to behave while allowing you to protect yourself, your emotions, and your time.

### WHEN IT'S NOT A BOUNDARY ISSUE

Many people confuse requests with boundary issues. For example:

- I wish my husband would take the garbage out.
- I would like my wife to be more romantic.
- I would like my boss to give me more praise.
- I want my girlfriends to call me back when I call them.

These requests fall under the definition of The Manual (see pdf "The Manual") rather than qualifying as boundary issues. It's OK to make requests like this of other people, but when your happiness depends on their fulfilling the request, you could have a problem. You cannot expect to control other people, and you don't need to. In these scenarios, the person isn't violating your personal or physical space by not honoring your request, so it's not a boundary issue and it's not appropriate to create a consequence. Doing so is a form of manipulation or constitutes threatening behavior. Boundaries should always come from a place of love to promote self kindness.

A boundary is not an ultimatum. It's not a way of controlling another person so that we can feel better. This never works, and it's completely disempowering and separating. People don't like being controlled or forced, and the truth is that an ultimatum is actually a boundary violation against the other person.

Here's an example of setting a boundary:

Susan's mother-in-law likes to come by the house unannounced to see her grandkids and often enters without knocking first. To Susan, this was violating a boundary, but because she continued to allow it without saying anything, her mother-in-law likely didn't know she was doing so.

Susan decided out of love and self kindness to set a boundary. She said to her mother-in-law, "We love spending time with you and I'm so glad you like spending time with the kids, but I really need you to give me a call and let me know when you'd like to stop by so I can tell you whether it's a good time. If you don't call first, the door may be locked, we may not be here, or we may be in the middle of something else and just not answer. Calling ahead would be better for me because I would know when to expect you, and it would be better for you, so you don't show up to find nobody home." This is a very reasonable boundary with clear consequences if the violation continues.

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It's important that Susan follows through with the consequences, which is a difficult area for many people. She worried about locking the door because she feared how her mother-in-law might react. Failure to follow through and act accordingly sends the message that the boundary doesn't truly exist. Furthermore, when Susan's mother-in-law continues to come over unannounced, Susan feels frustrated and angry and slowly builds up resistance and resentment. This doesn't foster an intimate relationship, but rather, it causes Susan to create unnecessary drama and conflict to which her mother-in-law may not realize she is contributing.

### THE CHALLENGES OF SETTING BOUNDARIES

At the other end of the spectrum, some clients don't want to set proper boundaries because they don't want to risk losing relationships. They're afraid that if they take care of themselves and tell the truth, they might make the other person angry. So in order to avoid the other person "losing control," they stay in relationships that are based on lies, pretenses, and resentment. This prevents any true intimacy in the relationship.

Having a conversation about the boundary can be uncomfortable and challenging. It's hard work. It's the work of true intimacy. Honoring yourself and what is authentic and true, along with the willingness to let other people interpret it how they will, is difficult but well worth it in the end. People who cannot find the courage to have conversations like this stay in relationships where they're pretending and then wonder why their relationships aren't deep and intimate. Or worse, the relationship erupts in the end because of built up resentment and hostility, and we blame the other person for our lack of boundaries.

In Henry Cloud's book *Boundaries*, we're taught that we must love and honor ourselves enough to tell the people in our lives the truth and to set proper boundaries. This isn't just for us; it's for the sake of the person doing the violating. Often, this person is unaware of how you're feeling.

Others don't have to understand or agree with your boundary, and you should be prepared for that. When you set the boundary out of love for yourself and the other person, you can tell them your truth without attacking or yelling at them. Your truth has nothing to do with them, and you can tell them when setting the boundary. If they choose to be hurt or upset, it's not your fault so long as you have approached it from a positive place. What happens in the end is that you can move forward in your relationship from a place of authenticity and without resentment. Your relationships become genuine and intimate when you're willing to do this work.

Many of us worry about being viewed as bad, rude, or uncaring when we have the boundary conversation. The irony is that this is how we generally act when we don't have proper boundaries. When you try to smile and act like everything's fine but you're seething underneath, you're acting exactly how you are trying to avoid acting. When you tell someone the truth about yourself, you open the space for more honesty and truth.

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### IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN SETTING A BOUNDARY

Proper boundaries come from a place of love. If you're angry, frustrated, and mad, you'll want to work through those emotions before you do any boundary work. Write down all your feelings, and work through them until you can get to a space of calm, peace, and love. Remember, the reason you're upset is not because this person has violated your boundary. It's that you haven't set proper boundaries and that you haven't been speaking the truth. When you can own that and take responsibility for your emotions, you can explain your boundary from a place of love and set clear consequences for what will happen if it isn't honored.

When you have a boundary conversation, don't be afraid to share that you are doing this out of love. For example, you could say, "Look, this is a boundary issue for me, and I'm not comfortable with this going on. If it does continue, this is what I'm going to do. I think you are wonderful and magnificent, and I value our relationship, so that's why I want to be clear and straightforward about this."

### THIS WORK IS NOT ABOUT MANIPULATING SOMEONE ELSE'S BEHAVIOR

Always remember that the other person in the relationship gets to choose how they will act. When you set a clear boundary and it isn't honored, you'll need to follow through on the consequences. Many people do this from a place of frustration and anger because they think thoughts like, "What's the matter with you? I set a clear boundary, and you're still coming over without calling and now you're forcing me to lock the door!"

Remember, this person isn't forcing you to do anything. It's your boundary and your consequence, and you'll want to enforce it from a place of peace and love. There is no need to ridicule the other person or make them feel wrong or bad for their behavior. It doesn't feel good, and it's not necessary. Emphasize for yourself and the other person that this is how you are taking care of yourself and it's nothing against them. Be very clear about upholding the boundary. Many times, people continue to violate boundaries because in the past you haven't had any, so they keep doing what they've always done. When you honor and take care of yourself by enforcing your boundary, that will change for you.

### SIGNS THAT YOU'RE NOT READY TO SET A BOUNDARY

If you don't feel peaceful and loving, it's not an ideal time to set a boundary. If you are trying to manipulate someone else's behavior for your own benefit to avoid having to follow through on consequences, or if you are blaming, negative, frustrated, and trying to delete someone from your life, you're not in a place well suited for boundary work.

For example, you may decide you're done with a person, ready to eliminate them from your life. The desire to delete people who trigger something negative in you is understandable, but it's not a boundary issue. Instead, consider the idea that the people who trigger you the most can be your greatest teachers.

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Many people get upset at that idea because they don't want these difficult people even being in their lives. However, if we step back and examine the situation, the people who set us off the most are able to do so because we either don't know how to set boundaries or we have never done so properly. Removing such people from your life is an easier option, but then you miss out on an opportunity to understand where your boundaries are and how to properly set them.

Instead, try asking yourself powerful questions such as "What can I learn from this relationship?" especially if this person is a family member or someone you have known for a long time. Ask yourself, "How can I use this as an opportunity to take care of myself and create real authenticity through this conversation?"

### FINAL THOUGHTS

Sometimes we are the ones who have made the boundary violation, and this can be challenging as well. For many people, such a violation triggers thoughts such as "Oh, my gosh! I've done something wrong or bad! This person doesn't want me in their life!" These thoughts typically cause us to create a lot of drama around the situation, but there's another way to look at it.

Remember that this person has taken the time to share their truth with you. That's an intimate and challenging thing to do, and the fact that this person was able to do so says a lot about how they value the relationship. Setting a boundary requires more courage than simply eliminating someone from your life or continuing to harbor resentment, so take it as a gift and try not to overanalyze it.

Boundaries are the most amazing, wonderful, and yet difficult things to implement. They are beautiful tools that can create intimacy in relationships rather than blocking it out. They don't keep people out of our lives—they simply keep people from violating important spaces. Setting boundaries is about telling the truth to ourselves and to the people in our lives. Also, remember that following through on our consequences 100% of the time is critical to make this tool effective in your life.

Finally, remember that if you're willing to have the courage to honor yourself, tell the truth, and ultimately protect yourself, you will see an increase of peace and intimacy in your life.

### WORK IT OUT

Fill out the Boundaries worksheet