



Dialogue

For People Who ENJOY Learning About Themselves!

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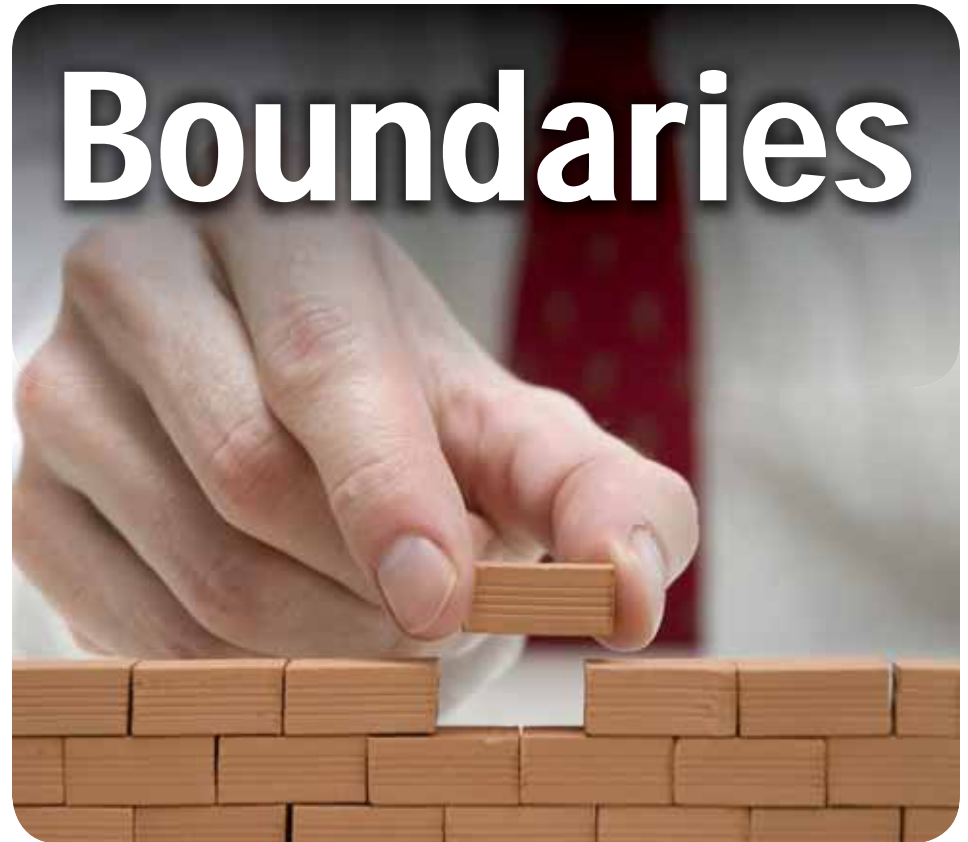
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Boundaries

What They Are

The concept of “boundaries” relates to our sense of self. At birth and for a long while after, a baby has no real sense of who they are. When we see a baby in its mother’s arms, we see two people—the child and the mother.

But the baby notices no difference, no division, and no boundary between itself and its mother. A newborn is “one” with its mother. As life goes on, the child notices where their skin ends and their mother’s skin begins. This is our first “boundary,” and the beginning of our “sense of self.”

When our boundaries are crossed we are naturally furious at the invasion because we know we could lose our sense of who we are.

What Goes Wrong

Obviously, if a mother is unable to bond with a child and doesn’t hold her child enough, boundary problems and problems related to sense of self will abound. But things can go wrong in later childhood and in adult life too. When they do, it is usually

either because someone treats us like they “own” us or, conversely, like they “disown” us.

Being “Owned”

The worst example of being owned is physical or sexual abuse. People who treat us in these ways are insisting that they own our very bodies. We can also lose our sense of self in less severe but more constant ways. Some people never hear anything from their parents or partners except orders and complaints (“Do this!” “Do that!” “You didn’t do that well enough!”). Constant exposure to such treatment can shatter their boundaries and their sense of self.

Being “Disowned”

On the other hand, being treated like we are not there can also cause boundary and self problems. Beware of people who are so preoccupied with their own ego, and their own life, that you sometimes wonder if they know you are there. This can kill your sense of self, too.

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Help Your Child Build Healthy Boundaries

“Play nicely.” “Please share with Johnny/Suzie.” These phrases or similar versions of them are familiar to many of us. We heard them as children and probably repeat them to our own children. It’s in the early years when we begin to help our children make friends and build relationships.

As individuals we may be unique, but some experiences and needs are common to all of our lives. Having healthy relationships with our peers is one common need. Adolescent children especially need healthy friendships. It’s important to this age group to have someone who shares the same likes and dislikes in music or clothing, or someone who can offer mutual support in navigating this difficult growth stage. Parental guidance at this time is key to helping form healthy friendships.

Here are some ways you can help your child build healthy relationships:

➔ Build respect for other people’s feelings and property. Compliment your

child’s knowledge and abilities, pay attention and listen to her, and ask permission to use things that belong to her. Your child will display the same behaviors to you and to others outside the home. Respect is a two-way street that builds trust, encouraging good relationships.

➔ Provide a safe and loving home environment. Your child should feel comfortable bringing friends home, and her friends should feel welcome in your home. This gives you an ideal opportunity to observe your child’s friends and spot troublesome relationships.

➔ Teach responsibility. Give appropriate amounts of independence and

freedom. Do not instantly demand that your child end a relationship with which you are uncomfortable. Instead, choose a time to calmly express your concerns and gently remind your child about the boundaries and standards you have set for your family. Most children will respect these boundaries and eventually make them part of their lives. A child is more likely to give up an inappropriate friendship because it could cause embarrassment than because he feels compelled to.

➔ Resolve conflict. Teach your child to respect other points of view. No relationship is without discord, and sometimes we have to lose the fight to win the relationship. Compromise is a key ingredient in maintaining good, healthy relationships. Where good relations are concerned, winning isn’t everything.

➔ Be a good role model. You are the most powerful example in your child’s life. Let your child observe your own relationships, especially those that are long-standing—from junior high or your college days. Talk about your friendships openly—the good times and the not-so-good times, the ups and the downs. Your child should know that putting effort into relationships is what contributes to their value and longevity.

Our children spend many unsupervised hours away from home, and inevitably they leave the family. Learning how to choose good friends and how to nurture friendships is an important part of growing up. These skills can make coping with life’s hardships a lot easier when they occur.

Put It Into Practice

Talk to your child about her friendships. Ask her whether she and her friends treat each other with respect. Talk to her about how she can approach a friend when things aren’t going well but she wants to keep the friendship.

Source: <http://family.samhsa.gov/teach/healthy.aspx>

Additional Resources

National PTA: Help Your Child Succeed
<http://www.pta.org>

New City of Hamilton (Ontario, Canada): Social Development
<http://www.ccsd.ca/home.htm>

Family Education Network: Help Your Kids Make New Friends
<http://life.familyeducation.com/friendships/parenting/36480.html>

Substance Abuse Treatment and Family Therapy

Cost Analysis



The guideline developers reviewed published cost analyses. Only a few studies have assessed the cost benefits of family therapy or have compared the cost of family therapy to other approaches such as group therapy, individual therapy, or 12-Step programs. A small but growing body of data, however, has demonstrated the cost benefits of family therapy specifically for substance abuse problems. Family therapy also has appeared to be superior in situations that might in some key respect be similar to substance abuse contexts.

For example, Sexton and Alexander's work with functional family therapy (so called because it focuses its interventions on family relationships that influence and are influenced by, and thus are functions of, positive and negative behaviors) for youth offenders found that family therapy nearly halved the rate of re-offending—19.8 percent in the treatment group compared to 36 percent in a control group. The cost of the family therapy ranged from \$700 to \$1,000 per family for the 2-year study period. The average cost of detention for that period was at least \$6,000 per youth; the cost of a residential treatment program was at least \$13,500. In this instance, the cost benefits of family therapy were clear and compelling. Other studies look at the offset factor; that is, the relationship between family therapy and the use of medical care or social costs. Fals-Stewart et al. (1997) examined social costs incurred by clients (for example, the cost of substance abuse treatment or public assistance) and found that behavioral couples therapy was considerably more cost effective than individual therapy for substance abuse, with a reduction of costs of \$6,628 for clients in couples therapy, compared to a \$1,904 reduction for clients in individual therapy.

Similar results were noted in a study by the National Working Group on Family-Based Interventions in Chronic Disease, which found that, 6 months after a family-focused intervention, reimbursement for health services was 50 percent less for the treatment group, compared to a control group. While this study looked at chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, Alzheimer's disease, and diabetes, substance abuse also is a chronic disease that is in many ways analogous to these physical conditions. Both chronic diseases and substance abuse:

- ▶ Are long-standing and progressive
- ▶ Often result from behavioral choices
- ▶ Are treatable, but not curable
- ▶ Have clients inclined to resist treatment
- ▶ Have high probability of relapse

Chronic diseases are costly and emotionally draining. Substance abuse is similar to a chronic disease, with potential for recovery; it even can lead to improvement in family functioning. Other cost benefits result from preventive aspects of treatment. While therapy usually is not considered a primary prevention intervention, family-based treatment that is oriented toward addressing risk factors may have a significant preventive effect on other family members. For example, it may help prevent substance abuse in other family members by correcting maladaptive family dynamics.

Source: <http://www.guideline.gov/>

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About Feeling Connected

The saddest thing about boundary problems is that the people who have them can feel “too close” (afraid they’ll lose themselves), and “too far” (very lonely), but they can seldom feel safely in between or “connected” with others.

The Double-Edged Sword of Boundary Problems

People whose boundaries are weak also tend to violate the boundaries of others. If you don’t know that you have boundaries that must be respected, then you also don’t know that other people have boundaries you must respect.

The Way Out

First of all, people with these problems should get therapy. This is too difficult to solve completely on your own.

Therapy Can Support What You Need To Do For Yourself:

1 Learn to identify even the most subtle ways you violate the boundaries of others. Become excellent at noticing when people “back away,” emotionally and physically. When they do, you can be pretty sure you have just violated their boundaries.

2 Once you become accustomed to noticing the boundaries of others, begin to notice that you have many of the same boundaries yourself!

3 Learn how to object whenever any of your boundaries are crossed, even in the smallest ways and even by people with the kindest intentions.

4 Test various ways to of telling people when they cross your boundaries. Allow yourself to make mistakes while you learn (by sounding either too angry or too nice). Experiment. Notice what works and what doesn’t. With close friends who might understand, you might even tell them that you are learning about protecting yourself (so they can understand why you are acting differently toward them).

5 Keep reminding yourself: “People need my permission before they cross my boundaries!”

6 Remind yourself also: “Nobody should ever help me unless I ask them to!”

If people have constantly crossed your boundaries, it may seem unfair to say that you have to stop crossing their boundaries first. But if you’ve been taking such treatment for many years the sad truth is you may not even know what boundaries you are entitled to have! The best way to learn this is to focus first on the boundaries of the people around you.

As you catch yourself violating the boundaries of others, don’t pick on yourself! Remember, you are just now beginning to learn about all of this.

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