

Boundaries Class

Lesson 1

What Are Boundaries?

Excerpts from
Facing Codependence by Pia Mellody &
Boundaries: Where You End and I Begin by Anne Katherine

A boundary is a limit or edge that defines you as separate from others. Your skin marks the limit of your physical self, but you have another physical boundary that extends beyond your skin. You become aware of this when someone you are uncomfortable with stands too close. It's as if you are surrounded by an invisible circle, a comfort zone. This border that separates you from others contains your 'youness'; that which makes you different and separate from others.

What Is a Boundary?

- **A BOUNDARY is a definite place where your responsibility ends and another person's begins. It stops you from doing things for others that they should do for themselves.**
- **A BOUNDARY also prevents you from rescuing someone from the consequences of their destructive behavior that they need to experience in order to grow.**

**So what's the goal of a person who wants to be healthy?
To form boundaries that have some flexibility and some
definite limits, boundaries that move appropriately in
response to the situation. Boundaries should be distinct
enough to preserve our individuality yet open enough to
admit new ideas and perspectives. They should be firm
enough to keep our values and priorities to the right
people, yet closed enough to withstand an assault from
the thoughtless and mean. Healthy boundaries protect
without isolating, contain without imprisoning, and
preserve identity while permitting external connections.
Good boundaries make good neighbors.**

Exercise:

Whatever mishmash of boundaries your parents had profoundly influenced your development. The purpose of this exercise is to identify these influences.

Part 1: Pick a parent, your mother or father or other adult, and answer the following questions.

In what ways was your parent distant or withdrawn from you? Include:

- a. Incidents in which you ran to your parent with enthusiasm and he or she turned you away without following up on your excitement
- b. Events missed, such as no one there when you were the lion in the school play
- c. Broken promises
- d. Evidence that your preferences were unknown
- e. Evidence that your thought processes were understood
- f. Evidence that your interests were missed
- g. Being passed over when something concerned the whole family

In what ways was your parent enmeshed with you? Include:

- a. Ideas held by the parent that were forced on you
- b. Preferences that a parent expected you to share
- c. Evidence that your parent assumed you felt the way he or she said
- d. Parental ways/responsibilities which you were expected to adopt

In what ways did your parent use you to meet his or her needs? Include needs for:

- a. Power
- b. Comfort
- c. Sex
- d. Stress relief
- e. Solution of adult problems
- f. Other

Part II: Repeat this exercise with any other person who assumed a parental role towards you.

Part III: From what you know of your grandparents on both sides, what's your best guess about their boundaries? Write about each grandparent. Identify suspected patterns of enmeshment, withdrawal, coldness, intrusion, and the expectation that children existed to meet their needs. Talk through your findings with a therapist.

*Today, notice what physical distance feels comfortable as you interact with people. If someone you don't know and trust stands too close to you, move to a distance that feels safer. Pay attention to how it feels when you move yourself to safety.

*Today and tomorrow, notice when you are touched. Ask yourself, do you want to be touched in that way by that person? Stop the touching if you don't want it. Talk to a friend about what you experienced.

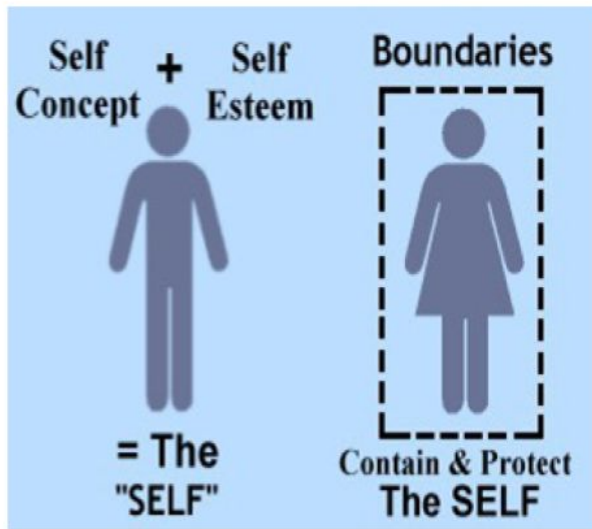
What about some less severe ways in which we neglect our OWN boundaries?

- Pretending to agree when you actually disagree
- Concealing true feelings (pretending not to be hurt)
- Going along with an activity and never stating your preference
- Pushing yourself beyond your limits
- Working too hard or too long
- Doing too much for others
- Not resting when tired
- Not eating regular/healthy meals
- Insufficient sleep
- Too much or too little time alone
- Too much or too little exercise
- Insufficient contact with those who truly care about you/isolation
- Insufficient or too many leisure activities
- Using chemicals to avoid yourself: nicotine, alcohol, caffeine, sugar, drugs
- Using compulsions to avoid yourself: eating, starving, exercise, work, shopping, TV, sex, games, sports-all can be done compulsively

Let's think about the effect it has on you to pretend you're different than you really are. Being someone you're not lets alien behavior and attitudes enter your boundary and REPLACE your true self. When we do this a lot, we begin to feel strange to ourselves. We can lose sight of who we are. Our wants, needs and beliefs can become lost until we don't even recognize ourselves. When you pretend to take on another's views and conceal your conflicting opinion, you obscure your boundaries for yourself and for others.

The harm we may have received as children (what you understand to be "normal") often sets us up for continued harm as adults. If, as children, we had to deny our true thoughts or feelings to be safe, as adults we are likely to deny (or not even be aware of) what's true for us. Telling the truth may feel unsafe, a threat to survival. What a dilemma! Denying ourselves feels safer, but it obscures who we really are. This "safer" route is a violation to our emotional boundary.

***Today, think about an incident in which you denied your true self. Feel about it then write about it. Share your thoughts with a trusted friend or therapist. Next, focus on an incident in which you asserted yourself. Feel about it then write about it. Share your thoughts with a trusted friend or therapist.**



You don't ever have to feel guilty about removing toxic people from your life. It doesn't matter whether someone is a relative, romantic interest, employer, childhood friend, or a new acquaintance — You don't have to make room for people who cause you pain or make you feel small. It's one thing if a person owns up to their behavior and makes an effort to change. But if a person disregards your feelings, ignores your boundaries, and "continues" to treat you in a harmful way, they need to go.

~ Danielle Koepke ~

Boundaries

Where You End and I Begin

By Anne Katherine, MA

The Verbally Abusive Relationship

By Patricia Evans

Facing Codependence

By Pia Mellody