

Boundaries

Definition:

A boundary is a line, point or plane that indicates or fixes a limit or extent. Boundaries are also the limits we set in relationships that allow us to protect ourselves. They let those around us know what is acceptable and *not* acceptable to us. Boundaries come from having a good sense of our own self-worth.

What Boundaries Do for Us:

Boundaries make it possible for us to separate our own thoughts and feelings from those of others and take responsibility for what we think, feel, and do. Boundaries allow us to rejoice in our own uniqueness.

Intact boundaries are flexible, so they allow us to get close to others when it is appropriate. They also help us to maintain our distance when we might be harmed by getting too close to others. Good boundaries protect us from abuse and help us to take care of ourselves. At times, boundaries allow us to distinguish our limitations. At other times, they can keep us from positive influences as well.

Four Types of Boundaries

Everyone has the right to set boundaries in various aspects of their lives.

Boundaries can be broken down into four different areas:

Intellectual Boundaries:

Each person has a unique capacity for knowledge and understanding, and the right to apply these abilities in his/her own way. Within the limits of the law and ethics, we all have the right to think and do what we want for ourselves, as well as accept the consequences of those choices. Sometimes, we want to be alone with our thoughts in order to clarify them. Intellectual boundaries allow us to do that, and the freedom to choose what we want to think.

Physical Boundaries:

In every culture, there exists the human desire to maintain some minimum personal space. This is similar to the "territoriality" that animals demonstrate. Almost all humans care deeply about private ownership. We need to feel that something belongs to us, and is ours alone. Personal space is the physical region all around us whose intrusion we guard against. North American culture displays a need for a greater area of personal space than other cultures, such as Latin America. To be comfortable, an individual requires a certain amount of physical space.

Emotional Boundaries:

Individuals need to feel safe, supported, and respected in relationships. Emotional boundaries help to maintain the space needed to process our own emotions. Sometimes, we need to be alone with our feelings in order to better understand them. Emotional boundaries help us to identify our own feelings, and separate them from everyone else's. Good emotional boundaries are non-punitive, and create peaceful connections in which each person feels appreciated and accepted for who he/she is.

Spiritual Boundaries:

Each person has the right to believe in his/her own spiritual or religious beliefs. When appropriate spiritual boundaries are in place, there is room for differences in each person's perspective. Respect is the basis for the relationship, and there is no hidden or overt agenda for changing (or "fixing") the other person's beliefs.

Congruency

Virginia Satir, a brilliant family therapist, coined the term *congruency* to indicate wholeness. When we are congruent, we are aware of and respect our own boundaries and other people's. Our emotions and actions match each other. Our bodies, thoughts, and feelings are aligned together, which creates a whole (not partial) response to a given situation. We are integrated people, living from a solid inner foundation that is complete. We know where we stand, and so do those around us.

When we are congruent, we are often adhering to a personal ethical or moral code. Congruency is a sound and satisfying place from which to relate to others, and usually creates trust and stability in relationships. This is because we are consistent in our behaviour.