

Healthy Boundaries

By Cheryl Thompson, LCSW

Boundaries are a healthy part of every relationship. They define who we are apart from others. Boundaries help build and maintain healthy relationships which are both enjoyable and supportive in our daily lives.

Poor boundaries in our lives leave us feeling lonely, isolated, angry, depressed, and anxious. Walls form when boundaries are too rigid. A boundary grows out of a sense of self-respect and advocates communication and connection with others. But a wall is built out of a sense of fear to keep people out. A wall leads to loneliness and pain and prevents us from connecting emotionally with others. When boundaries are too loose, we become enmeshed with others. Enmeshment creates chaos because we do not know where we end and the other person begins. It is unclear if our thoughts, choices, and feelings are our own or someone else's. Often our ability to have boundaries is limited because of distorted beliefs such as these:

Lies that are barriers to creating boundaries:

- I am bad for having boundaries.
- My wants are not important.
- I must do whatever anyone wants of me.
- They will hate me for saying "no".
- They will leave me if I don't keep them happy.
- People are unloving if they say "no" to me.
- People are selfish if they do not want what I want.
- Whatever goes wrong is my fault.

The following will give you a good start on developing and maintaining healthy boundaries:

- Take responsibility for yourself; take healthy and appropriate control of your life. Look for your choices and recognize what you can and cannot control.
- Develop a healthy self-concept. Understand who you are and who you are not. Define yourself.
- Find a voice to define your expectations and say "yes" or "no". Set limits.
- Respect and accept others for who they are. Listen to their choices.
- Develop a supportive network.
- Challenge lies and distorted beliefs about boundaries.
- Realize your separateness.

On a final note, journaling is a great way to increase your awareness and definition of boundaries. Recommended books on this topic are [Boundaries](#), by Dr Henry Cloud and Dr John Townsend, and [Boundaries: Where you End and I Begin](#), by Anne Katherine.