

Boundaries in Relationships¹

What are Boundaries in relationships?

Boundaries are property lines.

Boundaries mark where my responsibility begins and ends.

Important characteristics of Boundaries

Ownership: who owns the problematic feelings, beliefs, and behaviors?

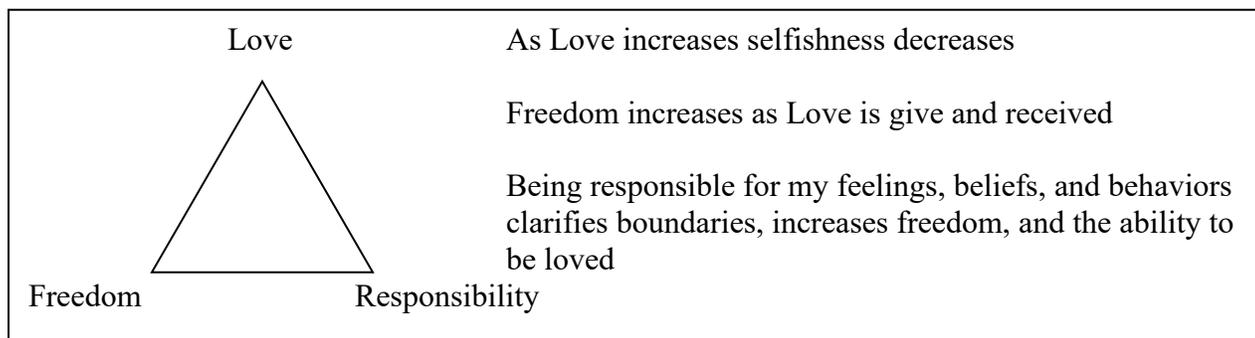
Responsibility: I am responsible for my feeling, beliefs, and behaviors; I am not responsible for your feelings, beliefs and behaviors.

Freedom: I am free from the feelings, beliefs, and behaviors of others. Others may influence me and I may influence others; but the choice to feel, believe, and act is mine.

Protection: Boundaries help us to keep the bad out and allow the good in.

Self-Control: Boundaries are about self-control rather than controlling others.

The Triangle of Boundaries



Tools for Maintaining and Managing Boundaries:

Words: My words help to define me. Words define what I believe, what I feel, and what I want or what I do not want to do.

Honesty: Trust is essential in all relationships. Honesty enables trust, dishonesty destroys trust.

Consequences: When words fail to function as effective boundaries, consequences are the actions I use as a secondary boundary.

Emotional and Physical Distance: If words and consequences fail to protect my boundaries it may be appropriate for me to withdraw emotionally or physically to protect my heart and myself from others and the harmful choices. However, Avoidance is not a permanent solution.

Time: Time can heal our wounds and teach others not to violate our boundaries.

Four reasons why Boundaries are for us rather than others.²

1. I am not blameless. Remove the plank in your own eye before admonishing others.

¹ Cloud and Townsend, 2000, Boundaries in Marriage Workbook, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI.

² Cloud and Townsend, 2000, Boundaries in Marriage Workbook, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI.

2. I need to take responsibility and ownership of my own life.
3. I enable others to love me by setting limits on myself
4. I embrace humility. I will make mistakes, but I will try to make good choices.

Ten Laws of Boundaries

I would rather find ways to say no to others rather than say no to myself. Yet, the belief that boundaries help make me a better person drives the following Ten Laws of Boundaries.

1. The law of Sowing and Reaping: my choices have consequences
 - a. When I am loving and act responsibly people move closer to me
 - b. When I am selfish, unloving or irresponsible people withdraw from me
 - c. Consequences help me learn to become responsible for myself.
 - d. Relational reaping is the emotional consequences of my choices
 - e. Functional reaping is the behavioral consequences of my choices
2. The law of Responsibility
 - a. We are responsible **to** each other but not **for** each other.
 - b. The Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.”
3. The law of Power
 - a. Clarifies what I do and do not have power over.
 - b. I do not have power over others, but I can influence them.
 - c. I have the power to confess, submit, and apologize and be willing to change.
4. The law of Respect
 - a. If I wish others to respect my boundaries I must respect their boundaries.
 - b. Respect fosters love. Loving others involves self-sacrifice to protect freedom.
5. The law of Motivation
 - a. When loving others I must be free to say no in order to wholeheartedly say yes.
 - b. I can not actually love someone if I feel that I do not have the choice not to love them.
6. The law of Evaluation
 - a. I need to evaluate the pain my boundaries create for others.
 - b. Do my boundaries cause pain that leads to injury or growth?
7. The law of Proactivity
 - a. Proactivity means taking the initiative to solve problems based upon my own beliefs, feeling and desires; regardless if others do not.
 - b. Proactive people do not need permission to solve their own problems.
8. The law of Envy
 - a. Envy is the most powerful obstacle to setting effective boundaries

- b. Envy is devaluing what I have, thinking that it is not enough.
 - c. I will never get what I want if I focus outside of my boundaries on what others have.
9. The law of Activity
- a. I need to take the initiative to solve problems rather than be passive.
 - b. In relationship one partner tends to be more active than the other. Active partners have an edge in boundary setting. What areas of my relationship need more active participation?
10. The law of Exposure
- a. When my boundaries are “exposed” my communication and connection begins.
 - b. When my boundaries are “unexposed” I am less emotionally invested in the relationship and love struggles.

Values Determine Boundaries...“What I value is what I will have”³

What I value will determine the kind of relationships I will have. There are six values that will significantly shape the quality of my relationships. Please note that when I choose to ignore one or more of these values my relationships will suffer. I can use these values to create and shape my boundaries and enhance my relationships with others.

The worst value ever is happiness. Happiness is often treated as a value but it is not; happiness is a result. Values are complex systems of belief I develop as I mature. Values drive my decision making. Young children pursue their own happiness because they have not yet developed values. Young children use their emotion rather than reason to get what they want. The pursuit of happiness is an emotional act that may or may not be tempered by values.

Six Values and Principles that Guide the Development of Healthy Boundaries

1. Love of God

Jesus said, “The greatest commandment is to love God with all of your heart, with all of your soul and with all of your strength” (Mark 12:30) The reason why this value is placed above all others is when loving a God is my orienting principle, I am open to adjusting myself to what God asks of me. Love God first, with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength. When I lose my life to God, and I will gain it.

Hopelessness is the belief that my way will not work. Question first if my way is God’s way? If my way is not consistent with God’s way, try something different.

2. Love your Partner

How do you love your partner? What type of love does my relationship represent?

Eros: Physical / Erotic love; “What is in it for me?” This is typically a marriage that last 1 -3 years.

³ Cloud and Townsend, 2000, Boundaries in Marriage Workbook, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI.

Phlios: Brotherly love (80% of marriages); “I love you for who you are... Why did you change?” This is typically an marriage that lasts for last 6-9 years.

Agape: Unconditional love; “I choose to gut it out with you.” Partners that recognize that people change. Partners who have effective boundaries and respect each other as they are. These partnerships can last forever.

3. Honesty

“I can deal with... whatever... I just need to know the truth.” The act of lying is much more damaging than the things being lied about. Lying is an emotionally driven behavior that is motivated by the belief that I will be rejected if the truth were known. It is a problematic belief and habitual behavior that develops in childhood and frequently becomes a chronic problem for adults. Habitual lying occurs because the fear of being rejected is too high and an individual is unwilling to risk being rejected. The way to help your partner learn the value of being truthful is to reduce their fear of being rejected.

4. Faithfulness.

Faithfulness is the ability to be trusted. Faith is a belief that something good will happen. Faithfulness in a person is the belief that the person will not willfully do anything that will hurt you. Faithfulness allows your partner to rest, to let down their defenses, and to be secure in their relationship with you. Intimacy requires faithfulness because it enables each partner to release all fear of harm and to be present with and for each other.

5. Compassion and Forgiveness

The person that you love is not perfect. This person is guaranteed to hurt you and fail you in many ways, some serious and some not. You need to expect them to fail and be ready for it. Boundaries are there to teach and insure that your partner’s mistakes do not become habitual problems that damage your ability to trust them. Compassion and forgiveness ensure that people can experience love and relationship for a long time. Clothe yourself with them.

6. Holiness

Holiness sounds stiff and boring to most of us, but in reality it is a great protector of relationships. A holy person is someone who is “blameless.” In reality, only God is holy and blameless. But, if we aspire to be holy we are saying that we are committed to try to be blameless. More importantly, the desire to be holy motivates us to be responsible for our mistakes when we are wrong. In the Bible, King David was a very unholy man at times, yet the pursuit of holiness is a key attribute that is recognized in the Psalms of David.