

SOCIAL/RELATIONAL BOUNDARY LAYERS

1 SKIN AND PHYSICAL TOUCH

The most basic boundary that defines who you are. As an infant, you slowly learn that you are separate from your mother who embraces you. If you have been neglected physical comfort or physically violated, you may have difficulty establishing your rightful boundaries and/or asking for what you need in order to feel loved and comforted. With conscious boundaries you gain the ability to ask for what you need to feel close and cared for, like a comforting hug.

2 PHYSICAL (CLOSENESS AND SPACE)

Asking for what you need for closeness and for space is vital. "I'd love a hug right now." Also, physically removing yourself from a situation or person maintains healthy boundaries. Give yourself permission to create space **WHENEVER YOU WANT!** There's no need to JADE (justify, argue, defend or explain) why. "I'm going to enjoy a 10 minute walk" or "I need time to process what you've said and would like to talk about this tomorrow." **Asserting your needs for closeness and space is an essential action step that sends a clear message to yourself and others: I'm caring for myself and I'm caring for our relationship.**

3 WORDS AND COMMUNICATION

The word "No" is the most basic boundary-setting tool we have. It is the **ONLY** word that provides **PROTECTION**. Sharing other words, even if you are yelling them is **not** protection. Words are 'sharing of yourself' and vulnerable. Words open us up to connection, giving and receiving. We need to be careful who we share our words with as words automatically and directly share aspects of ourselves. Words can also be used to communicate our **WANTS** and **NEEDS**, providing opportunities for real connection, giving and receiving, support, love and appreciation.

What makes one person feel loved will not make another person feel loved. We must discover and speak each other's Love Language: Physical Touch, Acts of Service, Words of Appreciation/Affirmation, Thoughtful Gifts, Quality Time.

Gary Chapman, PhD

4 TIME

Our time is one of our most precious resources. Giving your time to someone is a gift. Give your time and presence wisely. Give yourself permission to take time away from someone or a project as needed. If you feel resentful, overwhelmed, confused or depressed you may need time to relax, enjoy simple comforts, time with loved-ones, or perhaps time to prioritize and plan for big concerns. Even a few minutes makes a difference.

If you feel you've been spending too much time with someone, give yourself time and space. This time apart is an important part of relationships. Use "I" statements to state your needs, such as "I am going to enjoy some me time."

5 CONSEQUENCES

We need to back up our boundaries with consequences. Rather than nagging and complaining. This gives them strength, power, and a tangible quality. Do not enable irresponsible behavior or maltreatment. You can restore relationships and friendships by not only stating your boundaries, but also following through. For example, "If you raise your voice at me again, I will leave the room." Another example is in parenting. Rather than nagging or enabling, state clear consequences, like "I will not loan you more money until you pay me back the \$300 you owe me first."

Your personal boundaries protect the inner core of your identity and your right to choices... boundaries define your soul and they help you to guard it and maintain it.

Henry Cloud, PhD

We cannot control what emotions or circumstances we will experience next, but we can choose how we will respond to them.

Gary Zukav

6 EMOTIONAL: RESPONDING TO OTHERS

We feel close, fulfilling emotional connection (and 'feel good' hormones and neurochemicals like oxytocin) by listening and responding with curiosity and care. Unfortunately, there is a common false belief that being a caring partner, friend or family member means you should get into their emotions with them, fix them, or take responsibility for their emotions, grappling to make their emotions 'better' which pulls us into emotional enmeshment, a confusing place of blurry boundaries.

Emotions can be contagious, especially if we don't have emotional boundaries skills. So we feel compelled to 'fix' others' painful feelings because their distress, makes us feel distress. Unfortunately, trying to make other adults feel "better" (wanting to change or control their emotional experience) is selfish and pulls you into unintentional controlling behaviors, emotional enmeshment, defensiveness and disrespect and lack of disconnection.

With emotional boundaries, we can stay on solid ground, providing respect, presence, support, and empowerment to others as they navigate turbulent emotions and rough life experiences.

These tools provide emotional connection and balanced boundaries at the same time:

- Openhearted or Curious Listening
- Respect at Face Value
- Understand How not Why

It is important to understand more about what emotions are and how they can either connect us or disconnect us. The following two pages provide a helpful overview.



When people set boundaries with you, it's their attempt to continue the relationship with you. It's not an attempt to hurt you.

Elizabeth Earnshaw

7 EMOTIONAL: SHARING YOURSELF

Emotional connection is not blaming or venting our emotions at others. Connecting emotionally is the deepest level of relating. Emotional connection is sharing aspects of self, such as your likes, dislikes, joys and sorrows, dreams, perspectives, travels, interests, values, needs and desires... and on and on... that allow for opportunities to build closeness, respect and trust.

- It's our job to discern (based on past experiences) who is capable of connecting with us at richer, deeper-levels of authenticity and vulnerability.
- We set ourselves up for disappointment, over-sharing our words and time, feeling exposed, resentment, anger, pain, and self-resentment, if we share parts of ourselves with people (including family) who are not capable of meeting us at deeper, higher levels of self-sharing.
- Unfortunately, many lack Emotional Health Skills and Boundaries in our society today. This does not make them bad people. It is just part of our culture.
- If you've had to set firm boundaries due to being let-down, shamed, betrayed or hurt by someone, you may give them small 'Sharing Yourself' opportunities over time, as their trustworthy-ness increases.
- Do not be too quick to force trust in the name of forgiveness, as this is a form of self-neglect and forces you to have Complaint Boundaries, betraying self-protection and self-trust.