

# Setting Functional Boundaries

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Boundary systems are invisible and symbolic "fences" that have three purposes:

1. to keep people from coming into our space and abusing us
2. to keep us from going into the space of others and abusing them
3. to give each of us a way to embody our sense of "who we are"

Boundary systems have two parts: external and internal. Our external boundary allows us to choose our distance from other people and enables us to give or refuse permission for them to touch us. Our internal boundary protects our thinking, feelings, and behavior and keeps them functional.

## Personal Boundaries

A *boundary* is a system of setting limits that enhances a person's ability to have a sense of self. Boundaries control the impact of reality on the self and others. The purpose of a boundary is to contain and protect reality.

Reality is composed of four components. These are:

1. the body or what we look like
2. thinking or how we give meaning to incoming data
3. feelings or our emotions
4. behavior or what we do or do not do

There are three components of boundaries. These are an external system, an internal system, and a spiritual system. The External System protects the body and controls distance and touch. The Internal System protects thinking, feelings, and behavior. It acts like a block or filter and functions in conjunction with the External System. The Spiritual System occurs when two people are being intimate with one another and both are using their external and internal systems.

## Creation of Personal Boundaries

Boundaries are created by:

- Visualization of External and Internal Systems
- Memorization of statements which create the External Physical Boundary, External Sexual Boundary, and the Internal Boundary.

The statement used to create the External Physical Boundary is:

I have a right to control distance and non-sexual touch with you, and you have the same right to do so with me.

The statement used to create the External Sexual Boundary is:

I have a right to determine with whom, when, where, and how I am going to be sexual. You also have the same right to do so with me.

The statement used to create the Internal Boundary is:

I create what I think and feel and am in control of what I do or do not do. The same is true for you.

# Setting Functional Boundaries

We need only to note the impact of our reality on the other. If a person acts as a major offender, the person doing the offending is accountable for the impact and owes the other person an amends.

## Three Guidelines to Boundary Procedures

### *External Physical Boundary*

You create the "self protective" part of your external boundary when someone is approaching you. You do this by determining how close you allow the person to stand to you and whether or not you are going to allow him/her to touch you.

You create the "other protective" part of your external physical boundary when you are physically approaching another person. You do this by being respectful of an eighteen inch social distance between you and the other person and by not touching him/her without his/her permission.

### *External Sexual Boundary*

You create the "self protective" part of your external boundary when someone is sexually approaching you. You do this by deciding for yourself if you want to be sexual with this person by asking yourself if it is in your best long term interest to do so. If you agree to be sexual, you then negotiate the issues regarding when, where, and how with him/her.

You create the "other protective" part of your External Sexual Boundary when you are asking a person to be sexual with you. You do this by directly asking the person if he/she wants to be sexual with you and if the person agrees to be sexual by negotiating the issues of when, where, and how with him/her.

### *Internal Boundary*

You establish the "self protective" part of your internal boundary when someone is talking. First, set your personal boundary. Then, say to yourself that the other person is responsible for creating what he/she is saying. You only take into yourself what is the truth for you. Block the rest by following this procedure:

1. If it is true, let the information in, embrace it, and allow yourself to have feelings about it.
2. If you determine that the information is not true, allow it to bounce off your boundary.
3. If the data is questionable, gather data regarding the information.

As you observe and analyze the information, you can determine if the information is "true" or "not true". If it is true, filter the information and have feelings about it. If the information is not true, block it and remove it from your boundary.

1. True: Filter/Filter & Feel
2. Not True: Block/Block
3. Questionable: Filter/Block & Gather Data

You establish the "other protective" part of your Internal Boundary when you are verbally sharing yourself. As you share your thoughts and feelings, you say to yourself, "I have created what I am saying and feeling. I am the only one responsible for my thoughts and feelings.

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## Physical Boundary Violations

- Standing too close to a person without his/her permission.
- Touching a person without his/her permission.
- Getting into a person's personal belongings and living space such as one's purse, wallet, mail, and closet.
- Listening to a person's personal conversations or telephone F. conversations without his/her permission.
- Not allowing a person to have privacy or violating a person's right to privacy.
- Exposing others to physical illness due to your having a contagious disease.

## Sexual Boundary Violations:

- Touching a person sexually without his/her permission.
- Not negotiating when, where, and how to engage in sexual activity.
- Demanding unsafe sexual practices.
- Leaving pornography where others who do not wish to or should not see it may see it.
- Exposing oneself to others without their consent.
- Staring or looking at another person lustily (voyeurism) without his/her permission.
- Exposing visually and/or auditorily others to your sexual activities without their consent.

## Internal Boundary Violations

- Yelling and screaming
- Name calling
- Ridiculing a person
- Lying
- Breaking a commitment
- Patronizing a person
- Telling a person how he/she should be or what he/she should do
- (Negative Control)
- Being sarcastic
- Shaming a person