

ARE MY BOUNDARIES HEALTHY?

Interpersonal Boundaries are invisible lines that separate us from others both physically and emotionally and protect our rights to be ourselves. They delineate where my physical and psychological space ends and where your space begins.

Healthy Boundaries

- rest on respect and provide the basis for mature relationships.
- come naturally if we are raised in a good environment or have learned from life's lessons.

Unhealthy boundaries are usually described as being diffuse or rigid. While individuals can move back and forth between diffused and rigid boundaries, depending on the circumstances, usually one type predominates in each individual.

Those individuals who have diffuse boundaries accept all the slings and arrows that come their way without protecting themselves. They may also give too much of themselves to others. They have not learned to be appropriately selective.

Eventually individuals with diffused boundaries get beaten down by life or have some kind of crisis that instigates a change. For example, if someone is constantly told as a child that they will not amount to much, they may respond by becoming a doormat. Because they truly believe that they are not worthwhile individuals, they accept all the negative things that come their way. They may, for example, marry a controlling spouse, confirming their negative view of themselves. These individuals have diffused boundaries and tend not to have their needs met.

Individuals can also develop rigid boundaries to protect themselves. They are protected so well that nothing affects them, good or bad. In addition to being emotionally overprotected, they become emotionally unavailable. They have built a protective wall, a rigid boundary that keeps other people away. They are not being selective at all. Healthy boundaries are fluid and keep only certain individuals away.

For example, they may respond to the same childhood experience by building a rigid boundary, determined that nothing will hurt them in the way they have been hurt in the past. Such a person may be seen as negative or unfeeling. This strategy usually does not work, either, because such people often believe, no matter how much success they achieve, that they still have not amounted to much.

Limits are statements of boundaries: what is and is not part of us, what we will and will not allow, what we choose to do and not to do. Our limits are learned and are influenced by our upbringing. We need to take responsibility for them. A determining factor in setting limits is recognizing our comfort level. We set out boundaries to both distinguish our individuality and protect ourselves from pain and anguish.



Ways Unhealthy Boundaries Affect Us

▪ Intrusive Behaviour

Individuals who have diffused boundaries will often intrude on the boundaries of others. For example, they may borrow without permission or ask questions that are too personal. If the other person involved also has diffused boundaries and is upset by these intrusions, they may either say nothing and be resentful, or later overreact to some other event (an example of passive aggressive behaviour). This usually results in bad feelings between the individuals.

▪ Limited Growth

Parents with diffused boundaries may do too much for their children. They can overprotect them emotionally or let the children control what is happening in the home. Over-nurturing limits a child's growth.

If the parents have rigid boundaries, they can also limit a child's growth by saying **no** too often and too harshly. Their rules do not allow for different circumstances. Neither of these are effective parenting styles.

▪ Poor Limits

Individuals with diffused boundaries not only have difficulty setting limits for their children but also for themselves. Their first response is always **yes**. As a result, they may be overworked or over-involved. Individuals with rigid boundaries have no difficulty saying **no** and do so regularly. As a result, they miss out on a lot of fun.

▪ Adopting a Caretaker Role

Some individuals with diffused boundaries are caretakers who help others even to their own detriment. When young, they learned to take care of abusive, ill, or addictive parents or siblings. If they have had to be careful of either parent's reactions they will have learned to make sure the parent is all right. As adults they continue to try to take emotional care of others, often seeking relationships with individuals who need to be taken care of in some way. The problem is that no one is taking care of them, especially not themselves.



Why Develop Healthier Boundaries?

Healthy boundaries provide privacy and safety and allow us to relate with genuineness to others. They also allow appropriate intimacy and trust because there is no fear of losing oneself in connecting with others. Sometimes it takes a crisis to demonstrate that to survive emotionally we must set healthy boundaries.

If you need help from a counsellor to set healthier boundaries, call the EFAP.

**For confidential assistance
Brown Crawshaw 1.800.668.2055
www.browncrawshaw.com**

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