

Everyone has boundaries: you as well as the person for whom you are caring. However our world is larger than just our role as caregivers or support workers or volunteers, so it helps to remind ourselves that we all have boundaries which separate us from each other (our family, our friends, our acquaintances, strangers...). In other words we each have our own agenda and perspectives on the world around us and ourselves. Boundaries separate us in many ways: physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. In effect, our boundaries are our limits which house our unique values and our integrity.

Our behaviour demonstrates our boundary health. Every little choice we make reinforces or erodes boundaries. Thus said, it is never too late to repair boundaries or to build boundaries. Healthy boundaries improve relationships and enhance self-esteem.

Physical boundaries

When we are caring for another person, we can too easily violate the other person's boundaries. Empathy, that is putting yourself in the other person's shoes really helps to minimize physical boundary violations. Though it would be ideal, it may not be possible for the person for whom you are caring to put themselves in your place so it is important for you to respect yourself enough and the other person enough to ensure a respectful relationship. Asking and informing before doing can help enormously. Listening carefully too is excellent.

Emotional boundaries

Perhaps this is the area of most concern for us. Witnessing someone in distress can be quite horrible but to do it time and time again will whittle away at your emotional integrity without a doubt. Because of this, I strongly recommend some self-care strategies to maintain your emotional boundaries. Here are just a few: using visualization (carrying a shield for example); reminding yourself that you are choosing to care for or be with this person; taking time for yourself every single day; simply noticing what works and using that; seeing a counsellor; joining a support group; or asking yourself if your expectations are fanciful or realistic (i.e. Are you still thinking that this is the parent that "was" or the spouse that "was" or the friend that "was" or the child that "was" rather than realizing that this is the person who is.).

Mental boundaries

You are the only one living your life. Once we realize that we are creating our lives we begin the process, exciting for some and arduous for others, we bring control back into our hands of how we shape our interactions with ourselves and others no matter what our life circumstances bring us. Our self-esteem soars.

Spiritual boundaries

While boundaries in general separate us, our spiritual boundaries can connect us. They provide purpose to all of us about the reasons why we exist. Spiritual boundaries permit us to explore the meanings behind our life circumstances and the choices we make.

As you practice boundary health, your life becomes clearer. In practical terms, you will have fewer and less bitter altercations. Your stress level will become much more manageable and you will experience more energy, better communication, and more joy. It might sound like I am a fortune teller but with the wealth of experience I have in counselling individuals to enhance their mental health despite what life circumstances intervene, I simply love to predict this because I know it works.