

Boundaries

Using the COSA tools to set, maintain, determine, and honor boundaries

Does all of this talk about boundaries seem a bit complicated to you?

In basic terms there are two aspects to boundaries in a healthy relationship: setting and maintaining boundaries to keep ourselves safe, and determining someone else's boundaries and honoring them. Boundaries might be as simple as "I don't feel comfortable talking about that."

Sometimes we (or someone else) may set a boundary like "You will not smoke cigarettes anymore." Is that a boundary? We don't think so. Sometimes the easiest way to differentiate a boundary from control is to look at possible motives behind it. We set healthy boundaries both to keep US safe and to help us be in relationship with others. *When we're trying to change someone else's behavior, it's probably not a healthy boundary.*

Setting and maintaining boundaries is fundamentally *asking for what you want and need, noticing what you get, and celebrating the no!* First we had to get some practice in learning what we really wanted and needed, and who was likely to give us that. Noticing what we get is all about "playing the movie without the words." Often people say yes with their voices but their actions are a clear "NO." Once we get an answer, even if it's not the answer we want, we have more information and we can move forward with getting our needs met, perhaps in another way.

We can learn not to "go to the hardware store for bread." That is, we can learn who in our circles of support can be relied upon to help in what situations- and who cannot!

We learn how to set boundaries by setting boundaries. We are not going to be smooth and succinct in our first attempts. People who have been doing what they wanted with and around us may not respond well to those first attempts. After all, we teach people how to treat us, and sometimes we have to un-teach them the lessons we've been giving them for years. We do this by stepping up for ourselves, setting reasonable and firm boundaries, and respecting ourselves enough to maintain those boundaries. We've heard that "those who mind don't matter, and those who matter don't mind." We may see that the people in our lives change. Either their behavior changes or they leave or come closer. We don't have to be afraid of change. We can keep it simple- and as long as we're getting stronger, our circle of support will get stronger too. Let's go out there and take care of US!

Using the Steps to set boundaries:

1. I am powerless over other people's behavior. I didn't cause it, can't control it, and can't cure it. I can only control my actions and attitudes.
2. I am coming to believe that asking for what I want and accepting the answer is a form of sanity my Higher Power can give me. I don't have to do the same thing over and over and expect different results.

3. When I turn over my relationships, I am still responsible for doing the footwork. I just leave the outcome to God.
4. I can make an inventory of my boundaries and decide which are reasonable; which are necessary; and which are forms of control.
5. I can admit to my sponsor or another COSA when I'm off track and get help seeing my part clearly.
6. I can pay attention to what I'm doing wrong (rather than what someone else is doing wrong) and I can get ready to let God remove any defects I have in this area.
7. I can humbly ask God to remove any shortcomings that get in the way of setting and honoring reasonable boundaries.
8. I can make a list of the people I've harmed in terms of boundaries and become willing to make amends.
9. I can make amends for trying to control with "boundaries" and for busting other's boundaries.
10. I can pay attention to boundaries and improve my behavior.
11. I can bring God into boundary setting.
12. I can carry a message of healing and hope by setting and maintaining reasonable boundaries. I can determine and honor other's boundaries.