

**BOUNDARIES**  
**FOR UNDERSTANDING AND SETTING**  
**A WORKBOOK**

**BOUNDARIES**

The material in this workbook is meant to provide information on understanding and dealing with boundaries. It's an attempt to provide much needed information about boundaries as well as specific tools to help you set healthy boundaries. This workbook is not a substitute for counseling and therapy. It is meant to be used as a tool to enhance recovery and facilitate growth. Application of any treatment approach or technique outlined in the workbook is the sole responsibility of the reader. Whenever possible review this material with your counselor, therapist or physician before taking specific action.

If you would like to read about these issues in more depth, the following books are recommended:

Mellody, Pia, with Andrea Wells Miller, and J. Keith Miller. *Facing Codependency: What It Is, Where It Comes From and How It Sabotages Your Life*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989.

Mellody, Pia. *Boundaries* - Audio Tape. Wickenburg, AZ: 1988.

Kellogg, Terry, and Harrison, Marvel. *Finding Balance: 12 Priorities for Interdependence and Joyful Living*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 1991.

Boundaries involving physical distance are set to protect us from getting too close to people who may harm us (Melloyd, 1988). A healthy boundary in this area means that we have the right to decide how close another person stands or sits next to us. If we

## 1. Interpersonal Physical Distance

The easiest boundaries to understand and to work on are the physical boundaries. These boundaries include interpersonal physical distance, non-sexual as well as sexual touch.

## Physical Boundary

Human beings have physical and emotional boundaries as well that help us define who we are. We are often not aware of these boundaries. Many of us have allowed others to define them for us or to remove them altogether. Others have created rigid boundaries as a means of isolating and protecting ourselves from those who would do us harm. These rigid boundaries ultimately become walls against which few can enter.

One boundary that is easy for most to understand is the boundary of our skin. Our skin is a physical boundary that separates our internal organs, muscles and bones from the outside world. It protects us, and keeps us intact. When this boundary is broken there is trauma and danger to the body. When something foreign enters your body, e.g., a virus or poison, the body mobilizes its resources to get the external object out as quickly as possible. Those things don't belong in your body and your body naturally knows that. Another common form of a boundary is the boundary between two countries or two states. These are typically geographical, agreed-upon limits that allow each to claim, "This is my territory and that is yours." If one country violates another's boundary there is usually a consequence (sometimes a war) to reset the boundary and remove the violators from the territory. Boundaries such as these are essential to maintaining the identity of the country.

One of the most important tasks of the healing journey is learning about boundaries and the step-by-step process of setting functional boundaries. Boundaries are the means by which we define who we are, what our limits are and what our rights are. They are not visible or tangible yet they are a tremendously important concept to understand and to put into practice. They help us to have a sense of "self" and a sense of "other," or "not self." Without boundaries we become victims and/or offenders. Boundaries help us control the impact others have on us as well as our impact on others. Unhealthy families do not model or reinforce functional boundaries. What the children are left with in these families is an inability to set and enforce boundaries that protect them and facilitate growth. This workbook will focus on what boundaries are and how to set functional boundaries. Much of this discussion of boundaries is adapted from Pia Melloyd's (1988) groundbreaking work on boundary systems.

## Boundaries

As with all boundaries, if we expect others to respect our limits we have to respect the rights of others to set their own boundaries. If one person feels comfortable standing 2 feet away from another, yet the other person is only comfortable at 3 feet, then the boundary for this relationship should be 3 feet. We need to respect the other person's boundary and not expect his or her boundary to be exactly like ours.

Table 1-1: Exercises for Setting Functional Boundaries in this Area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get a partner and walk toward him or her maintaining eye contact; notice when you move from a feeling of comfort to discomfort.</li> <li>• Typically, when eye contact breaks, you have crossed over the comfort zone.</li> <li>• Practice moving toward and away from different people and notice your comfort levels with them.</li> <li>• Practice setting your boundary, i.e., notice where you stand, and when you back up if you need to, etc.</li> <li>• Notice if your boundary is different with men compared to women.</li> <li>• Tell yourself daily that you "have the right to decide how close someone can stand or sit next to you."</li> </ul>

I do not have rights in this area and I allow others to get too close to me even if it makes me feel uncomfortable.

### Unhealthy Boundary - Distance

I have the right to decide how close others can sit or stand next to me, and other people have the same right.

### Healthy Boundary - Distance

You need to find your own particular comfort zone and realize that you have the right to maintain that comfort zone. Your own personal distance boundary will vary with different people and with different circumstances. For instance, you may feel comfortable letting your spouse get very close to you when you're having an intimate conversation, yet when you're angry or in conflict with each other you may need to have 3 feet or more distance in order to feel safe.

This comfort zone is different in different countries and cultures. feel that someone is sitting or standing too close we have the right to move back or to ask him or her to move back. Many of us can remember feeling uncomfortable when someone stood too close to us. There is a natural tendency to back up to a more comfortable distance. The uncomfortable feeling we get in this instance tells us that this boundary was violated. Most Americans have a comfort zone of about 1 1/2 to 2 feet.

Support groups often involve hugging and touching. This can be a wonderful means of support among members but also presents a problem to those who lack boundaries. At the very meetings where boundaries should be taught and reinforced they are often violated. Imagine a person, who has been physically and sexually abused, summoning the courage to go to her first support group and encountering such close contact, often uninvited, from people she doesn't even know. We need to feel safe enough at these groups and everywhere in our lives to decide for ourselves without pressure whom we touch and who touches us. In intimate relationships, the touch boundary is often negotiated so that each partner agrees that it's alright to give each other a hug without asking. It's important, however, to be able to renegotiate this agreement at any time depending on the circumstances and always maintaining your right to say no. Again if we are to be in healthy, functional relationships we need to respect others' boundaries. We need to let others say no to us when we want a hug or want to touch them and they don't want us to touch them. Healthy boundaries always go both ways.

Those boundaries involving physical contact are there to protect us from being touched when we don't want to be touched (Melody, 1988). We each have the right to decide who touches us, as well as how and when they touch us. This is a crucial boundary if we are to gain a sense of empowerment and ownership of our own bodies. We have the right to say no to hugs or pats on the back, even from relatives. People who have been sexually or physically abused tend to have difficulty setting this boundary in healthy ways. They either put up a wall that doesn't allow any touch or they are continually letting people touch them when they don't want to be touched. It's imperative to reach the point where we have a sense of ownership over our bodies so we can decide at a conscious level who can touch us and who cannot. Once we reach this point we can develop a sense of control over this aspect of our lives.

## 2. Touch

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c. How and with whom I can practice setting this boundary:

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b. How I have allowed my distance boundary to be violated:

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a. How I have violated other's distance boundaries:

I hope it's becoming obvious to you how important boundaries are and how the boundary of sexual touch would be extremely important to a sense of personal empowerment. This boundary involves the right that each of us has to decide with whom, when, how and where we are sexual (Melloyd, 1988). This means that we can decide if

### 3. Sexual Touch

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c. How and with whom I can practice setting this boundary:

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b. How I have allowed my touch boundary to be violated:

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a. How I have violated other's touch boundaries:

<p><b>Table 1-2: Exercises for Setting Healthy Touch Boundaries</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become aware of interpersonal non-sexual touch.</li> <li>• Become aware of whether or not you allow people to touch you when you don't want them to.</li> <li>• Begin to give yourself permission to say no to inappropriate touch.</li> <li>• Practice with friends and significant others - tell them you will be setting boundaries and then practice with them.</li> <li>• Think before you accept a hug from somebody especially if you have been physically or sexually abused - say no if you want to.</li> <li>• If you have a wall find one person who is safe and practice setting boundaries.</li> </ul>
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I don't have the right to say no to touch. Other people can touch me without my permission. I will put up a wall so thick that nobody can touch me.

### Unhealthy Boundary - Touch

I have the right to decide when someone touches me and how they touch me, and other people have the same right.

### Healthy Boundary - Touch

**Table 1-3: Exercises for Setting Healthy Sexual Boundaries**

- Give yourself permission to set sexual boundaries (daily).
- Begin to examine what your sexual preferences are.
- Notice in what ways you allow your sexual boundary to be violated.
- Notice how your boundaries are being violated at present.
- Communicate with your partner about your personal preferences and talk about boundaries in this area.
- Practice saying no to sexual touch that violates your boundaries.
- Respect your partner when he or she sets a sexual boundary.

- I cannot decide for myself what my sexual preferences are
- I cannot say no to my partner.
- My partner's needs are more important than mine.
- I'm obligated by marriage (relationship) to be sexual with my partner when and how he or she wants to, even if I don't.
- Sex is not safe and I choose to put up a wall.

### Unhealthy boundary - Sexual Touch

I have the right to decide with whom, when, how and where I'm going to be sexual and my partner has the same right.

### Healthy boundary - Sexual Touch

It is important for all of us, especially those who have been sexually abused, to understand our sexual rights and boundaries. As with all boundaries, we need to give our partners the same rights we expect from them. We need to respect their "no" and be glad they feel safe enough with us to set a boundary.

Many of us have difficulty setting this boundary and end up being sexual when we don't want to and in ways in which we don't want to be sexual. Again, if a person was sexually abused (as a child or as an adult) his or her sexual boundary was violated in a powerful way. The recovery process from this kind of boundary violation is very hard. Abuse victims often lose all sexual boundaries or they put up a very thick wall. Without boundaries, victims can become sexually promiscuous, re-enacting the victim role in an often deadly game of sexual acting out. Abuse victims are typically confused about sexual boundaries and their rights in the area of sexuality. In using a wall, other victims close off any chance of being sexually fulfilled yet remain safe and protected.

we want to be sexual with a partner. It means that it's alright to say no to specific sexual activity in which we do not want to participate. This boundary protects our individual preferences in regard to sexual activity.

This may sound basic and simple, yet most people in this culture do not have healthy internal boundaries. Most of us want to blame someone else for causing us to feel a certain way and we often blame ourselves for someone else's feelings. When we are able to set healthy internal boundaries blame is no longer necessary. Many of us hear comments daily like, "You make me so angry," or "You made me jealous." These are examples of poor internal boundaries. Healthy boundaries remind us that we have sole responsibility for our feelings and no one can make us feel anything. People can, however, trigger very strong feelings within us. It's important to remember that these feelings are still our feelings and not caused by the other person. In intimate relationships it's important to notice the impact one's own reality (thoughts, feelings, behavior) has on the other person. If we want to stay in a relationship, we probably don't want to continue doing things that trigger anger or hurt within the other person.

**"Who I am is about me, not about you. Who you are is about you, not about me. I create who I am, you create who you are. Each of us must know the impact of our reality on the other."**

Internal boundaries are much harder to understand and set in functional ways. They help us understand and deal with our feelings, thoughts and behavior. These boundaries help us to know where we end and another person begins. When this boundary is set we can own our feelings, thoughts and behavior and let other people own theirs. Hence, I am responsible for what I feel, think and do. The opposite is just as true -- what you feel, think and do is your responsibility and not mine. As Pia Mellody (1988) states:

### **Internal Boundary**

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c. How and with whom I can practice setting these boundaries:

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b. How I have allowed my sexual touch boundaries to be violated:

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a. How I have violated other's sexual touch boundaries:

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- Table 1-5: Exercises for Setting Internal Boundaries**
- Give yourself permission to set internal boundaries.
  - Look at your pattern of dealing with feelings:  
Do you tend to blame others for your feelings?  
Do you tend to blame yourself for others' feelings?
  - Accept that your feelings come from within you.
  - Accept that other people can trigger your feelings and have a tremendous impact on you, yet your feelings are still yours and not theirs.
  - Work on letting other people have their own feelings.
  - Tell yourself that others' feelings are about them and not about you. (unless you've committed a major offense against them)
  - Try not to fix others' feelings or make them go away.
  - Visualize a clear force field around you that can serve as your imaginary boundary.

What I feel, what I think and what I choose to do or not do is your responsibility, not mine. What you feel, think or do is my responsibility, not yours.

**Unhealthy Internal Boundary**

I am responsible for what I feel, what I think and what I choose to do or not do. You are not responsible for my feelings, thoughts or behavior and visa versa.

**Healthy Internal Boundary**

- Table 1-4: Major Transgressions**
- touching without permission
  - hitting, punching, choking or other physical abuse
  - violating private space and personal belongings (purse or wallet)
  - forcing sexual activities on another
  - subjected others to screaming, yelling, name calling, ridiculing, lying, sarcasm, teasing
  - failure to keep agreements
  - negative control (sit down, shut up and be what I want you to be)

There is one important exception crucial to understanding this boundary. If either person is engaged in a major act of transgression toward the other, the offender is accountable for the impact on the other person (Melody, 1988). In other words, if Sally goes over to Mary and slaps her across the face, Sally cannot just stand back and say, "What you are feeling is about you, not about me." This is a major offense and Sally is accountable for Mary's reaction.

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c. How and with whom I can practice setting these boundaries:

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b. How I have allowed my internal boundaries to be violated:

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a. How I have violated other's internal boundaries:

We can only set boundaries for ourselves. We cannot set another's boundary no matter how much we would love to try. Our job then is to be aware of our boundaries, set them, and then accept the consequences. One of the consequences may be the loss of the relationship. We can't predict how others will respond to our boundaries or limits. We need to be able to negotiate our boundaries with those to whom we relate with- out keeping them rigid and allowing for flexibility. It's not healthy, however, to have boundaries that change every day depending on one's own or someone else's mood. It's also important to realize that boundaries are limits that we set within ourselves. Boundaries should be personal and private, and not verbalized to others (except when negotiating). They are there to help protect us and keep us from hurting others; they don't need to be announced with fanfare. Therefore, when someone is blaming us for a feeling that he or she is having we need not erupt into a discussion about boundaries, we just need to be clear about our boundary, enforce it and go on. When people first learn about boundaries they often go overboard, setting boundaries all over the place. That's an understandable overreaction given that most of us had little or none to begin with. Over time, however, we become less zealous and begin setting more realistic boundaries. As with anything, boundaries can be used in destructive, negative ways. Some people use boundaries as a weapon to hurt or punish others. Some people can rationalize most any behavior supposedly to support their boundaries.

It's crucially important to work on stating our feelings with "I" statements rather than the accusatory "you." This may be dismissed by some as semantics and irrelevant, yet "I" statements are a very important first step in setting internal boundaries. When we start a sentence with "you" the focus is on the other person and the natural response is for the other person to adopt a defensive posture. Once we are in a defensive posture we are no longer listening but are preparing a response or counterattack. When we use "I" statements we are owning our feelings. We are, in effect, saying: "This is what's going on within me; you may have had an impact on my emotional state or triggered these feelings but these feelings are mine." If we can use "I" statements effectively we can usually avoid triggering defensive reactions in other people.

## How to Assess Boundaries

Boundaries routinely need adjusting, monitoring, changing and reevaluating. They are not absolute rules of behavior or etiquette. If they are healthy, they can change when warranted and evolve as our understanding of ourselves and our needs evolves. It's rare that anybody can maintain healthy boundaries all the time (although that is the goal). Through the journey of self-discovery we learn how to set and maintain healthy boundaries more and more frequently. Many of us just beginning the journey have little or no sense of them. It's important, therefore, to define or assess our boundaries so that we know which areas require extra attention. Pia Mellody (1988) talks about assessing boundaries in four different ways: intact boundaries, damaged boundaries, lack of boundaries, walls as boundaries.

## Intact Boundaries

When our boundaries are intact we are in a relatively healthy place. Intact boundaries help us to be intimate and vulnerable with people while at the same time maintaining sufficient protection. Intact boundaries help us to meet our needs for love and attention and protect us from being victimized. They also help us to stop victimizing others with our behavior. Intact boundaries help us define ourselves and enable us to live life to our best ability without hurting others.

## Examples of Intact Boundaries

### Distance and Touch

At all times you are negotiating distance and touch.

### Sexual Touch

At all times you are negotiating when, where, how and

with whom you are being sexual.

### Internal Boundaries

You take responsibility for your reality and let others take

responsibility for theirs, note the impact and share the

impact in a moderate way.

## Damaged Boundaries

When our boundaries are damaged we have only partial protection from others. We can set boundaries with some people, yet with others (Mom, boss, etc.) we become wett noodles and lose all sense of boundaries. Or we are able to set boundaries most of the time but falter when we're tired, sick or under pressure. Damaged boundaries mean that we can only be safe some of the time, with certain people, and under certain conditions.

**Examples of Damaged Boundaries**

**Distance and Touch**

With some situations and with some people you can negotiate distance and touch, yet at other times and with certain people you cannot.

**Sexual Touch**

You are able to negotiate sexual touch and sexual activities some of the time, yet at other times you allow your sexual boundary to be violated.

**Internal Boundaries**

- Part of the time you are able to separate your reality from that of others, yet sometimes you fall back into believing that you are responsible for their "stuff" and they are responsible for yours.
- When you are sick or tired, you have difficulty setting internal boundaries.
- With certain people, like your mother or boyfriend, you have difficulty with these boundaries.

a. My boundaries are damaged in the following ways:

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b. I have difficult setting boundaries under the following conditions:

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c. I have difficulty setting boundaries with the following people:

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d. The consequences of my having damaged boundaries include:

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**Lack of Boundaries**

When we lack boundaries we have no protection and cannot tell where we stop and others begin. This is a very dangerous condition to be in both for ourselves and for the people in our lives. Lack of boundaries is a set up for abuse and violation of basic human rights. If we have no boundaries we become either victims or offenders.

When we have walls as boundaries we are completely isolated from others and cannot experience intimacy. We are totally protected and safe, yet also totally isolated and alone. Walls are most important when you are face-to-face with a major offender. In such a situation it is healthy and prudent to put up a wall as quickly as possible and remove yourself from the situation as quickly as you can.

### Walls as Boundaries

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d. The consequences of my lack of boundaries include:

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c. I lack boundaries with the following people:

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b. I lack boundaries under the following conditions:

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a. Examples of how I lack boundaries:

- You blame others for your reality, and in turn blame yourself for another's reality.

#### Internal Boundaries

- You are a victim yourself or you victimize others.
- You have difficulty saying "no" even when you want to say no.
- You are sexual with people with whom you don't want to be sexual.
- You are sexual in ways in which you don't want to be sexual.
- You don't accept "no" for an answer.
- You don't negotiate sexual touch or activity.

#### Sexual Touch

- You let people touch you when you don't want to be touched.
- You let people stand too close to you.
- You stand too close to others.
- You don't ask if you can touch.
- You don't negotiate distance and touch.

#### Distance and Touch

### Examples of Lack of Boundaries

- my own thoughts
- my own feelings
- my own beliefs and opinions
- be myself

I have a right to....

Functional boundaries also serve to protect our basic rights as human beings. If we don't have good healthy boundaries we often sacrifice our basic rights. Basic rights are inherent birthrights we shouldn't have to earn, but to which we are each entitled simply because we are human beings. The best way to fight for them is to be aware of them and then to set boundaries to protect them. Below is a list of some basic rights. See if you view these as inherent rights or privileges you have to earn.

### Boundaries as Protectors of Our Basic Rights

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d. The consequences of my use of walls as boundaries include:

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c. I use walls as boundaries with the following people:

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b. I use walls as boundaries under the following conditions:

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a. Examples of how I use walls as boundaries:

- You don't care about other's feelings or how you impact them.
- You are invulnerable.
- You have retreated so far away from people that they cannot hurt you.

#### Internal

- You do not let anyone hug you or get close to you.
- You let others know that they should stay away.
- You avoid hugs and sexual contact as though your life depended on it.
- You do not get your touch or nurturance needs met.

#### Distance, Touch & Sexual Touch

Personal preferences are different and unique for each of us and are just as important and necessary as our basic rights. It's important to become aware of what our unique preferences are and to set boundaries that protect them. Basic rights are our birthrights, while personal preferences are a reflection of the choices we make as unique individuals.

### Boundaries as Protectors of Our Personal Preferences

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d. People in my life (current and past) who have granted me these basic human rights:

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c. People in my life (current and past) who have not granted me these basic human rights:

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b. The consequences of not having these basic rights:

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a. Basic rights that I was not granted growing up or as an adult:

- take care of myself
- feel safe
- privacy; my space
- be alone when I choose to be alone
- decide what I want and what I don't want
- protect myself from harm
- be touched in appropriate and healthy ways
- basic human respect
- have fun
- be human and make mistakes
- my own religious beliefs
- choose my own actions
- say no

**Examples of Personal Preferences**

- How and when one desires touch
- How and when one desires affection
- When (and with whom) one desires privacy
- How, when and with whom one expresses feelings
- Individual expressions of religious values and beliefs
- Personal tastes in food, clothes, music, etc.

Because no two individuals' personal preferences are exactly alike, they make us special and unique. It's important in relationships to share our personal preferences with the other person and to negotiate how these individual needs may be met. One person may need to be hugged many times a day and the other, once a week. Relationships often involve sacrifice and negotiation, yet the goal is not to give up being yourself in order to be with someone else. Many people don't make their personal preferences known in their relationships and then wonder why they're not getting those needs met -- and resent the hell out of the other person for not reading their minds and just knowing it. As we become aware of and acknowledge our basic rights and preferences we can then find ways to get those needs met. Boundaries are an important part of getting that done.

a. Personal preferences that have not been acknowledged as a child or as an adult:

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b. The consequences of not having my personal preferences validated:

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c. People in my life (current and past) who have not valued my personal preferences:

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d. People in my life (current and past) who have valued my personal preferences:

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In healthy development, boundaries are developed mostly through trial and error, modeling and education. In unhealthy families, we are forced to create boundaries that fit the system in which we live, whether or not they fit our own personal needs and rights. The basic rights talked about earlier are concepts that unhealthy families do not typically apply toward children. These children are stripped of such rights which are

In most families boundaries are vague, inconsistent, excessively rigid or totally absent. In any of these situations the child is set up to have poor boundaries and, therefore, lacks the skills to negotiate boundaries with others. We are constantly making decisions at a very early age about boundaries and basic rights. Whatever decision we make as a child is likely to be irrational and illogical but it's often the best decision possible given the circumstances. And while these immature boundary systems may have worked for us as children, they typically get us into trouble as adults. As children we develop a map of the world using these dysfunctional rules and limits. This is done out of fear and in response to pain rather than as a way to validate and expand the self.

- "If you kids would just behave, your father would be in a better mood."
- "I'm in a bad mood and it's all your fault."
- "You kids make me so angry."
- "If I hadn't had children I might have finished college."

#### For Example

Many parents reinforce their children's belief that they are responsible for the bad things that happen to the family. Children quickly learn that they are to blame for whatever misfortune befalls their parent or the family and begin trying to fix the situation.

In unhealthy families, parents do not teach their children what is appropriate regarding distance, touch and sexuality. In fact, boundaries are more often violated and abused in these families. It's hard to imagine a child who is being physically or sexually abused being capable of maintaining a healthy boundary regarding distance, touch or sexuality. These children learn that one's body is not one's own but rather the property of the offender. They grow up believing they have no rights with respect to their own bodies and have difficulty saying no to inappropriate touch. This is not surprising considering most do not even know what appropriate touch is because all they experienced was inappropriate touch.

In healthy families, children are able to learn functional boundaries because they are modeled and reinforced in the home. Those of us who lack functional boundaries did not learn about them because our parents themselves did not have or know about healthy boundaries. Young children can't set boundaries for themselves without having them modeled by parents or caretakers.

#### How Boundaries are Formed

As we continue to grow and heal it's important to find people who are safe to share with and to be around as we lower our defensive walls and begin to trust again. One of the most healing experiences one can have is to share oneself with someone and not be shamed by that person. Many people find that it's hard to find people who are safe. If you come from a dysfunctional family you may have difficulty making good choices in relationships. Part of setting boundaries is learning whom to trust and whom not to trust. The drawing that follows represents the ideal when setting boundaries in relation to others. It's not healthy to be totally vulnerable and it's not healthy to be walled off from the world. The compromise is to have protection with vulnerability that you can control. It's tremendously important that we get to choose when and with whom we are vulnerable.

### Trusting Others

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c. Examples of unhealthy boundaries in your family:

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b. How boundaries were modeled in your family:

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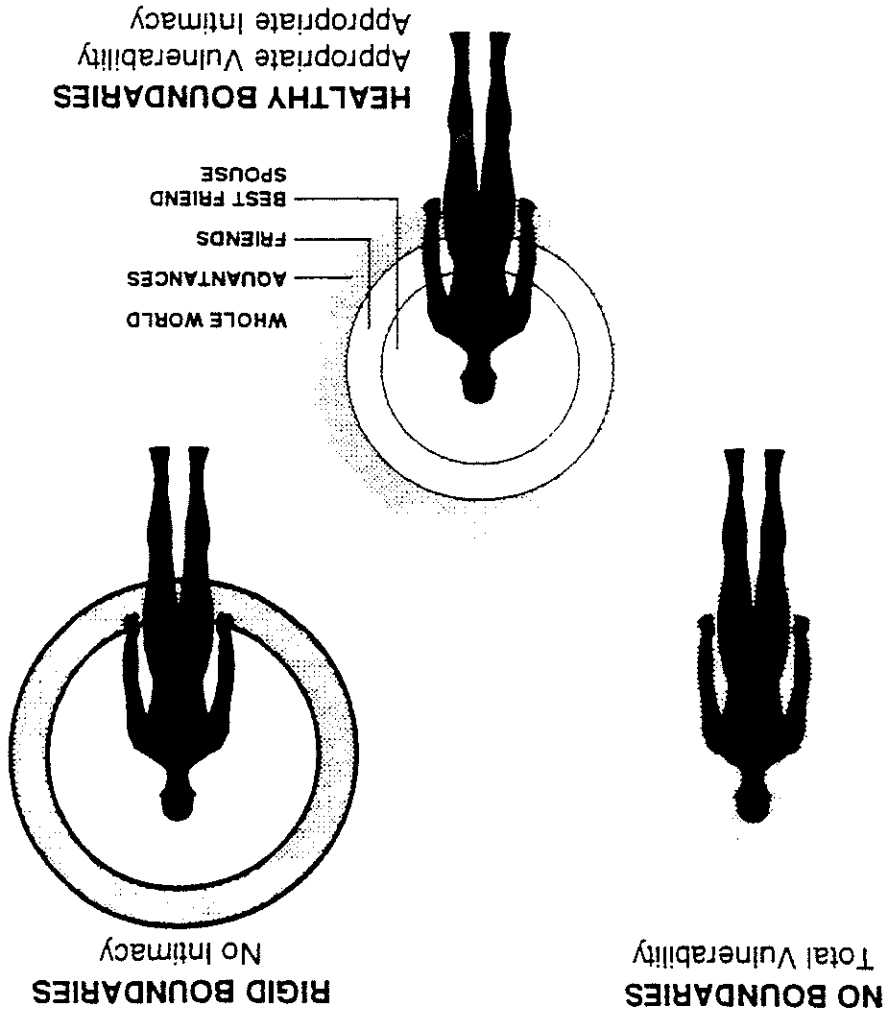
a. Messages that you received in your family about basic rights and boundaries:

<b>Basic right</b>	Decisions made by a child in a unhealthy family
I have a right to take care of myself.	To take care of myself is selfish; I must put others needs before my own.
I have a right to my own feelings.	My feelings are bad and wrong; I must hide them.

**Example:**

given only to adults. When this happens it is impossible for any child to believe that those basic rights belong to him or her and should never have been taken away.

The concentric circles represent the boundaries we use to keep people at a distance and to keep ourselves safe. Outside the largest circle is everyone with whom we come in contact. Within the first ring are people with whom we associate but do not know well enough to call friends or those we would not want to have as friends. These are people who know us only at a very superficial level. It's appropriate to keep these people at a distance until their trustworthiness has been established. Once a relationship has passed from one of acquaintance to friendship, each must pass the "trust test" in order to become true friends. The trust test simply means that each has done nothing to hurt the other; that neither has been dishonest nor betrayed the other and that each has developed a small measure of trust in the relationship. We need to know that we have the right to choose those who are allowed this level of intimacy with us. Still, there may be people in our lives whom we trust, who have not hurt us, but whom we do not want to have as friends (even if they would like to be friends). We need to feel that it's alright to leave these people at the acquaintance level.



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d. People from whom I need more protection:

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c. People with whom I would like to be closer:

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b. People in my life whom I trust at the best friend level:

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a. People in my life whom I trust at the friend level:

When relating to anyone at any level, we have the right to pull back and protect ourselves either by physically leaving or by reducing our level of disclosure to a less vulnerable one. These types of boundaries are very helpful, especially when dealing with those who have not been able to establish boundaries in their lives. Many people are amazed when they are given permission to keep people at a distance if they want to (including family members). Most never thought they had that right or were too concerned with what other people might think.

Once these people pass our trust test they can be allowed the kind of intimacy we typically share with best friends. These are those rare people in our lives with whom we can share most anything and yet be completely accepted for who we are. It's difficult to have more than one best friend at a time because these relationships require time and energy in order to maintain this level of intimacy. Hopefully, our spouses or significant others can be allowed this level of intimacy. However, some are not safe enough to warrant this closeness and it's important to keep them at the level reserved for friends or acquaintances.

Once we have allowed someone the level of intimacy reserved for friends, we typically still do not tell all or bare our souls. Such a person is one with whom we share activities, with whom we can talk to about ourselves, and on whom we can depend to help us when we need them. We can choose to move these people back to the acquaintance level if the trust we've placed in them changes or if we need more protection from them.

## Summary

The establishment of boundaries is perhaps the most important aspect of recovery and when they are set in healthy functional ways, they can provide safety and protection. Boundaries help us develop different ways of defending and protecting that are not as harmful as some of the old defenses.