

Cowichan Family Caregivers Support Society

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Boundary Practice for Caregivers

What are Boundaries?

- A sense of self: “This is me and that is you.”
- How you know where you end and others begin, or where others end and you begin.
- “Everything inside my boundary is me. Everything outside of my boundary is not me.”
- Leads to an understanding that we can choose what to allow into our boundaries, and what to leave outside.



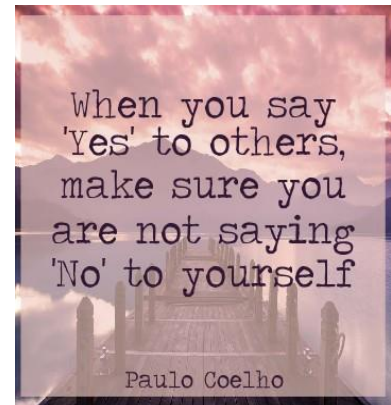
Why are Boundaries Important?

- They're essential to knowing and taking care of ourselves.
- When we're in a caregiver role without boundaries, we experience more resentment, frustration, fatigue and burn out. Boundaries make caring sustainable.
- Without boundaries, we are vulnerable to “compassion fatigue” and “vicarious traumatization.”
- Boundaries show respect for the autonomy and independence of others.
- When a person is “unboundaried,” they meet the needs of others first, and often don't recognize the boundaries of others. Their own needs are neglected, and they try to get them met by/through other people.
- All people are both boundaried and unboundaried at times.

Types of Boundaries

1. Vague

- We have trouble saying “no” and setting limits.
- We put other people’s needs and desires first, even when it harms us. We act on behalf of others
- We have trouble seeing or respecting other people’s boundaries – this can involve caretaking, giving advice, getting involved, problem-solving, and all forms of “helping” that involve doing for someone else what they are capable of doing for themselves.
- We’re afraid of losing connection to others if we tell the truth about our feelings or take space to meet our own needs.
- Our connection to others is more important than our connection to ourselves.



2. Rigid

- We feel a strong need to protect ourselves.
- We can be defensive.
- We feel separate from others, and this feels safer to us. This kind of boundary is more like an eight foot wall.
- We maintain a sense of connection to ourselves by keeping other people at a distance. We fear we will lose our sense of connection to self if we connect with others.
- We say “no” frequently, and we’re sometimes grumpy about it.
- We say “no” more forcefully than we mean to.
- Often we choose rigid boundaries after having vague boundaries and getting hurt – the pendulum swings back and forth.

3. Healthy/Flexible

- We can connect to someone else **and** stay connected to ourselves at the same time. We can be present for the person and present for ourselves at the same time.
- We know what we need, want, and feel most of the time.
- We can say no, and we can say yes – to others and to ourselves.
- We can speak our preferences and set limits using assertive communication.
- We can see and respect other people’s boundaries without feeling abandoned.
- We feel capable of handling most situations. We are grounded.
- We can separate our feelings from other people’s feelings while still feeling empathy.
- We know that if we’re having an emotional response, it’s our responsibility to take care of ourselves, not someone else’s.
- As caregivers, we allow people the space to be themselves. We don’t need people to do anything for us.
- Our sense of ourselves is not connected to how another person feels about us.
- We easily sense when someone invites us into their boundary, and we decline.
- We easily sense when someone enters our boundary, and we can assert ourselves to re-establish our space.

