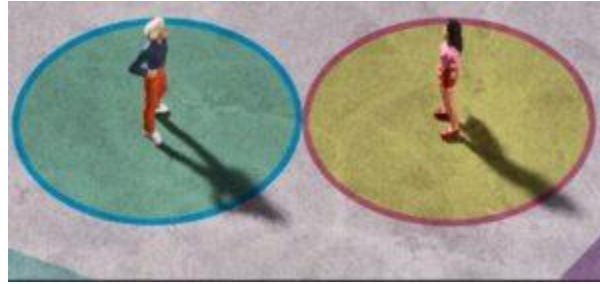


SETTING BOUNDARIES



Self-care is about setting boundaries, letting go

Setting boundaries is integral to establishing one's identity and is crucial to mental health and wellbeing. Sounds easy but is not often intuitive. "Some of us have so many voices in our heads; we could hold group therapy by ourselves," said Rokelle Lerner. Lerner is a popular speaker and trainer on relationships, women's issues, and addicted family systems.

This internal chorus is often composed of voices from our family of origin. Also included are critical teachers or bosses' voices from past relationships or current situations. Often these voices are drowned out by our voice nagging, reprimanding, berating, but rarely praising us.

"In times of stress or chaos, the voices grow louder, and it's easy to go numb," Lerner once told the audience at a Hazelden Women Healing Conference. "We become estranged from our purpose and our passion. Our response is fear, and our reaction is an attempt at control." We frequently become children again during times of stress. This leads to reverting to old and unhealthy patterns in dysfunctional families or relationships. Our boss becomes our mother; the vindictive coworker becomes the childhood bully. Although we are adults, we feel like vulnerable children. This vulnerability puts us at risk for depression, substance abuse, or other addictive behaviors.

Grow ourselves up

"We need to 'grow ourselves up' when we feel little," said Lerner. Growing up is about setting appropriate boundaries and limits and turning from reactivity to creativity. "Without boundaries, we all react to the past and retreat to family patterns," said Lerner. Boundaries communicate "what I value I will protect, but what you value I will respect."

Lerner said that growing up is about maintaining dignity and integrity and being "authentic" with ourselves — a skill that takes practice and preparation. In addition, it's about learning how or whether you want to "show up" in a situation. This involves how you want to communicate what you need or want to say. And, finally, taking the consequences for what you say and do. It's also

about listening attentively and with respect. When people communicate directly, honestly, and sensitively, they are learning to speak from the best part of themselves to the best part of others, said Lerner.

“Healthy adults learn how to make appropriate requests, set limits, and take action,” said Lerner. She gave the following example: A skateboarder taunted a woman by skating too close to her, knocking the newspaper she held out of her hands. The woman at first reacted explosively by yelling and calling the adolescent every derogatory name she could imagine. He just laughed and walked away. Overcoming that first raw reaction, she called him back, this time explaining in a much calmer voice, “What I meant to say is that you scared me. I thought you were going to hurt me.”

Understanding your emotions

“If you can’t identify your emotions right away, at least you can control your behavior,” said Lerner. This “fake it ’til you make it” approach is one of the first things people recovering from addiction learn. It often requires counting to 10, breathing deeply, or excusing yourself until you feel more in control. Reacting reflectively rather than reflexively opens the door for honest interaction. Boundaries differ for each individual and each situation. Boundaries run from “too intrusive” on one end to “too distant” on the other. Pay close attention to your instincts and feelings to strike a healthy balance in relationships that will honor your boundaries. If an interaction feels inappropriate or uncomfortable, the chances are a personal limit is being tested or crossed or a need is not getting met.

Practicing setting boundaries skills

The more we practice sifting through all the voices in our heads, tuning into and trusting the one clear voice that guides and protects us, the better we will get at identifying and respecting our boundaries. Violating our boundaries occurs, and we can improve at developing strategies to take the best care of ourselves. We discover outlets like mutual-help groups, hot baths, long walks, and prayer or meditation feed our soul better than drugs or alcohol. We find out how good it feels to be a grown-up. ~originally posted by [Hazelden](#)

[How to set Healthy Boundaries](#)