

Boundaries



Like fences, boundaries are at the interface of where two different spaces meet. Your boundaries reflect who you are, your personality, and how you uniquely relate to the world. They are patterned ways of responding to the world that have been built up over a lifetime of experiences. Boundaries also reflect your circumstances, and can change depending on the situation, and how you are in ourselves.

Boundaries can serve you, enabling clear communication, protecting you, and helping you in your interactions with the world.

However, when boundaries are too strong or too weak, or are inappropriate or not relevant to the situation, they can create barriers where there doesn't need to be, interfere with what is good and healthy for you, lead to imbalance in your life, and mess with you clearly communicating who you are and what you need.

There are often lots of internal rules that keep your boundaries as they are... 'what will people think of me', 'polite people don't do that', 'don't make others upset', 'others needs are more important than ours'. There can be an unconscious reluctance to go against these types of beliefs. You can also get into patterned ways of responding that limit you. When you are aware of what's happening and challenge your boundaries, there can be a feeling of fear. On the flip side there can be a sense of empowerment and liberation.

Being conscious of your boundaries can help you to move towards boundaries that reflect your values and how you want to be in the world.

What are your boundaries like? Do they change much, e.g. depending on who you are with, or how you are on that day?

Take a walk around your neighbourhood and check out the different sorts of fences. How could they be similar /differ from the sorts of boundaries you have?

Do you feel empowered or uncomfortable if you go to assert your boundaries differently?

There's three types of boundaries that I invite you to look at in this course.

1. Boundaries that protect

These boundaries reflect being able to be who you are and your right to express that to others. It's not about being right or wrong, but more 'this is where I'm at'.

These boundaries also reflect your values and what is ok and what is not ok for you. We will often feel uncomfortable when others intrude in this area. Sometimes we will accept being uncomfortable because there is a deeper value we are holding on to. Other times we let other's intrude because we aren't aware of the boundary, we don't feel safe to express it, or we don't have the skills to know how to put it in place.

*Identify the values that are important to you in your life.
Identify where your boundaries effectively protect you and times when they don't.*

2. Gates

Gates let things in or out. For many people the gates associated with giving out to others, or to our work, or going the extra mile, are open and we find it difficult to close them.

Often the gates associated with receiving from others, for nurturance, and for doing things for ourselves are not open near as much, and get rusty. This has to do with values and beliefs we have developed, as well as stress and getting caught up in things.

Reflect on the balance within you of giving and receiving.

3. Internal Boundaries

These are boundaries between different areas of your life, for example between work, time for our self, family time, relaxation, creativity, spirituality, health, sleep, and contribution. One area of your life can take over and be out of proportion. This can happen through the time you spend on it, or one part of your life 'infiltrating' another. Balance in life doesn't mean equal amounts; it is amounts that are appropriate to the context and to your greatest values.

A lack of internal boundaries can be characterized by not having distinct parts to your experience of life. When this occurs, you don't move through different types of experience, but stay in the one mode all the time. Two typical ones people speak of is not being able to switch off, and not experiencing the joys of life because they are tired. Life becomes monotone rather than a rich experience.

Reflect on the balance between different areas in your life. Does this balance work for you? How do you balance short term gains with potential long term losses, or visa versa? How do you balance competing demands?

Strengthening and growing ourselves involves moving more consistently towards boundaries that work for us. As we have discussed previously in this course, wanting things to be different can contain a 'lack trap'... "I should have good boundaries", "I'm not good enough if I don't have good boundaries".

Remember, the most important thing is valuing and respecting yourself as you are, in all your humanness. This is an important, but often missed step, in establishing healthy boundaries.

Developing boundaries requires developing skills such as communicating clearly, in being prepared for others not being happy, and learning how communicate boundaries in ways that invite others to come alongside of us and connect with us when we set a boundary. It takes courage to step outside of our comfort zone, even if it is a tiny one. Developing boundaries also takes practice. A good first step is to just imagine putting in a boundary, without the pressure of having to act on it.

Who do you know has good boundaries that you could benefit from adapting to yourself? How do they put their boundaries in place?

What small (or not so small 😊) steps could you take forward in the area of boundaries?