

GRIEFWORK & BOUNDARIES

A boundary is a limit or edge that defines you as separate from others. When that boundary is indistinguishable from the boundary of others, the relationship is called **enmeshed**. When someone crosses your boundary without your full consent, your boundary has been **violated**.

An understanding of boundaries, those which have been appropriately healthy for you and your past, current and future relationships, is particularly useful when dealing with the changes brought by the death of someone who has been a significant part of your life.

You might discover that your boundaries were inappropriately enmeshed with a deceased partner, or even violated by that partner. In order to constructively deal with your loss, you may need to better understand that relationship and learn whether or not there is a danger of having it adversely affect your future well-being.

Many changes will be brought about by your loss, and a better understanding of your rightful boundaries is an important part of shaping that change in a healthy manner.

While problems in life are inevitable, suffering is not. You are allowed to make appropriate changes in your image, outlook and behavior.

BOUNDARY TYPES

- **Physical.** A boundary may be physical, like where and when you are comfortable being touched by others, how close you want to be to others, how physically involved you are comfortable being with others. It is in respect for the accidental violation of another's physical boundary that in our first session we asked you not to hug or physically comfort another without first getting that person's consent. We cannot assume that someone else's boundary is the same as our own.
- **Emotional.** A boundary may also be emotional, a result of how you act with others or will permit others to act with you, communicate with you, be with you, and how you permit yourself to feel in a variety of life situations.
- **Visible.** A boundary may be visible, obvious or apparent to you and to others, or invisible, where you or others are not aware that it exists or even that it has been violated.

Given a particular relationship or situation, your boundary may be different than usual. There are appropriate boundaries and inappropriate boundaries for you in varying situations and relationships. Your boundaries were learned as a result of your experiences as children and in the process of growing up. Because you may have learned a set of inappropriate boundaries, this doesn't mean that you can't change your life and learn to practice more appropriate boundaries.

PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

You have a right to have control of your body. You need not let anyone get closer to you than what is comfortable for you. Sometimes we're conditioned to accept something as outwardly comfortable which, had we been in good communication with our inside feelings, would have realized was making us uncomfortable. Incidentally, this is true for emotional as well as physical boundaries. Insist that your boundary of physical closeness, sexual contact, and degree of touch are honored and not **violated**.

EMOTIONAL BOUNDARIES

Emotional boundaries are more varied, more invisible, more deeply ingrained in your upbringing, and sometimes more difficult to change.

ACTIVITY

Do you:

- Pretend to agree when you really disagree? "I love that color" when you really don't?
- Conceal your true feelings? "That's okay, I'm not hurt," when you were terribly hurt?
- Go along with an activity you really don't want to do, never stating your preference? "That movie is fine with me," when you would rather have taken a walk.
- Declining to join an activity you really want to do? "No thanks, you guys go ahead."
- Work too hard or work too long?
- Do too much for others?
- Not rest when tired?
- Ignore your needs; not eat regularly, not get sufficient sleep?
- Get too little or too much alone time?
- Get too little or too much exercise?
- Have too little or too much leisure activity?
- Have insufficient contact with persons who really care about you?
- Use chemicals to avoid yourself: alcohol, drugs, tranquilizers, caffeine sugar, etc.?
- Use compulsions to avoid yourself: eating, starving, exercise, work, shopping, spending, TV, sex, games, sports? All can be done appropriately or can be done compulsively.

To the degree that you are comfortable, let's discuss some of the boundary issues you have had in previous relationships as well as desirable future changes.

Should you realize you've had a problem with boundaries in the past and wish to prevent similar problems in the future, a more intensive work on your personal boundaries may greatly benefit from the professional direction of a therapist or trained counselor.