

September 2020 Issue

For more health & wellness news, visit DailyHealthWire.com

Boundaries and Healthy Family Relationships

Healthy personal boundaries in family life are a foundation for individual and family well-being. Boundaries are what define us as people. They clarify our identities and our relationships to others. Much like a fence provides a physical limit around a yard, boundaries help us know for what we are responsible and for what others are responsible. Good boundaries also allow us to choose how we will let others treat us. Modeling healthy boundaries in family life is especially important to help children grow up to have secure and healthy relationships.



During times of stress, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic, healthy boundaries also can reassure our family members that they will be cared for and that our family can continue to thrive even during challenging times. When families spend unusually large amounts of time together, good boundaries can reduce conflicts and stress in family relationships.

Healthy Family Boundaries:

- **Give us a sense of well-being:** We feel confident that we can manage our personal lives because we recognize we have freedom to make appropriate choices for ourselves. We accept that we are responsible for our own feelings and needs. We understand our role and responsibilities to others, without being burdened by unrealistic expectations or “shoulds.”
- **Establish our identity:** Healthy boundaries communicate to others that we are individuals and have a right to choose our own values, beliefs, emotions, thoughts and behaviors. We are allowed to have different viewpoints from family members and to develop our unique identities.
- **Lead us to practice good self-care:** Good boundaries affirm our personal worth and value. When we recognize our own self-worth, we are more committed to healthy self-care.
- **Help us avoid stress and burnout:** We can say “no” to requests for our time and other resources if they do not align with our priorities. Parents can set healthy limits with their children that can reduce everyday conflicts. Caregivers for elderly parents can set healthy limits on what they are able to do.
- **Guide us in having appropriate interactions with others:** Healthy boundaries rest on a foundation of respect. When we understand healthy boundaries, we support other’s right to make their own choices, and we communicate how we want to be treated as well.
- **Help us build deeper bonds with our partners and children:** Healthy boundaries require us to listen carefully and share our thoughts and feelings openly with our partners, children and other family members. Honest, respectful communication builds trust and strengthens our relationships.
- **Allow our family members to grow in personal responsibility:** Letting other family members be accountable for their actions is also a key part of healthy family boundaries. For a relationship to function well, each person has to take responsibility for their actions and feelings.
- **Strengthen us to face challenging times more easily:** When healthy boundaries are in place, we have a stable foundation to help us through crises or times of loss. The skills we have developed are even more valuable in helping us navigate change and challenges.

How Can I Practice Healthy Boundaries?

With Partners

All couples need a balance of togetherness and separateness. Make sure you each have personal time as well as opportunities to engage in activities outside the home. This enriches your life together. A little time apart does make the heart grow fonder!



When you do have disagreements with each other, remember that you are each responsible for sharing feelings honestly and working to resolve things. Don't fall into the temptation to complain about your partner to your children or others in an effort to get them to take your side. This triangulates your relationship and is unfair to your partner and to the person you draw into the conflict. Work things out between yourselves!

Healthy partners don't have to agree on everything. But, you are responsible for getting your needs and wants filled. It's true that we will not get everything we desire in life, but you can have much happiness when you recognize that you, not your partner, are ultimately responsible for your happiness.

With Children

Helping children develop healthy boundaries protects them from those who might try to harm them or treat them poorly. Young children should be allowed to choose whether or not they want to hug or kiss others, and should be taught about appropriate touch. The sense of ownership of one's body is a fundamental boundary that is essential for children.

Children also aren't responsible for meeting the emotional needs of their parents or other adults. Parents need self-care so that they are able to meet their children's various needs. Allow your children to express feelings, whether anger, fear, sadness or frustration. When their feelings are acknowledged, they learn they are valued and respected.

Caregiving for Family Members

Just because someone "is family" does not mean that you have to give up healthy boundaries in order to give them what they want. When elderly family members need care, it is wonderful to be able to offer loving support and help. But accept that your siblings have a right to choose how involved they wish to be. You need to respect your own limits in choosing how much assistance you can provide. Remember, there might be alternate ways to meet your loved one's needs.

For more information, check out these resources:

- [Boundaries: Where You End and I Begin](#) by Anne Katherine, M.A., Copyright 1991 by Parkside Publishing
- <https://www.mentalhelp.net/blogs/establishing-healthy-family-relational-boundaries/>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-flux/201511/7-tips-create-healthy-boundaries-others>