

What Are Boundaries?

When we think of relationships, we think of love. When we think of boundaries, we think of limits. Boundaries give us a sense of what is part of us and what is not a part of us, what we will allow and what we won't, what we will choose to do and what we will choose not to do.

Boundary systems (according to Pia Mellody in her book *Facing Codependence*) are invisible and symbolic "fences" that have three purposes: (1) to keep people from coming into our space and abusing us, (2) to keep us from going into the space of others and abusing them and (3) to give each of us a way to embody our sense of "who we are". Boundary systems have two parts: external and internal

Our external boundary allows us to choose our distance from other people and enables us to give or refuse permission for them to touch us. Our external boundary also keeps our bodies from offending someone else's body. The external boundary is divided into two parts: physical and sexual. The physical part of our external boundary controls how close we let people come to us and whether they can touch us or not. Also, if we have intact external boundaries, we know to ask permission to touch other people and we are careful not to stand too close to them for their comfort. In a similar way, our sexual boundary controls sexual distance and touch

Our internal boundary protects our thinking, feelings, and behavior and keeps them functional. When we are using our internal boundary, we can take responsibility for our thinking, feelings, and behavior and keep them separate from that of others, and stop blaming them for what we think, feel and do. Our internal boundary also allows us to stop taking responsibility for the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of others, allowing us to stop manipulating and controlling those around us.

Boundary Sketch

Healthy:

Healthy boundaries are like a door with a doorknob on the inside that we can choose when to open or close. With intact flexible internal/ external boundaries people can have intimacy in their lives when they choose but are protected against being abused physically, sexually, emotionally, intellectually or spiritually. God uses this boundary. We choose to allow or not and practice boundaries, choices, limits.

None:

No Boundaries. They have no sense of being abused or of being abusive. Such people have trouble saying No or protecting themselves. They allow others to take advantage of them physically, sexually, emotionally, or intellectually without clear knowledge that they have the right to say, "Stop that, I don't want to be touched" or "I am not responsible for your feelings, thoughts, or behavior".

A codependent with No boundaries not only lacks protection but has not ability to recognize another person's right to have boundaries with the codependent. Therefore, they move through other peoples boundaries unaware that they are doing something inappropriate. Life crashes in doesn't know own Reality.

Victim/Abuser/Rescuer

Partial:

Partial Boundaries. People with damaged boundaries can at times or with certain individuals say No, set limits and take care of themselves. At other times or with other people they are powerless to set boundaries.

For instance, they may be able to set boundaries with everyone but authority figures, or his/her spouse, or his/her child. In addition to, in certain circumstances they become offenders, stepping into someone else's life and trying to control it or manipulate it.

Walls:

It is also quite common for a person to move from one kind of wall to another, **switching from anger to fear, words, or silence at any time**, though always remaining invulnerable behind the walls. After a period of loneliness they may venture out get pinged and quickly retreat back. The sad thing about walls is that although they give solid protection, **they do not allow for intimacy** and leave the codependent even more isolated and lonely.

Anger:

People who use a wall of Anger give off the message (either verbally or nonverbally), if you come near me or say anything about such-and-such, I'll explode! I might hit you or yell at you, so watch out! Others are afraid to approach for fear of triggering that anger.

Fear:

People who use a wall of fear retreat from others to keep safe. Such people don't go to parties, don't hang around after meetings to chat. They emit an energy field that says don't come near me, or I'll fall apart. I'm so fragile and afraid that I can't handle contact with anyone. Unfortunately, an offender is attracted to a person like this, like a red cape to a bull. So this is not an effective method of protection from offenders.

Silence:

The person using a wall of silence becomes quiet and does not emit an energy field of emotion like the people using fear or anger, they fade into the woodwork. Another example would be some using the "silent treatment"

Words:

The person using a wall of words often just talks right on, even when someone politely tries to contribute to the conversation by making a comment or changing the subject. Talks over others and may ask a question and talk right over the answer.

From ***Facing Codependence***, by Pia Mellody

Skills For Setting Boundaries

- Gain Awareness
- Define who you are
- Define who you are not
- Develop the "No" muscle
- Stop blaming others
- Stop playing victim
- Persevere
- Become active, not reactive
- Set limits
- Choose values
- Practice self-control
- Accept others
- Realize your separateness
- Be honest
- Challenge distorted thinking

From ***Changes That Heal*** by Dr. Henry Cloud