

UNDERSTANDING BOUNDARIES

We all have personal boundaries. They define who we are and determine how we are able to interact and relate to the world, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

My boundary lets me know where I end and you begin.

My boundary allows me to express who I am and allows you to do the same about you.

If we grew up in a dysfunctional family, or where healthy boundaries were not role-modeled, inconsistency and/or various forms of abuse influenced our ability to form and maintain our boundaries. We also have difficulty identifying the boundaries of others.

Damaged boundaries are symptoms of codependency.

The primary cause of conflict and difficulties in relationships lies in unhealthy boundaries. My boundary is my container. When I am too contained or not contained enough, then problems in relationships result.

Healing and restoring our boundary is a part of the recovery process. It does not happen overnight.

Our **physical boundary** defines our need and right to physical space and safety; including our needs and rights in sexual interactions with others.

Our **emotional boundary** (or internal boundary) defines our emotional needs, rights and safety; including our right to our own thoughts and feelings.

If I develop an **overly protective or rigid boundary**, my ability to be in healthy relationships with others is compromised. It is like being surrounded physically and emotionally by a steel wall. *Nothing can penetrate in or out.* The give and take, back and forth flow in a relationship is hampered.

The other extreme is a **lack of a sense of boundary**. I cannot experience myself as separate from others. My wall is faulty and does not keep things (others) out. *It becomes difficult to distinguish myself from others.* I feel my feelings and your feelings too. I begin to define myself according to your definition of me, losing my own identity as a result. I begin to behave in ways I think you want me to behave.

A **healthy boundary** is like the permeable membrane of a cell. *It controls what goes in and out.* It allows the wall to have windows to see (increased awareness) what is coming at you, and a door to open and close allowing you to take in what you need. There is a back and forth flow.