

Setting boundaries

Hint series – Adult Survivors of Child Abuse - Cowra Support Group – August, 29 2011
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Background

Our definition of personal boundaries

Personal boundaries include the minimum space I feel comfortable with between my body and the person I am speaking to. They also define the amount of ‘abuse’ I am prepared to endure before it becomes unbearable.

Personal boundaries being personal can only be defined by me.

Children usually learn about setting boundaries as they interact with adults and others and test numerous physical and emotional boundaries. They are also guided by their gut feeling about their level of comfort at the time.

Adult Survivors and Personal boundaries

Abused children have no concept of personal boundaries as their world was totally violated, there was no limit to what the perpetrator could do.

Consequently adult survivors usually get walked over in daily life even though their body and soul may indicate how uncomfortable it is.

They typically bottle up which translates in stress – physical tension and illnesses – or they literally explode as they do not have the skills to appropriately express how they feel about the boundary trespassing.

Way forward

Firstly realise that, unlike paddock fences, personal boundaries are mostly invisible and only known to me.

Give the person a fair chance at **not** trespassing by clearly exposing my boundaries when appropriate and preferably prior to trespassing.

If trespassing still occurs, ensure it is acknowledged there and then. Indeed boundary trespassing is an offence and as any offence is better dealt with in context.

When you try your hardest to communicate your feelings and set your personal boundaries and both your feelings and personal boundaries are dismissed, become aware that you **cannot change the other person’s behaviour. You are only in control of your behaviour.**

The steps below may be a good guideline to follow in times of boundary trespassing.

Steps to follow when one of my personal boundaries has been trespassed

1. Recognise which emotional state I am in
2. Verbalise it
3. Make a statement to explain to the 'offender' which boundary was trespassed
4. Be prepared **not** to follow up
5. Reward yourself for having been able to carry out those steps

Further explanations of the steps

1. Recognise which emotional state I am in

Am I angry? Sad? Hurt? Frustrated? What am I really feeling?

Without recognising the emotion it might be hard to identify which boundary was trespassed.

2. Verbalise it

Even if only internally acknowledge the emotion.

'I am angry'.

3. Make a statement to explain to the 'offender' which boundary was trespassed

'I don't like hearing criticism all the time'

(meaning: you have reached my capacity to tolerate any more criticism out of your mouth. Will you please stop that behaviour?)

4. Be prepared **not** to follow up

It is not necessary to follow-up especially at the early stages of learning to set boundaries – as fear of conflict might be great within you and might render you powerless and unable to respond appropriately.

Do not respond if response there is. It is all right to learn to state the offence and not argue with the offender.

5. Reward yourself for having been able to carry out those steps

Be proud of yourself for having had the courage to stand up for your rights. Often you will feel bad about it – probably in fear of another upcoming conflict. Try not to. You only have stated your boundaries and pointed out an offence. This is a great step forward which you should be proud of.

It takes practice to get better at it. But every day brings many opportunities. Seize them.

About setting personal boundaries directly from mother nature....



Willie wagtail is a very territorial bird, here defying an azure kingfisher



However there are times where one has to stand one's ground and defends one's personal boundaries ...

Disclaimer: Hints provided to you courtesy of the Adult Survivors of Child Abuse - Cowra support group. They may or may not help you. Consider carefully. In doubt consult your therapist.