

## Appendix 3: Boundaries

### Appendix 3-A:

#### Establishing and Communicating Boundaries: A Vital Aspect of Self-Care

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What are boundaries? Boundaries are the limits we set with other people, to promote and protect our own well-being. Boundaries can relate to the physical, mental, emotional and/or spiritual aspects of our lives and ourselves. Examples include: whether we speak up for ourselves/take action on our own behalf when we feel used, unsafe, putdown or violated, how well we protect our time/energy/privacy from invasion by others, whether we can say "no" to requests/demands without guilt, and whether we maintain the right to make our own decisions.

What is a "boundary issue?" A boundary issue is an area where our current boundaries aren't working for us; where we may not have clearly defined what our boundaries are, or where we don't know how to effectively enforce them in our relationships.

★ Boundary issues touch every aspect of our lives. For all of us, clarifying, reassessing, communicating and enforcing our boundaries is an ongoing process throughout life. When we don't have clear and strong boundaries, we are left vulnerable to harmful outer influences and may find ourselves feeling overwhelmed, confused, exhausted, resentful, anxious, or depressed. We need a variety of boundaries: some firm, some flexible, some permeable and some solid. As an analogy, imagine a room. Some of its boundaries (walls, roof, floor) need to be solid and firm. Others (windows, doors, locks) need the flexibility to open and shut. Screens are permeable boundaries, letting in nourishing elements (fresh air) while keeping out unwanted elements (insects). Similarly, in defining our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual boundaries, we need to identify the nourishing versus harmful elements in our interactions with others, and determine which types of boundaries best address our needs in each of these areas. ★

★ ★ From my experience helping clients to re-establish necessary boundaries in their lives, I have observed two major areas that commonly need to be addressed. First, we need to discover the beliefs and emotional patterns that block our ability to set boundaries (for example, "it is never OK to displease a friend or relative"). Second, we need to know, on a practical level, specifically how to go about setting and maintaining clear boundaries.

★ For many of us, our families of origin did not model healthy boundaries. Recovery often involves virtually "starting from scratch." Referring back to the room analogy, imagine you had grown up in a cave, or on an open prairie with no shelter. You would need to learn about a variety of things, including the nature and purpose of walls, windows, roofs, etc., how they are constructed, what makes them resilient, and different designs/materials to choose from. You would then need to assess your own lifestyle, tastes, practical needs, local climate, etc., in order to select the best combination for you. Redefining our boundaries is similar in that it is a gradual process of gaining new awareness, exploring

our options, taking the risk of trying something unfamiliar, listening within for what feels right, and, as we get clearer, communicating our choices to others. And, just as houses can be damaged by weather, vandalism, etc., and then restored to their former condition, we need to know how to proceed when someone chooses to violate or ignore our boundaries even after we have set them. Understanding, establishing and maintaining boundaries are skills that can be learned at any stage in life. This is the hope and the promise that recovery offers.