

Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essayby [drug free rehab](#) on Fri 25 Jan 2008 06:34 AM PST | [Permanent Link](#)

I feel like a child again. I really enjoyed reading and seeing the cartoons. Wonderful way to express yourself.

[Reply](#)

Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essayby Maria Rosenfägel on Wed 06 May 2009 12:52 AM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

This is so helpful reading to me right now. I'm moving out from a marriage with a partner having a more blurred sense of boundaries than I have. This has been particularly difficult in relation to his two children from a previous marriage, which has lived with us every second weekend, moved away with thier mother for a couple of years, returned when I was giving birth to a child of my own, then stayed with us one week every month, until my stating my boundaries made them withdraw.

They continued to see their father of course, with my good feelings and also invitation for them to our home. I was hoping on resolution to the conflict which origins I didn't quite understand as it was a matter of their interpretations, not anything concrete, thus arising very much from sources unknown to me. What did begin to arise negative feelings in me though was my husband's bringing my own two daughters to his meeting with his older daughters all the time. I was gradually beginning to feel them building up a "community" that excluded me. In the same time I was asking why my husband did so, because wouldn't his older daughters want to see their father and have his full attention for themselves sometime? So finally I asked of him not to bring my daughters with him, because his older daughters were very wellcome to our home if they wanted to see their younger sisters.

This was rewritten into accusations of my preventing the older sisters from seing their younger sisters, leading to accusations from my husband that I was "splitting the family". I was on my hand beginning to more and more persistently request my husband to get outside help to sort the conflict between the his older daughters and me out so that we all could get along together. Upon which he became infatuated in another woman and declared divorce. I could see no good option but to accept, because it was certainly another solution to the problem but the one I had strived for, but a solution still the same.

Next thing is that my husband asks for a 50-50 living arrangement and brings my children to see their sisters in a declaring that he can do as he pleases when the our children are with him and I have no right to interfere in that.

Which is what I have had to accept and "make peace with" for more than half a year now. And it is like having no means to protect my boundaries. It's like having an open, soar wound constantly exposed, being unable to... I can't close my door, because my children are being taken from me in a gesture that I have no right, no say, nothing. Which is true.

My children are six and ten years old. I am their primary custodian and they are the "meaning of my life". No accident. Not a "Everybody else has, so why not me?" But much of my life has been centered around making up wiht my own heritage for their sake, looking at men as potential fathers to them, waiting to have them so as to have their condition as good as I could make them... I also gave birth with no heavier anasthetics in order for them not to be affected by drugs. I adjusted my life so as to take care for them, took loan from the bank so as to stay with them...

It is so painful. So utterly, utterly painful... I feel totally unable to protect my boundaries in this situation. I can manage to calm down and turn away from it, so as to let the pain fade, but just a mentioning or approaching the situation... when talking about it... makes me feel overwhelmed with pain, frustration and contained anger. Helpless anger. Anger I have to gulp down and hold because I can do nothing, as I see it. I feel totally helpless. Any suggestion? When it comes to children...??? Boundaries might be a difficult issue, but it is when approaching the issue of children it really begins to escalate in difficulty I beleive... Thoughts?

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essayby [Al Turtle](#) on Wed 06 May 2009 11:16 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Wow! Sounds like a mess, though divorce, with kids of both sides of the family in the middle, seems to be extremely messy. To my way of thinking that makes this a "crash" boundary-learning situation.

Raising kids and teaching them boundary skills seems an enormous challenge. How do you handle wiping "their" nose when they don't want you to touch "their" bodies? How do you handle the amazing boundary-less activity of telling them to clean up "their" room? Etc.

Take that one step further. How do you teach them to speak up when they want to be with "their" friend, and when you don't want them to? How do you tell your partner what he does with "his time" with "his" or "your" kids? And how do you, or I, use the word of ownership (his, mine, hers, etc.) when relating to children? "My children!" Are they my property? Tough.

I think it is good to chat these things over and over with a good friend who knows about boundaries.

The principles I have outlined in this article still hold. **All boundary skills are defensive. If you are upset, your boundaries are invaded somehow. Your boundaries are your problem, not anyone else's.** The tough spot I see in your comment seems to be about "what or who belongs to you." If I think my kids are "mine," and someone does something with them, I will feel attacked. My defenses will go up.

But what happens if I put "something-that-is-not-mine" inside my boundaries? I will still feel attacked, even though at that point I am probably attacking someone else and stirring up their boundary skills.

Clarifying your boundaries, what is yours and what is not, seems important in this situation. Also remember that in the past this may have been very confusing for everyone. Studying boundary skills often made me re-examine foolish things I did in the past, foolish things I thought were right-things-to-do at the time.

I also overheard in your letter some considerable difficulty, at least in the past, in communication between you and your husband. When you asked him why he was putting the girls together, if you didn't get a clear answer that lead to understanding, then I think your communication skills need some work.

I also get the idea that you feel shut out, i.e. think people are not sharing with you. That usually suggests that people fearful to talk to you, and if that is the situation, it really needs work. For your safety, I believe you need people to feel free and easy to talk to you.

My guess is that you need someone skilled, nearby, for a while to walk with you through all this.

Best of Luck. Al

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essay

by Anonymous on Wed 06 May 2009 06:45 PM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

What an interesting answer to this person. I wonder though, Al, what if she is very skilled with boundaries and even with communication (it sounds, by how she wrote her comment, that she is quite able to communicate clearly) but found herself with a man who simply does not care at all what she thinks, feels, requests for herself and "her" kids, etc. I think that sometimes, some people are very skilled at ignoring others' boundaries, no matter how one approaches them. Some people will not communicate well either even when they find themselves with good communicator. Some people seems to love playing games and feel empowered by them.

I found myself in some similar situation and it did not matter what I tried with him, nothing worked. He is a liar, a manipulator, a game player, even with therapists with saw together as a couple. Just my thoughts.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essay

by [Al Turtle](#) on Thu 07 May 2009 02:35 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear Anonymous, Where do I start? Well, I am glad you dropped by and shared your thoughts.

One thought is that I've found no one has to respect your boundaries, ever. I believe it is your job to make them sufficiently uncomfortable whenever they come close to invading your boundaries so that they learn to be respectful. People, I find, can't see my boundaries unless I make them clear, and won't respect them unless I act with sufficient vigor. That is part of the above article. Saying

what you want is rarely a boundary statement.

Another thought is that everyone can learn to communicate well. The job of a good communicator is to participate in that learning. That's how we help children or adults learn to talk. Most "good communicators" I have met are not.

I listen to what you say and imagine that you still are pretty angry with this guy. It shows. One clue to anger is the tendency to villify "the other," make a list of how "bad" they are. One saying I was given is "To be angry at someone most of us first have to put them in the wrong." I am sure you have fine reasons for your anger, but I doubt it/they worked for you. Anger, in relationships, seems to fail miserably in the long run.

Best wishes. Al

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essay

by Maria Rosenfågel on Wed 06 May 2009 07:38 PM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

When I had my suspicions about resentment from the side of my step daughters confirmed and the conflict surfaced, then I immediately began to consult a legitimated psychotherapist for my own part in an effort to do my best in the situation. And yes - I'm being pointed out by my step daughters and eventually also my husband (after his initial "defending me", which I believe is a very poor way to sort out a conflict) as somebody very frightening to talk with. It seems that one problem is that I don't lose my temper and throw out accusations I don't mean in anger so as to come back and say that I'm sorry. The girls are used to their mother and father doing so. Instead I ask what they mean, I ask what they feel, I point to how little their feelings seems to have to do with the factual events that has occurred. I believe this is what is really scary. It begins to put the light on quite other sources for their misery than my person, which triggers rejection, resentment and the accusation that I don't respect their feelings. (The idea that has been growing in me when I've contemplated their reactions and responses is that I meant a lot to them when they were kids, and that they've come to feel very abandoned by me when their mother took them away, and when they came back finding me very preoccupied with children of my own. An idea which I believe is very threatening to their father and somehow must not openly be confessed to...)

In regards to my ex husband I can tell you how he makes sense to me. He hasn't yet given me a clear answer, because he becomes terribly upset at the question. His answer is repeatedly that it is self evident that the sisters must meet. He makes me understand that it is outrageous for me to even ask the question. (My pointing out that they're totally free to meet by the older sisters just coming over to see them is persistently ignored by him.) But I know this - his mother fell in love with another man and left him and his siblings when he was three. They were eight siblings who was thus divided among relatives. He and one sister was placed with a paternal aunt where they were both spoiled and abused in the same time.

So while I would have wished for his support in assisting his daughters to find out what is actually behind their grief and sadness in relation to me (which I believe their resentment and accusations is the expression of), in a supporting my invitation to them, he does something very different. In regards to his children with his previous ex wife I've accepted that there is very little I can do as "step parent"/friend adult in regards to the accusations against me from their side, or their refusal to have anything to do with me unless the contact is mediated by their father. It is all the more difficult when it comes to the children that I'm legally responsible for and who grew up with me in my parental place, with my mother, with my family traditions and in my family house. To have them taken away by their father who has now come to cut me off from communication, except at the counseling sessions, in his openly declaring that he can do as he wishes without having to discuss with me or come to any kind of agreements with me... and have "all his girls" gathered with him and his new partner... The way the situation is in Sweden now, I can't do much but to accept it and he knows it. Politically there is a will to strive for gender equality, which means shared custody and often enough a 50-50 living arrangement (every second week with each parent). If I object then it could be perceived as my trying to prevent the girls from seeing their father (and of course their sisters, as they have already accused me of in spite of my invitations to them to come to see me and their sisters whenever they wish). If it had not been for my children, then I would have packed my belongings and just taken off, leaving the whole situation. I know I can work on a lot in my manner to communicate, and I do actively try to do so by studying Non Violent Communication. But in this situation those my NVC studies is also something that rather confirms the difficulty perceived about me, and the more I try the less I seem to

achieve.

So what can I do but choke on my own boundaries? Because I figure those are the ones I'm choking on while I reluctantly let my hands fall into my lap, feeling utterly helpless.

But I have one more question - could the reluctance in relation to me also be caused by the possibility that strong positive feelings might be seen as a form of "disloyalty" towards other family members? Could it be so that attempts to have my step daughters feel safe with me might increase underlying tensions and imply a great dilemma to them in that somebody else (maybe two) may feel frustrated by this? And if this is so, and if there are more people but me making the situation feel unsafe, then maybe things are placed within my boundaries that shouldn't be there? Or rather - responsibility is being placed upon me that isn't mine, and my attempts to resist it is provoking quite some punishment consisting of my being excluded from the "community" into which my children is being taken?

In relation to my mother's funeral my husband's daughters didn't contact me, but they came and I was told that my mother had made the children felt so welcome, but I had not. They wouldn't sit in the same room as me at the coffee after the ceremony, but their father joined them in another room. My husband had a very close relation with my mother and "adopted her as his own", so it was made very clear to me that they were there as connected to their father and his connection to my mother and in spite of my presence. Which is baffling as I've always greeted them to my home with open arms... and did so on this occasion too in spite of the "set up". So I figure I don't react and behave as I'm supposed to... I feel there is a lot of pressure. And the competence of my psychotherapist is also questioned by the counselor as a result of my getting visibly and noticeably upset in regards to my husband's insinuations that I'm hostile towards his older daughters, refusing them to meet with their younger sisters.

I figure I shouldn't feel upset, frightened or threatened, huh? But when there are several people involved who has had their sense for boundaries messed up since childhood, and when the love and dependency of children becomes a "desirable commodity" that is competed for?

Yes, I need somebody skilled. I don't know if the one I have is skilled enough, because the counsellor seems to think that my stance in regards to the situation (that I wish for the conflict between my husband's older daughter and me is sorted out in family therapy before my husband takes my daughters to see their sisters, i.e. that we get assistance so that the older sisters can overcome their reluctance to come visit me and their younger sisters) is something a good psychotherapist should have made me reconsider. I am being forced to accept my husband's taking the children to see their older sisters and apparently I am supposed to emotionally find this totally ok also, i.e. as not overstepping my boundaries. And sure - it would have been perfectly fine if it hadn't been for the larger picture of it that I see. I had no bad feelings in regards to it initially. But when I found that the daughters of my husband allegedly perceived me as rejecting them, feeling resentment towards them, me being "passive aggressive" with them and secretly hostile... and with hardly no foundation for it but pretty weakly founded distorting interpretations of a few incidents. And when I found that my attempts to explain those incidents to them so as to show things being very different from what they imagined was being rejected as my "not respecting their feelings", then my feelings in regards to it changed.

I feel the situation really calls for my being focused. But I didn't get here by accident. I have been raised to doubt my own senses while yet being stubborn enough to express the sense I make and hold on to it until convinced some other sense provides a better alternative. And I usually retreat when I sense somebody begins to fight me. I could see the difficulties and I was trying to back out a couple of times, but persuaded to continue as partner with my ex husband. Which I believe also has given rise to resentment in my husband in his sensing my reluctance. Now I have children... and I can't take them with me in a backing off, so my husband is divorcing me now but yet maintaining a firm grip on me through my children.

So I'm consulting your pages now almost daily, reading your presentation of slave-master communication, etc, getting so much support out of it. But the situation remains difficult and at times I feel my mind and emotions go off in a spin that renders me unable to sleep or rest all that much. I try breathing, I try to turn my mind away from it, but it is really difficult. Yet there is so much joy in my life and so much fun together with my children and in my garden and at work. And your site is just great. Just so great. There is so much support to be found in it and I'm so happy about it. There's just no "quick fix" to get me out of the jam I've managed to get myself into, I figure. Just one step at a time. And I'd better place them the very best I can. There is so much for me to learn, and it gives me great hope. But boundaries and children can be a really tough issue when the love/dependency of children becomes "valuable commodity" to adults and competed for.

Reply**Re: Re: Re: Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essay**

by [Al Turtle](#) on Thu 07 May 2009 06:52 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Hang in there. Having a local person who can walk thru this with you still seems a good idea. There seem so many pieces to the situation. Fortunately the only parts you probably need to focus on are yours. Determining which that is can be very tough, especially with many people you will be in contact have little or no boundary skills themselves.

I sometimes laugh outloud when someone tries to "blame me" for "their interpretation" of some event. Having good boundary skills is a treasure to me and my "warrior" just loves to dance on "my castle walls." And at the same time I can safely feel great concern for others - empathy is easier with boundaries.

It is sad that at times I must stand back while others thrash around and learn their lessons. My boundaries, well done, are often a significant part of their learning.

Keep going, be gentle with yourself and remember to Validate or at least PreValidate yourself when you come across things you've done in the past that now you wish you hadn't. Those things were you best at the time - period.

Nice to IM with you yesterday. Hope other readers learn from your experiences, too. Thanks for sharing.

Al

Reply**Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essay**

by Maria Rosenfågel on Thu 07 May 2009 10:58 PM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

Just have to add :-):

I'm a bit euphoric today. I discovered that I've locked myself up in an almost catch 22 power struggle by becoming afraid in noticing the tendency of this to come about in regards to an issue around my children. So I jammed myself into a tug of war I couldn't win. I've lost and still wouldn't let go, but sitting there with jaws tense, hands forming fists, and steaming with frustration. And I've been giving this reason for my upsetness - "My children are being used as pawns in a power struggle!" Well, sure they were in my allowing myself into it and getting all steamed up, cramping in my own trying to tug it all in my direction! So I was in a kind of self fuelling spiral there. If I stop tugging there wouldn't be a tug of war, isn't it so?

I can not work for a better situation in that manner. It prevents resolution. It prevents my trying to ask what it is all about. Yes, the situation I tried to prevent isn't ideally good for the children, but I don't make it better by engaging that tug of war about that specific issue, and specifically not in the manner I had kind of... cramped into due to my fears in regards to the larger picture I was seeing. Principally there was nothing wrong with my "stance" and my reasoning. But so what? If the other part "doesn't make sense" yet, even if the sense is there somewhere beyond, it doesn't matter how much sense I make. Engaging in a tug of war that finally comes out as a fight where one has to win over the other, i.e. a fight about power, just obscures whatever sense I was making in the first place.

And there wasn't any immediate danger to my children. The struggle in itself in the larger context of our family is what is harmful. Both I and my children can afford to "lose" in that specific case and no harm will be done to them by that alone. And - as long as I, myself, engage in that battle, it is difficult also for our councillor to assist us in with the overall situation, and also - to explore what this might have been all about for my husband and his daughters.

Yes, boundaries. I do have a lot of work to do when it comes to my boundaries. It is easy enough when it is only a one to one interaction, but when there is a tendency in a constellation of people towards scape goating, using master-slave talk, hiding, obscuring, being afraid to

come forth and talk about what is really going on, etc, then the situation takes some boundary skills indeed. And I have a lot of weaknesses to work on in regards to my boundaries. Thanks to you I'm in school!!!

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essay

by [Al Turtle](#) on Fri 08 May 2009 07:29 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Good for you. Congratulations.

I find the "normal" and boundary-less way to see things is characterized by talking about 'the truth' or 'facts,' etc. as if there exists a correct point of view. I am amused to have found [MasterTalk](#) as a clear clue to this approach. This to me now seems an inefficient and poor way to proceed. Yet it seems almost completely commonplace.

I believe having good boundaries allows you to see things from many points of view at the same time. I can see my way of evaluating the world, and I can see how other's experience things. I can see what I am trying to share and also see how I come across to others.

This multiple-camera-view of the world allows me to make much better choices in my life, and is only possible with good boundary skills.

When someone chats with me and are using MasterTalk, I imagine how limited their awareness is and how poor their boundary skills may be. I often invite them to join me in a wider and more accurate world view. Sometimes they come along and sometimes not. And sometimes they become angry that I don't collude (pretend to agree) with them in their "correct" way of seeing the world. How silly.

Have fun. Al

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essay

by Maria Rosenf gel on Sat 09 May 2009 03:29 AM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

Sigh... I thought I managed to get myself out of that specific fix/issue and brush it off by just letting go. I find it wasn't that easy. Loosening the grip to leave it for others to sort out made me feel so utterly exposed that I feel totally miserable again. Scared. And approaching that "either-or" of beginning to actually think about giving up my children, just let go and hand them over to others. Because I experience this, on an emotional level, as an attempt to forcibly deny me to have any boundaries at all, and that the children is where this can be done to me.

As I've tended to pay attention to the discrepancy between interpretation and "facts" (studies of cultural science for many years), I've had a rudimentary ability to both uphold and respect some boundaries in the situation. That's why I never began to feel bad about my husband's two older daughters in spite of many "strange things" I noticed in regards to my husband's manner to deal with the whole situation. That was his problem. I could only air my view, accept that he couldn't clarify things for me but just erupt defensively in anger and so I backed off.

But here is a situation where particularly his oldest daughter is challenging my boundaries. Had it been her and me - no problem. She is welcome. I want to listen. I want to understand her. I realize she is very miserable. If I can help her in any manner from _my_ sense I will be glad to do so. I have patience. I could just make use of your advices and try them until the situation opens up, unless she chose to walk in another direction, and that would be fine for me too. It is her choice. I can only be willing and open to be there for her.

No problem until the older daughter, refusing to even speak with me or meet me, claims that I'm preventing her from seeing her sister. I don't. Her interpretation of me and consequent feelings do. I see this clearly. My husband doesn't.

So what is this about? Is it really about the oldest sister wanting to see her sisters so badly, being prevented by her feelings? If this was talked about in such a manner with me, as a problem of hers for me to assist with, I wouldn't hesitate to say "Then bring the children to her for a while!" I wouldn't mind. If I was allowed to deal with it from my view of things this is the path I would go. The problem is that I'm not even being asked.

It was instead my (now ex) husband who was posed with the question of how he could allow this - my refusing the sisters to see each other. And so he was challenged to assert himself in relation to me. Which is certainly not easy for him, because he learned to survive in his childhood by serving other people's needs in a self denying manner and thus gain their liking (is my present guess about what lies behind some of what he does and the ways he does it). In other words - my (ex) husband was really put in a jam by this. Emotional stress, his lizard must really have been having a tough time with constant tension.

It is funny, but I believe he couldn't openly "defy me" and take our children to see their sisters while we were still married. So he lived in this jam, this constant tension, for over a year before the solution came... I believe... In the shape of a woman (With, to me, obvious likenesses with his mother and his former wife, which makes me ask - me too? They all give clear examples of master talk. Which really faces me with the question of if I'm like that too, yet he claims I resemble his father.)

So I believe that in many ways his infatuation and divorcing me has to do with it representing a solution and way out of the dilemma he was put in by the request that he'd take my daughters to see their older sister in a act resembling a "killing the dragon" that doesn't even exist... in my world. Because to him the divorce meant that he wouldn't have to comply any more (Which I hadn't asked for, but I want my boundaries respected, and I want my role as parent in relation to my daughters to be respected and that it should be natural to consult me before involving them in things and that one shouldn't do things with my children against my wishes unless having _really_ good reasons).

Anyhow - my husband divorced me, quickly moved into the flat of his new woman, and in that situation I ask explicitly out of him not to bring the children together before sorting the conflict out in family therapy. I don't want my children put in a loyalty conflict between their older sisters and their mother, and I don't want them to be used as pawns.

Which of course he did, while pulling down the iron wall between us. He became so defensive and scared that we couldn't talk about anything, because whatever view I had about whatever remote thing would trigger him to try to "put me down" in a stating, with master talk sentences, that my view was oppressive.

And things were kind of growing from that - suddenly I had been very oppressive the whole time, imposing my views on him, forcing him to live in a self alienated state in which he couldn't be himself, resulting in him feeling more and more empty. Which puts me in a jam, because I have two alternatives - either he has deceived me for twenty years or he is deceiving himself now in order to "explain" his own doings now in a manner that doesn't expose his own vulnerable... core... being...

But the issue referred to as my "refusing to let the sisters see each other" is certainly hiding some really complex issues about boundaries.

And when I see how I'm winding up in a power struggle here... It is really foolish to engage in power struggles, but for me it is a question of boundaries, my boundaries, and if I'm to be allowed to have boundaries or not. Also if I'm to be respected as a parent to the children I gave birth to or not. I want to give my consent when handing over my children to somebody else. I want us to agree upon basic rules when it comes to how to train, raise and give the best possible conditions for my children. I want to be consulted. If my children ask me to go see their sisters I'd accommodate them in a second and without hesitation. If they asked of me to leave them with their sister, because they feel fine being with their older sisters alone, then I'd be happy to get

some time off. And if the oldest daughter called me and told me she really wants to see her young sisters and couldn't I let my (ex) husband take them over, then that would be totally ok for me...

There is a difference here. For me it is crucial. It makes me feel terribly exposed and naked when deciding to just emotionally drop it so as not to wind up in those senseless power struggles that occur whenever we begin to talk about this. I really feel a need to fend my boundaries here! And can't you just hear me go "But that is not the TRUTH" in regards to it and really resort to utterly foolish strategies that just doesn't work at all....? Yet I feel like a helpless child. And it puts me in a situation I'm so terrible familiar with, because as you may have guessed - I've been there before. Unable to fend myself or have my boundaries respected. So it really triggers the lizard in me very, very easily. Yet the situation takes for me to remain calm and very, very clear. As clear and focused as I can be. To the point. Minimalistic (which I have difficulties with, as you can probably see).

But... How do I fend my boundaries without getting into a power struggle I can't win even if I win? This, my example, is a pretty clear example of a situation in which my winning would be a great loss actually. Yet, my losing is equally much a loss. The thing is - the enemy isn't there! Only lack of clarity when it comes to boundaries, don't you think? I believe the older daughters distress arise from that too I think, because I believe they interpret my allowing them space as my rejecting them... They're not accustomed to have adults allow them boundaries, I believe. (Also they're pretty used to their father doing his utmost to do things for them, something which I've noticed before but... that's his way of doing things, so only in relation to my own children have I brought it up for discussion in an asking him in a more persistent manner if maybe he could reconsider the effects of it when it comes to fostering self reliance in the children.)

So how do one fend ones boundaries without resorting to power struggle? I feel a need for lots and lots of validation... It frightens me terribly when the councilor begins to ask me what my psychotherapist has said about the situation, indicating (in my interpretation of it) that something about my position here is out of line and something my psychotherapist should have worked with. I easily interpret it as her indicating that I have no right in asking my boundaries and my role as parent to my children to be respected. And so... I feel panic to creep in. And it is not about the sisters seeing each other, but does she see that? I really would need lots of validation from her in this situation....

But maybe I can... just ask this from her, and explain that the problem isn't the sisters seeing each other or not? Maybe it will work better if I put the focus on what it is really about for me instead - my need for boundaries and to have them respected, plus my need to have my role as parent to my children not only accepted, but preferably supported. Because my greatest need in the situation is to get validation in regards to my boundaries and my role as parent. I think I should get myself some... talisman... reminder... something with which I can, when I can sense my emotions getting very strong, focus and remind myself and redirect my attention and energy to the issue of boundaries and my role as parent...? Instead of resorting to "But it is OBVIOUS that this isn't TRUE!" Because then I'm discussing somebody else's statement, and I get out of boundaries there.... It is so tempting though. The whole situation makes it utterly tempting to engage in a fruitless power struggle...

I feel a bit awkward in taking up all this space, but.. it gives me the chance to self-validate and think things true in relation to what you have to teach about these matters. To defend ones boundaries without resorting to master talk and fruitless power struggles... It's tricky. And children when they turn into "commodity" that is "yours" or "mine" - that's tricky... To uphold a position of authority as in the relation adult-child and see the difference between ones own needs and the child's needs - that's tricky...

My husband and his older daughters remains a riddle to me. They make their own sense which appears totally senseless to me in that it isn't consistent, doesn't add up with "facts", etc... I don't mind as long as it isn't imposed on me. Instead it arises my curiosity, which unfortunately isn't all that welcome. So all in all the divorce is ok with

me. It's not comfortable for me either when others are so uncomfortable with my views. I suppose it will all be fine eventually if only I keep my focus and stay away from master-slave talk and with a keen eye on where the boundaries can be found. Thank you Al for this my opportunity to make use of your site!

[Reply](#)

Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essay

by Maria Rosenfägel on Tue 19 May 2009 12:38 AM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

After having reevaluated my situation in the light of what you write about boundaries I come up with this: We have boundaries also when it comes to our relations and unique manners to relate to others. Every relation we have brings forth something in us, and of us, that comes to live within that specific relation. So losing a relation can therefore be a loss of an aspect of oneself. I propose that our relations are "ours" and that we can get very frustrated by somebody causing trouble to our relating to another person. There is also the temptation and desire to control somebody elses relating and relations. Parents tend to do so with their children. Spouses tries to do so many a times. And relations also implies value, as for example social value. I own my unique expressing myself, an expressing emanating from my core of my being as response and in response to the other. Also I own the aim, the strategy in my relating, which can set it apart from another person with another aim and thus another strategy.

I think some of what causes the lizard struggles between me and my husband (and his two daughters in a previous marriage) is rooted in such felt/perceived transgressions of boundaries, and attempts to defend strategies serving a sense of being safe in those relations in question.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essay

by [Al Turtle](#) on Wed 08 Jul 2009 05:43 PM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

I actually made some notes from your send, and then sat on the notes for quite a while. Here's what I have to share.

We have boundaries also when it comes to our relations and unique manners to relate to others. Every relation we have brings forth something in us, and of us, that comes to live within that specific relation.

I think we need better boundaries and boundary skills when it comes to people we are close to, our families, and our close communities. Many communities provide the structure of some "boundary rules" - churches, professional organization, the military, etc. We sometimes call these "rules" ethical standards. Many organizations do not provide boundaries and some have particularly horrid boundaries rules. In these we each need to learn and assert our own boundaries and skills. (A marvelous example of boundaries provided by a culture can be found in the teachings of Confucius.)

Every relation we have brings forth something in us, and of us, that comes to live within that specific relation.

I'd really like to reverse the responsibility in this situation. We chose (consciously and/or unconsciously) to act in different ways within differing communities. We are responsible for this choice, whether we are aware of it or not. The community doesn't make us do anything. Just my thinking.

So losing a relation can therefore be a loss of an aspect of oneself. I propose that our relations are "ours" and that we can get very frustrated by somebody causing trouble to our relating to another person.

Well, this brings us to a wonderful phrase called **cathecting libidinal energy**. As I see this, it manifest by our inserting into someone or something the attribute of belonging to ourselves. Touching my wallet is like touching my eyeball. I have cathected life energy into my wallet. This does not make the wallet mine. But it leads to me acting as if the wallet were part of my body.

This to me is part of the rules around physical boundaries. I believe that our relations are not ours, in the sense of ownership, but are ours in the sense of association. Still we can act as if our relationships do belong to us. If someone interferes with our access to someone/something that we have cathected libidinal energy into, we feel robbed. We fight.

Parents often get trapped in this by thinking that the own their children and thus feel robbed when the kids grow up (as they do) and want to leave home. I suggest that the more possessive parents or grandparents act, the more children want to get away.

Holding my children in a very light and open hand seems the best way to maintain my relationships with them.

There is also the temptation and desire to control somebody else's relating and relations. Parents tend to do so with their children. Spouses tries to do so many a times.

I think there is a natural desire to maintain, what you determine is, order within your space and among what you think is your property. I think this really relates to The Lizard's desire for order. The problem comes when I try to maintain my sense of order in your property or on you. This is the profound problem of Control about which I have written much. It is also a wonderful arena in which to learn boundaries. I recall the principle that all boundary skills are defensive and when you try to manage me or my property, I get to practice my boundary skills.

I think of parents as people responsible for maintaining good boundary skills and teaching them to their children. I fear that many parents try to over-write their child's natural boundaries by attempting to obtain obedience and control. Just leads to eventual rebellion. Sigh.

And relations also implies value, as for example social value. I own my unique expressing myself, an expressing emanating from my core of my being as response and in response to the other. Also I own the aim, the strategy in my relating, which can set it apart from another person with another aim and thus another strategy.

True, but most of use have very poor awareness, control, and ownership of how we come across. In relationships, I believe that how you come across is more important than what you intend. If I mean to express joy and come across cranky, my wife wants to get away from me.

Not sure what your are trying to get at here. I read the term "social value" and wondered whose social value. My general belief is that values are individual activities, even though we can in kind of a statistical way speak of group values. You might have to say more to give me an idea of what you are referring to.

I think some of what causes the lizard struggles between me and my husband (and his two daughters in a previous marriage) is rooted in such felt/perceived transgressions of boundaries, and attempts to defend strategies serving a sense of being safe in those relations in question.

My guess is that your are right on track here. I recall that in this situation you mention there are 4 lizards involved. Must be and have been very complicated.

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essay

by Maria Rosenfågel on Thu 06 May 2010 08:25 AM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

Hmmm... I like trying to see through your angles...! There is something that seems to me to fall outside of that focus, that I'd like to make a new attempt to bring into visibility. That is how other people, or the world, is kind of mirrored within oneself. I don't own you, but I own my image of you... And so I see people sometimes defend such images of loved ones, or ones own for that matter. And this because these images might have a function in our psyche, in the web of our world view, in how we think about things and perceive ourselves... And also - you don't give me the same opportunity to relate as another person. You have your boundaries different from another person. You and I can negotiate our relating into something totally unique and in which I "take shape" and is seen by both you and me in a unique manner. If something then happens to you, then that phenomenon in our relating, that was uniquely I in relation to uniquely you, is lost. I beleive that is why we mourn losses of loved ones - we truly lose the capacity to be that particularly "me" that was manifested in that particular relation.

And that is my experience, my experience of my own person i relation to another person. Yet, in another way I can agree that we don't own our relations because they come about as a result of an interaction of not only individuals but also language/culture etc. Still we own them because they are uniquely ours in them being mirrored within our psyche as something of our own being becoming externalized in our expressing and relating. So it is a little different from a wallet, an object that has an existance also when removed from our relating to it. A relation hasn't got such an existance.

And also - I can't own how I come across until this is being communicated to me. I can be deceived in how I come across. A person might smile and inside be quite offended (yes, somebody taking offence is often slightly noticable still the same, but not always, and I might be in a hurry or have my capacity to notice diminished). I'd say I own also how another person comes across to me, and I have a choice to show or not show, explain or avoid in response to that. The other person hasn't got a chance in regards to how s/he came across unless I give such a chance by telling about it.

So in my eyes your reasoning leans a little towards... the possibility of manipulation, if I take responsibility for how I come across - an attempt to have the other person think and feel how I want her to think and feel. The responsibility I see myself having is the responsibility I have to myself in trying to get my intention across even if my first attempt didn't work (when I have been made aware about my attempt not working). I have a responsibility for my statement, my intention, and for being flexible in an adjustment to the other person (when the other person is also willing in an owning their interpretation and how I came across to them).

Yet I'm with the stride of what you say. We have to face up to the human difficulties of how we interpret each other and thus be prepared to work on it and adjust to the response we get or else confess to our own weakness in regards to getting the message across if we give it up. I may chose to be lazy and give up after one try, but if I then declare the other to be stupid because I'm lazy, then I don't own my part... And I'm a lazy person. I get annoyed when I don't come across and sometimes I don't feel like being the one to struggle and adjust. There is another side who might misinterpret me and simply condemn me one way or the other instead of taking interest, being lazy too, putting all the blame on me. I can only take responsibility for my expressing, and trying again in new ways, and in adjusting to the other person's response, when I find myself motivated to. But I don't feel it useful to think myself responsible for how I come across. Actually, if I'd adopt your view here, then I'd feel downright miserable!

No, I prefer to let others own their interpretation... I right now realized that "coming across" is a two faced and two sided phenomenon, just like a relation. Yet it is different in that it is something in and of itself... as cultural phenomenon, like a word is a word... I have my part in uttering it. Yet it has it's meaning that is culturally established and can be looked up in a dictionary, and I have little responsibility in regards to that. But I have responsibility in how I use it and if it is true to what I wish to convey. How another person interprets it _is_ her responsibility, not mine. It might not be congruent with either the dictionary nor with my intended meaning.

I suppose my responsibility is my willingness to negotiate, and if necessary exchange the word if what I intended to convey doesn't come across. But I can't have or make the other person allow me to come across unless s/he is willing. The other person must equally be willing (or be made to be willing through how I relate).

Intrigued by what you write... I really enjoy trying to look through your angles... I hope you don't preceive my interest and enjoying to really test it and see how it fits with my experiences and ideas... to be too much! I've really struggled with these boundary issues! It's so interesting though! And it's also so, so useful to try to become clear about!

[Reply](#)

Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essay

by wrisler on Thu 26 Nov 2009 03:42 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Al,

What is an example of the difference between it being OK to upset other people (ie #1) and its not OK to use offensive tactics (ie #2) invade someone else's castle?)

1) I believe that if you were taught to not upset other people, then you were not trained in boundary Skills.

2) Using the picture of the castle, trying to change them means attacking their castle and shifting from defensive to offensive tactics. I've learned it doesn't work. They will get upset and just use their Boundary skills to defend against me. I remind you - all boundaries tactics are defensive.

Just wondering,

Walt

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essay

by [Al Turtle](#) on Thu 26 Nov 2009 09:01 PM PST | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Good reading of my essay. Actually I think it is ok to try to upset someone. It may not be very helpful, but is ok. Truly, I believe it better to not worry about upsetting someone. You do not know where their boundaries are until you cross 'em. If your partner has good boundaries, they will gently or more firmly let you know when you've gone too close to them. Trying to upset people should a) give them practice in using their boundaries and b) probably sting a bit.

Trying to "change them" seems always to involve being offensive and should never work. Sharing with them, being nurturing to them, works fine. Being supportive of their need to change, to improve, seems pretty useful.

Al

[Reply](#)

Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essay

by Anonymous on Wed 05 May 2010 11:29 PM PDT | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear Al,

I've felt terribly overwhelmed lately by my relationship's stresses and have started to acknowledge and accept how much space and time I currently need to calm down. I'm trying to learn the art of taking short time-outs not just from my partner but also from overwhelming friendships. I've been following the steps on your TimeOuts page to the letter, and my partner responded well to them, but some of my friends are responding by saying things like that they're "disappointed in me" or that I'm doing something "horrible." I've delivered the news well, I think: said I'm overwhelmed and need a time out to calm down, that I'll check back in with them in x days and that I still care about them and want to discuss things with them as soon as I can. They seem to experience my needing space as an attack, though, despite my stating that my reactions are my deal.

I haven't had good boundary skills historically. Is this a normal reaction for people in my life to have? Are they likely to get used to me defending my boundaries now and relax?

Thank you!
Warrior In Training

[Reply](#)

Re: Re: Boundaries for Individuals: The Essay

by [Al Turtle](#) on Thu 06 May 2010 10:12 AM PDT | [Profile](#) | [Permanent Link](#)

Dear Warrior,

Actually that response from friends is quite common. I can think of two reasons.

Amazingly people often become used the "person you were," and are not very interested in you changing. They can experience your changes and learning new skills as scary. They can thus resist you. The good news is that if they are resisting a bit, probably you really are changing - hooray. Keep working on the changes but also work on how you can present those changes in a comforting way to your friends.

My second thought is that there are "friends" and there are "friends." One way to check out who are good friends and who may need some work on their own is to learn and grow up yourself. If they encourage you, they welcome you, they support you, then I would chalk them up as "good" friends. If they resist you, I would put them down as people who perhaps need to learn the lessons you are learning. In this case, perhaps these people could study boundaries along with you.

A good friend will always encourage you to become better and to learn.

Good luck.

Al

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