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Boundaries and Assertiveness

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People with low self-esteem often agree to things that they don't really want to do. It may be that they feel obliged to say yes. Sometimes they are simply in the habit of always agreeing, and they don't know any other way. This can lead a person to feel like a walkover, which then leads them to dislike themselves even more. It becomes a vicious cycle, which is difficult to break.

In general people do not like change, and if they see someone suddenly standing up for themselves, they don't know how to react. However, knowing how to be assertive and set boundaries is one of the most important things you can do for your self-esteem. In this section, you will learn more about the boundaries in your life, the value of becoming assertive, and how to gain assertiveness.

The banner features the Explorable logo and the text "EXPLORABLE Quiz Time!". Below this are three quiz cards:

- Card 1: Image of red roller skates on a wooden deck. Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2
- Card 2: Image of a fan of colorful pencils. Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2
- Card 3: Image of a Ferris wheel at sunset. Quiz: Flags in Europe

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What Is a Boundary?

In the physical world, boundaries are easy to see, whether they're fences or walls.

In our spiritual lives, boundaries help shape how we respond to others and ourselves.
Boundaries:

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Help us let the good in, while keeping the bad stuff out.

- Show where you end and someone else begins.
- Are not walls!
- Skin, words, truth, emotional and geographical distance are all examples of boundaries.

A person who struggles to set boundaries may be labelled a walkover. At first that person may seem very nice and accommodating, but a closer look shows that they don't stick up for themselves and are unable to assert their own needs and wants.

Speaking up for Yourself

One of the tell-tale signs of a lack of boundaries is feeling that others are always using you in some way. Unfortunately, behaving as though you are at the mercy of others tends to attract people who are seeking to dominate and even abuse. This reflects itself in dramatic relationships.

Let's look at the example of Sophie. From an early age, her parents would argue and she often felt that she was in between them. Not wanting to cause any more arguments, she would always keep quiet even when she had things to say.

This habit of not speaking up stayed with her. She became so used to burying her wants that she struggled to make even the smallest decision. Her own relationships were unstable as she attracted people who abused her vulnerability.

The Trap of Compliance

We might describe Sophie as compliant. Compliance means saying yes to something, even if we don't really want to. Compliant people have fuzzy and indistinct boundaries. They 'melt' into the demands and needs of other people. Not wanting to rock the boat, they tend to agree to anything.

More often than not, compliant people have very low self-esteem. They may want to be dependent on another person, or they have a deep fear of abandonment, anger, or being shamed. Perhaps they fear being seen as bad, selfish or unspiritual.

Are You Compliant?

There are several ways of spotting people who are compliant or may have issues with setting and maintaining boundaries. Read through the following carefully:

- Falling love with someone at the first instance, with anyone who reaches out.
- Sharing secrets with a new acquaintance.

- Overlooking personal values to please others.
- Missing the signs that someone is crossing your boundaries.
- Accepting things without wanting or asking for them.
- Allowing yourself to be told what to do.
- Getting physical with a person without mutual consent.
- Various forms of abuse.

The Dangers of Lacking Boundaries

A person lacking boundaries may also be passive-aggressive, angry at themselves for not communicating what they want, and turning that anger in. The result is someone who fumes silently, then tries to regain some power in their relationships in unhealthy ways.

Not knowing or enacting your boundaries is tiring. Unsurprisingly, you may feel chronically defeated and resentful. There may also be an ongoing feeling of guilt, as you worry whether you have pleased everyone.

Key Points

- Boundaries and assertiveness are an essential part of healthy self-esteem.
- Boundaries are personal rules for what we are willing and not willing to accept.
- Not having clear boundaries shows itself in many different ways, such as feeling anxious.

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