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Think Outside The Box

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Forming Boundaries

Your boundaries and the way they have formed, is a process that has been going on since you were a small child. However, that certainly does not mean that you cannot change your boundaries now. It will require effort and introspection on your part, but the result is worth it.

As you now know, boundaries are an important part of who you are and how you reflect on yourself. Boundaries are influenced by your self-esteem and influence it in turn. Therefore, in order to improve your self-esteem and feel more confident, you have to look into what your personal boundaries are and how they have formed.

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How Did Your Boundaries Form?

Our boundaries begin to form in infancy. Babies rely on our mothers for our needs to be met. As toddlers, we differentiate ourselves from our primary caregiver and start exerting our independence.

Parenting has a huge influence our boundaries. Permissive parents, who do not set boundaries for their children, may find that their children grow up with disregard for rules of any sort. At the other end of the spectrum, parents who are overprotective and control their children too much.

When children are cocooned in this way, they don't ever have the chance to make or learn from mistakes. They may grow up with no sense of boundaries, used to having decisions made for them. In short, our parents set many of the parameters for our behaviour.

Boundaries and Your Parents

We infer so many boundaries from how we see our parents behave, as well as from how they treat us. Perhaps your parents have a co-dependent relationship, where one of them is always rescuing the other.

For example, the mother is always spending too much. Instead of your father telling her not to, he simply keeps paying the credit card bill every month. Not knowing any different, you may grow up with some odd ideas about financial boundaries.

Self-Esteem and Boundaries

Personality and self-esteem also influences our boundary style. For example, if you are someone who has always been shy and non-confrontational, it is likely that you will have different boundaries to someone who likes to challenge others and have debates. People with low self-esteem frequently have boundary issues, although it's not always clear which comes first.

Boundaries Come in Different Forms

Boundaries vary from person to person and place to places, as cultural and religious values impact boundaries. Let's take the concept of personal space. This can be defined as the distance between people which allows us to feel comfortable. If we are in a romantic relationship with someone, it follows that they are allowed to be physically close to us.

However, let's imagine someone who you don't like very much - what happens when they get too close? It may make you feel slightly anxious, frustrated and uncomfortable. When our other boundaries are violated, other negative feelings may also arise.

Categorizing people and their boundaries can be a little tricky, because sometimes we have firm boundaries in one area of our lives, but have weak boundaries in others. People who have weak boundaries are easily manipulated and often don't have a strong sense of self and their beliefs.

Next are the people who make some attempt at having boundaries, but they are indecisive about what to let in and keep out.

A person with fixed, rigid boundaries is like someone who has built a moat about themselves, determined not to let anyone in. They ensure that no one gets close to them. Sometimes they've had hurtful or abusive upbringings and are frightened of being hurt again.

Healthy Boundaries

A person with healthy boundaries is self-aware and assertive. They are aware of the motives and influences of other people. Having healthy boundaries does not make a person selfish.

In fact, quite the opposite is true, as a person cannot be much to other people if they are nothing to themselves. Knowing what you stand for, and knowing where you stand, shows

real confidence. Respect for other people and self-respect are far easier to acquire once boundaries are realized.

Your Boundaries

Take some time to think about the boundaries in different areas of your life. Do you have unwritten rules for your family, friends, relationships, work, money and health?

Now is the time to write them down. For example, it might be something like: "I don't let my friends call me after 9 PM" or "I never lend anybody money". Then, write down the boundaries you would like to have. Next we will look at ways to go about establishing them.

Key Points

- Boundaries begin to form from infancy.
- Our parents and caregivers are very influential on our boundaries.
- Personality and self-esteem are important players in our boundaries.
- Just as each of us is unique, so too do we have boundaries unique to us.

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