



Anxietylab.org

3-4-5 Program Course

Method #9: Boundaries

People who are abused and neglected are often treated as though they do not have the same rights as others. They learn to cope and protect themselves with various strategies that often involve giving up their autonomy. If an adult abuser demands to be in a child's space, the child can't really refuse; (the same is often true for adults in an abusive relationship). This is an enormous problem for abused persons: the ability to maintain safe personal boundaries, both physical and psychological.

“People-pleasers” often have a lack of good boundaries. They may have learned that pleasing other people will help reduce the pain of abuse. Doing anything anyone asks becomes a problem when a person has no time or energy for themselves and is doing whatever people tell them to do. It's a way to become utterly exhausted all the time – trying to please everyone else so we're not criticized or not hit or not left alone.

People without healthy personal boundaries are more easily manipulated.

Abusers do not respect their victim's rights, their dignity, their personal space or personal property. Often an abuser will use intimidation tactics to keep their victims where they want them.

Examples:

1. hide or destroy their property
2. gas-light them into questioning their own sanity
3. destroy their reputations

Establishing healthy personal boundaries is vitally important for abuse survivors. It will be challenging at first as we **learn to be assertive without being aggressive**. It will take practice to learn how to stand up for yourself and maintain good boundaries if it's not something you learned in a healthy way.

If a person was abused from a very young age, they may have never learned how to establish the personal boundaries that living in society requires. This could lead to destructive behaviors in adulthood. The survivor may have never learned how to respect others' boundaries, too. Living in chaos tends to make it hard to learn the right lessons.

One of the primary obstacles to maintaining healthy boundaries is guilt.

Especially for abuse survivors and those who have had their subjectivity denied (women, children, the poor and minorities), sticking up for ourselves is very difficult. Mal-treatment has taught us the wrong lessons. Trying to establish healthy boundaries that ensure our dignity and allow us to live by OUR principles is a vital step in the growth process.

We learned to give up everything for our abuser, so setting boundaries will make us feel *guilty*.

That is the first thing to work on – not feeling guilty for being an ethical subject in your own right - a fully formed person with all the same rights and freedoms as everyone else.

Start eliminating guilt in your journaling. Write affirmations about how you are not doing anything wrong by protecting yourself. Healthy boundaries are how we protect ourselves. This is every human's right and no one should feel guilty for wanting the right to say no, the right to privacy, the right to own their own property and the right to not be hit or raped.

Examples of boundaries that every healthy person should have:

- the right to privacy of thought (I don't have to tell anyone all my private thoughts)
- the right to say no (I don't have to do everything you tell me)
- the right to not be blamed for things I did not do (refuse to take the blame of others)

- the right to defend myself (I have the right to defend myself from harm)
- the right to not do things I do not want to do (sexually, financially, spiritually, etc.)
- the right to my own private time and space (the right to be left alone sometimes)
- the right to be vulnerable and ask for help, time or space (the right to not be perfect)
- the right to accept help (from a friend, therapist, judge, nurse, neighbor, etc...)
- being a whole person outside of the relationship (I am still me even if I'm single)
- the right to be respected (even if I'm flawed, I deserve respect as a human being)
- the right to express my own feelings (I have the right to say how I feel even if you don't like it)
- the right to make a choice (I have the right to change my mind)
- the right to keep my own principles (I don't have to lie just because you tell me to)
- the right to my own possessions (I get to own my own things)
- the right to negotiate for myself (no one should make my decisions for me)
- the right to my body (I don't have to apologize for my appetite, my sleeping habits, my complexion, the way my teeth look, the way I walk, etc.)
- the right to feel my own feelings (I will be sad if I feel sad. No one can tell me not to.)
- the right not to forgive (Forgiveness may or may not help me. I don't have to forgive if I don't feel it.)
- the right to actively grow better feelings (I can do things that make me feel good)
- the right to my own friendships (I can be friends with someone without anyone else's permission)
- the right to end a relationship (I have the right to disconnect on social media or anywhere else)

Steps:

1. Decide on my new boundaries (do journaling until I figure out what I want or start with the list below)
2. Write affirmations that will wire them into the brain and say them every day
3. Be assertive with people (start politely telling them when they cross a

boundary)

4. Start standing up for myself when not treated well (politely refuse to be bullied)

Affirmations:

I don't have to tell anyone my private thoughts.

I don't have to do everything you tell me.

I refuse to take the blame of others (I didn't _____ myself. THEY did it.)

I have the right to be left alone sometimes.

Even if I'm flawed, I deserve respect as a human being.

I am still me even if I'm single.

I have the right to disconnect on social media or anywhere else.

I have the right to say how I feel even if you don't like it.

I get to own my own things.

I don't have to lie just because you tell me to.

I have the right to change my mind.

I have the right to _____

_____.

It's okay to say no sometimes because _____

_____.

It's appropriate to refuse to do something when _____

I have the freedom to _____

Other people don't have the right to ask me _____