

Family Wellness Weekly

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What to expect:

Purpose:

- To provide ongoing support for families of loved ones with physical, emotional, behavioral, or addictive illnesses.
- To provide education about family systems and recovery.
- To introduce and practice skills that contribute to healthy relationships.

On-line protocol:

- Keep your microphone muted.
- You are invited to use the “React” function at the top of your screen during this presentation.
- If you have a question or a comment, please use the chat function.
- Do not use the name of your loved one in treatment in questions or comments.
- To maintain confidentiality, keep your camera off and make sure your name is not visible in your square.

Our Focus:

- Our focus is on you, the family member or friend, and your experience and skills, rather than on your loved one.
- We take a biopsychosocial approach to behavioral health challenges.
- We make assumptions about human behavior that favor a nonjudgmental stance.

Weekly Topics:

- Family Dynamics:
Functions of family, Human Needs, Patterns of Connection, Family Safety
- Boundaries:
Wants versus Needs, What Boundaries are and are not, Boundary Clarity.
- Accurate Communication:
One thing in the moment, Radical Acceptance, Validation of Self, Identifying Emotions and Thoughts.
- Accurate Listening

Listening with a Goal, Relationship Effectiveness, Tolerating Fear and Anger.

- Family Problem Solving
Wise Mind and Difficult Situations; What to do When Your Current Strategies Are Not Working.

Indicators of Successful Family Recovery

- Family is connected and differentiated.
- Emotional intensity is regulated
- Attachment is realistic

Session 2: Boundaries

What are Boundaries?

Boundaries are limits we set for ourselves

Are boundaries enforceable?

It is easy to confuse boundaries from ultimatums or requests. A boundary is an “I” message. It keeps the responsibility for thoughts, feelings and behaviors in the speaker. Boundaries are absolutely enforceable because the person saying the boundary is the person enforcing the boundary. Boundaries refer to your behavior, not to the behavior of another.

How do I get my loved ones to change their behaviors?

All behavior is logical. Change what makes it logical and you will have changed the behavior. When you follow through on your boundaries you have changed the part of the sequence of behavior that made the loved one’s behavior logical.

What if my boundary is about my partner’s behavior?

We cannot dictate behavior for another person. We can only dictate our behavior for ourselves and our well-being. A boundary is a statement about self-care. An ultimatum is a power struggle. “I am not willing to,” versus “You can’t.” You can only control your own behaviors.

The outcome of a request or an ultimatum lies in the hands of the listener. A request is a gentle statement for another to comply with the wishes of the speaker. An ultimatum is an expression of power that asks for change by saying, “do it my way or else.” Ultimatums blame or hold others responsible, and are often worded “If you X, I will Y.” Neither requests nor ultimatums provide the same function as boundaries. Others may or may not engage in behaviors that support your boundary. Boundaries are personal self-care and are always in your hands to enact or not to enact.

If you are thinking, “my boundary is that my loved one can’t speak disrespectfully to me,” you are confusing boundaries with requests and ultimatums. Your boundary is that you don’t want to be in a position where you are spoken to disrespectfully, and for your well-being you will remove yourself from situations where you are subject to being spoken to disrespectfully. The speaker will decide to continue speaking disrespectfully, or will decide that she/he would rather have you nearby and may change how they speak to you. Either way, it is your decision to stay while they are speaking to you appropriately, and leave when you hear yourself being disrespected.

When are boundaries needed?

You use boundaries every day. Doors for example, are tangible boundaries: Sometimes you physically open doors, and sometimes you shut doors. Boundaries can be less tangible, but clear: sometimes you stop to speak with people in a store, other times you rush about trying to stay out of conversation. When we are in close relationships our behaviors are habitual and can be less tangible. That can make it difficult to decide whether a boundary is needed. If you find yourself saying, “you can’t do that to me,” and the behavior is repeated, think about the boundary of yours that needs focus. As you decide on what needs to happen to improve your well-being, you begin moving out of a power struggle (bickering, being frustrated, feeling anxious) to boundary maintenance. You’ll move from “you can’t do that to me” to “I need to take better care of myself.”

How do I reinforce my boundary?

Boundaries are limits or rules we set for ourselves. Keep your boundaries simple and tangible, with an eye towards self-honesty: Are you willing to follow through with the boundary you are considering? Your boundaries are your responsibility. If you are not willing to follow through you are probably making a request rather than stating a boundary. When you are considering a boundary, write it down. Decide whether it is a preference or a boundary. For example: “I would like you to put your own dishes in the dishwasher so I don’t end up doing them,” versus, “I am not willing to clean your dishes.” If it is a boundary, when your partner’s dish is left in the sink you may need to engage in a number of distracting behavior so that you do not end up cleaning your partner’s dishes out of habit or discomfort.

How can I practice setting and following through with boundaries?

Use the Coping Ahead exercise anytime you are deciding what behaviors you need to use to skillfully navigate a situation in a way that keeps you safe: 1. Imagine yourself in a situation that is likely to happen that is upsetting to you, 2. Decide how you would like to see yourself navigating that situation that fulfills your outcome goal and effectively takes care of you, 3. Mentally rehearse using that skillful behavior.

Do I tell my loved one what my boundary is?

“Boundaries are like a pair of pants, it only shows when you’re not wearing any.” Since the boundary is for you to follow through with, and not your loved one, think about why you would need to make a statement. If you are making a statement so that their behavior changes, be honest with yourself: are you making a request or an ultimatum rather than setting a boundary?

For example,

“I do not want to be near Oreo cookies because I will eat them. My boundary is that if Oreos are put near me, I will move away.”

This boundary does not have to be announced, unless you want help from your host to not offer you Oreo cookies.

Now, substitute, “you under the influence” for “near Oreo cookies.”

“I do not want to be near you under the influence because I will become upset. My boundary is that if you are under the influence near me, I will move away.”

What does it mean to effectively rethink situations?

There are multiple ways to think about any situation. When we believe we have no options in a situation we can become unreasonable and irrational. When we believe that there are multiple ways to understand any one problem we become creative. We think of a hierarchy. At the bottom are behaviors. We nonjudgmentally observe these behaviors and compare them with our expectations. If they don't match we can either change the behavior or change the expectation. We effectively move from an experience of victimization to an experience of agency in a relationship and in our lives.