



Loving Parent Skill Development

Setting and Maintaining Healthy Self-Care Boundaries

Introduction

As I commit to and to begin developing my parenting skills, the most important of which is learning dealing with boundaries...! Growing up in a toxic and dysfunctional household, I saw virtually no modeling about boundaries, both internal and external.

I'll get right to it... BTW, throughout this writing "Adult/Loving/Actual Parent", "parent" and "I"/"me"/"my" mean the same thing. Also, the terms "Inner Child(ren)" and "kids" mean the same thing.

Setting and, more importantly, maintaining/honoring my well-being boundaries is an adult event and requires my Adult/Loving/Actual Parent to take charge and be totally responsible for setting and accountable for honoring or maintaining. Boundaries setting has virtually nothing to do with the object of my boundary - person, place, thing or my internal issues...IMHE, it is solely an issue of parenting, of self-care. I like to call it: a "Call2Parent". When a boundary needs to be set, I begin a series of conversations with my kids to let them know that setting boundaries is an adult job, that I'll handle the entire process....and I promise to do my very best to keep them safe no matter what. Once they trust what I am saying – which may take several sittings - I can then begin to achieve success in standing up for myself and the kids

Well I just outlined above, in words, makes perfect sense and is purely logical. However, being boundaryless my tire life – this is can be a difficult and challenging process from the very start. Yet, trust me, setting and honoring internal, then external boundaries does get easier – actually intuitive - as my parenting skills develop with practice.

Let's Get Started

Pia Melody defines boundaries as:

Boundary systems have two parts: external and internal. Our external boundary allows us to choose our distance from other people and enables us to give or refuse permission for them to touch us. Our internal boundary protects our thinking, feelings, and behavior and keeps them functional.

Focusing on internal boundaries facilitates the actualization of my parent - initially for safety/protection (based on trauma history), then to nurture/foster well-being. Internal boundaries awaken, blossom, evolve and lead to the **emergence in TOTAL of my True Self**. Once in place, setting/honoring external boundaries are the sole responsibility of my Loving Parent and and become instinctive and intuitive in the moment.



To keep things simple, I will focus on external boundaries. Keep in mind, however, there is no real difference in using this process to focused inward versus outward.

Entering the program, there was 'nobody home', my "inner world" consisted of three "aspects": my traumatized-wounded child, false self and critical parent. I had no idea what a boundary really was. I had concept - let alone experience with - being separate, safe and protected. Thus, setting a boundary for self-care is foreign to my 'false self'. This condition is common and – more important - a **NORMAL** consequence of suffering from childhood trauma.

For emphasis, setting boundaries is very difficult, yet maintaining or "honoring" my boundaries is even harder. What often happens is – in the moment when holding is needed – one of my kids may 'grab the wheel from the adult' and the boundary collapses. Please, keep in mind, the responsibility to hold the wheel is mine and my kids - by grabbing the wheel – are acting out, the moment, historical fear... and it is not remotely their fault...! This is key to understand – if this happens, my kids need special attention, love and parenting.

When declaring an external boundary with an unsafe person– whether verbally or in writing – I need to be mindful of the reaction I might get. When someone ignores, dismisses, reacts to, or tries to negotiate my boundary, this is really good data about this person. It least for now – I may want to consider just how much time I spend with them. As I continue to practice boundary setting and build that muscle, my ability to intuitively - in the present moment – set and hold external boundaries manifests with ease – honest...!

A trustworthy person – sponsor, trusted traveler, trusted counselor – with good boundaries will welcome my boundaries and – without question – will honor them. Often these folks will inquire to clarify their understanding of the boundary – to be clear. They inquire out of sheer desire to honor my boundary impeccably. These folks are great candidates to include in my "trusted support network", actually in my life...!

Working Example: As a practical matter, I'll use a hypothetical external boundary example to walk through the process, step by step.

I am in relationship with "Person x" (aka PX), yet not a romantic or sexual relationship. (BTW, romantic, emotionally/physically/spiritually intimate relationships to the next level as they involve a high amount of "chemistry". Yet, as I begin to develop my boundary setting skills with considerable practice – even these relationship are very doable.)

Recently, I notice when I am with "PX", I feel a nauseous twinge in my gut. Interactions, even short encounters, seem to border on subtle verbal abuse, weird manipulation and other what feel like 'crazy making' speech or behavior. I almost always feel ignored, dismissed and my point-of-view is ignored or minimized. Bottom-line, I don't feel safe around this person right now. My first reaction may be a ush of fear in my stomach



because I really don't know what to do - am I imagining this or is something "off" really happening. Looking deeply, I see that my kid is really scared and doesn't want to be around this person. Time for me to act.

My kids first, immediate reaction to decision to act is to feel very anxious, scared and borderline terrified even before I've done anything. It is important to note this reaction, which clearly is touching my historical trauma – again, this dynamic is **normal**.

So, what do I do...? Do I end the relationship? Do I pretend nothing is really happening, or, it's really not that bad? How do I do it? Do I just take a time out with no contact telling no-one? The is totally my decision, yet a conversation or a series of conversations with my kids will need to happen. In no uncertain terms, this is a "call2parent" and self-care.

For the purpose of this exercise, I decide to "take a time out", "to put down" – not end - this relationship, which will create space for my healing.

The 'inner conversations' with my kids can) begin...

Step #1: Why am I setting this boundary? What is the healthy rationale?

Right up front, it is important to establish – for my kid's benefit - why I'm setting this boundary. They are already scared, if not terrified. My clarity and truth always will make boundary setting possible. It is helpful, yet not required, to get my kid's agreement on the details in setting this boundary – as, in the end, every step, every decision in the process – and total accountability - falls solely and squarely on my shoulders. As I practice setting multiple boundaries successfully, my kids begin to trust I know what I'm doing and will – at some point - willingly 'let go' and yield all responsibility to me.

*Figuring out "why" and setting any boundary is simple and not complicated – I'm **setting this boundary for self-care, plain and simple. Also, in virtually in every case, that my kids will appreciate not having to feel rejected or abandoned. This latter phenomenon highly incentivizes my kids to let me take care of setting boundaries.***

Working Example: (I find it very helpful to treat my kids with utmost respect by asking questions to get their understanding and/or agreement as opposed to declaring or dictating my point of view or plans.)

Conversation with kids:

"Sweetheart, how do you feel after we are with "PX"? If no response..."Do you feel not listened to, ignored and taken advantage of when we are with her/him?"

(Parental aside, keep an eye out - are these feelings the same as or like what my kid felt, yet buried, in childhood?). Assuming my kid acknowledges feeling unsafe in person ask his presence, I start reassuring. "To take care of you, I'm going to set a



"no contact" boundary with "PX" for 30 days to give us time to heal. I am responsible for and will take care everything, letting "PX" know and making sure we keep this boundary."

"Sweetheart, you will not be involved in this - your only jobs 'to fee' (to heal), to talk (to me) and trust (in me) as I earn your trust."

Note 1: I may also have this conversation 'non-dominant hand' writing mode.

Note 2: Although this step is (may seem) simple, I do not underestimate the importance of taking the time to MAKE CERTAIN my Kid's really do understand why I am doing this. I will not proceed until this is clear.

Step #2: Who is responsible for setting/maintaining this boundary?

Boundary setting and, especially honoring once set, is my job. My kids are not responsible or even involved – in any way - in this activity. They may have feelings or reactions to not being involved – yet parenting these feelings is also my responsibility – throughout this process. The issue is not about the "PX" or place or thing I'm choosing to set the boundary around, it is about my declaring and maintaining ownership throughout this process, all the while taking care of my kids.

Remember: If mutual understand and agreement with my waivers at any point on this process, I stop and do not proceed until a understanding is reset. If I continue without this agreement, it is likely my kids will react and 'grab the wheel', which will jeopardize the honoring of the boundary - we're back to square one.

Here is the conversation I might have with my kids:

"Sweetheart, setting and honoring this boundary with "PX" is my responsibility, mine alone. It is my job to speak, to set and maintain healthy self-care and well-being boundaries. I will take care of this. You are not involved. I've got this. And, I love you unconditionally and I'm here to take care of you if any feelings come up and no matter what happens. I promise I will make sure that you are safe and taken care of no matter what happens. I will never, ever abandon you!"

Note: This conversation may be difficult – even for me to say and my kids to hear. This is **completely NORMAL**, especially for the first time I do this process. This is the nature of trauma. My kids crave safety, yet without adult supervision, boundary-less activities reliably do not achieve safety. So...A TON of TLC will always help - as much and as often as possible. Loving myself unconditionally, I ALWAYS respond with love to my kids. Is this easy? No way! Is it possible? YES, it is!



Step #3: What is the boundary?

It is of utmost importance to declare and describe the boundary clearly, succinctly - in as few words as possible. The wording needs to be clearly stated and measurable in real terms to achieve. Ideally, a 3rd party (sponsor, trusted counselor, trusted traveler) can understand and verify the boundary is clear honoring and achievement can be measured. As you might expect, any ambiguity here is the "kiss of death" for success. Words and clarity matter. I commit my boundary to paper in writing.

Working Example: I will set a "no contact" with "PX". I choose one month.

I declare:

Boundary: *For one month, I will not engage in any communication with "PX"– either in person conversation, emails, texts, phone calls or any unspoken communication.*

Boundary Maintenance: *I will let "PX" know this and include other important details. If she/he ignores my boundary and attempts or continues to communicate with me, I will let "PX" know I will not respond. If I get a call, text or email – I will not respond. If we meet in public, I will - at my option and discretion - choose to acknowledge their presence (or not) and I will not engage in any spoken or unspoken conversation."*

Of course, I engage sponsor, my "trusted support network" to ensure crispness of wording and measurability are in place.

Step #4: Setting the boundary.

I must now let "PX" know – I actually set the boundary. This can be done either in a written note or an in-person conversation. However, before I do so, I have some parenting to do.

I have a loving conversation with my kids about what is about to happen – letting "PX" know. This conversation may take a while or require multiple sittings – as my kids may be sacred – again – even terrified. Of course, I start by reassuring – over and over - that I – the adult – will take care of this and he/she/they is(are) not involved. When they openly calm down and acknowledge/accept - trust I have this covered and they're not responsible or involved – and will be protected and safe, **THEN AND ONLY THEN** - I can proceed. If needed, I engage and stay in touch with my 'trusted support network'. Outlined in Step 8 to follow.

I decide to let "PX" know – face to face, person:

I've felt uneasy and uncomfortable in our recent meeting. As such and until further notice, PX, I choose to not be around you and will not engage in any communication with you...including conversations, emails, texts or phone calls.



If you call, text or email me – I will not respond. If we meet again in public, I will, at my discretion, either acknowledge your presence or not, yet I will not engage in any conversation. If you ignore this and attempt to speak to me, I will walk away.

I did not mention the time period...on purpose. That is my business. I also am mindful to deliver the message and then refrain from any further discussion or comments. I literally just walk away. Note: I keep track as I exit to note "PX"'s words and actions – this will give me a clue as to whether she/he will honor my boundary. Also, it might reveal and maybe confirm her/his feelings and potential issues with me. This is not required, just good data for me – the parent – to collect.

Aside: To some, this language may seem harsh, even intrusive. Reactions to my wording are separate issues entirely and may have roots in history...and may shed light on why setting and honoring boundaries are difficult in the first place. I might remind myself of the lifelong phenomenon of being ignored and dismissed...and – Setting this boundary – I'm consciously and intentionally on the path of ending this – to care of myself and my kids with boundaryless, intrusive people.

Step #5: What are the real consequences of ignoring, my NOT HONORING this boundary?

Knowing this is very, very important. It's a check-in with Step 1. At a very fundamental level, if I do not hold this boundary or my I'm unable to honor it – once again and reliably so – my kids are exposed to the possibility of experiencing a reenactment from our history, which is the sole reason I am setting this boundary in the first place.

And, if I am not able to honor this boundary for whatever reason, I know I am accountable and I'm immediately kind and gentle with myself. If my kids are upset, I'll let them know that it was my mistake, their feelings are OK – yet my mistake was not their fault. I hold them, I love them.

Step #6: Who is responsible for maintaining this boundary?

Clearly and absolutely, I AM...!

Step #7: What form might the urge to drop or ignore take?

Now that the boundary has been set, it will come as no surprise that my kids may – again - feel scared or upset that I stood up and set this boundary. This is foreign behavior to both of us and is scary and disorienting – even terrifying - to them. This is yet another "call2parent"! Ironically and as a matter of fact, my kids may feel this way even if "PX" honors the boundary. They may be scared - diligently on the lookout of running into "PX"...! If this is the case - you guessed it - another "call2parent".



Even though they may be uncomfortable and scared, in the end, my kids pay attention to what happens and, as I set and hold boundaries, they see this and begin to trust me...one boundary at a time.

Step #8: Enroll a “trusted support network” to support me, when needed, to honor this boundary?

As a practical matter, I seek to love myself and my kids unconditionally – which means loving moment by moment no matter what circumstances we are in. Until I can provide self-care moment-by-moment/24x7 when setting and maintaining boundaries, my support network is an important, strategic component of this process. This network includes trustworthy people I feel safe with, who have the capacity to witness and not react, judge or give unsolicited advice. I may decide to remove anyone who offers unsolicited advice or thinks my boundary is not in my best interests. I am finding my “voice”, my truth - I have taken prudent and thoughtful care to decide to set this boundary. My self-care process may actually “trigger” another person's lack of self-care – which might explain their need to convince me they know better.

More caution: I'm careful to not include codependent 'advice givers' or 'rescuers' or “just trying to help” folks. What is at risk is their need to focus on someone else and, for me, the risk is having an external person involved in the parenting of my kids. This boundary support team will likely include my sponsor, however, there may be circumstances where I decide to not include her/him. Remember my self-care is – by far – more important than loyalty to anyone – on occasion, my sponsor.

Here's how I might approach and enroll:

- “I'm setting a boundary and need support in holding this boundary.” BTW, explain the details – what the boundary is and with whom it is being set – is optional. Consider the possibility of explaining the details might prompt a reaction, which may confuse and complicate things.
- “If I begin to waiver in honoring this boundary, can I call you? I'm not calling for advice, I'm calling to be heard and possibly share my feelings. You're free to ask me only one question: “Is it in your best interests to ignore or usurp this boundary?” Then just listen. If I want feedback, I'll ask.”
- “Are you willing to be in my support network to honor this boundary?”

If they agree, then I might also say:

- “I begin to doubt or waver in holding this boundary, I commit to call or contact you. Setting and honoring this boundary is in my best interests.”

I realize enrolling members of my support team this way is also me having to set upfront boundaries with each of them. Holding or honoring these enrollment boundaries tight



and without compromise. Is also key to my success. Hint: I may need to use this worksheet if, for some reason, issues arise during this step.

HERE IS SOME GOODS NEWS: As I become skilled and adept in boundary setting and maintenance from practicing this process, my parenting capacity will deepen and evolve – and I will be quite capable of handling this entire process without the need for creating a formal support for a specific boundary. At some point this entire process, from my adult perspective and ability to execute, becomes entirely intuitive and straightforward. Just for the record, tangible and unambiguous healing has occurred.

I am using this process to build my 'boundary setting' muscle – all the while taking great, loving care of all my kids...!

Step #9: What is my commitment to self-care if/when the urge arises to ignore?

As already discussed, setting and maintaining self-care and well-being boundaries runs completely against the self-harming behaviors and thinking from my history. Thus, my kids will definitely react to doing this...definitely in the beginning – then likely in the middle and toward the end.

Here is my adult commitment:

- "I commit to love myself no matter what happens. I will not abandon my Kid(s) no matter what."
- "I commit to engage my support network, when I run out of gas, and to share my adult feelings openly...yet only in the presence of trustworthy people in my network."
- "I commit to parent my kids with love and the facts: I am responsible...etc". See above. I repeat a lot, just for good measure.

Step #10: What is my commitment to self-care if I ignore or this boundary collapses?

Of course, I'm prone to shame myself or beat myself up for not holding this boundary. However, if I am unable to honor this boundary and my Critical Parent starts to "rag" on me (or also my Kids – "boy your parent guy sucks...!" or "It's your fault he messed up...!") for this, my adult immediately intervenes:

- To my Critical Parent:
"Stop, you are not welcome here...! I'm responsible for maintaining this boundary. No one else is involved – not you, for sure not my kids. I'm responsible and I – in this circumstance and was unable to maintain this boundary. I am not interested in nor will I entertain your intrusive criticism. Also, you have no access to my kids. You deal with me and leave my kids alone. Scram"
- To my kids:
"This is hard and I made a mistake. I'm doing my best – I will always do my best."



I love you, Sweetheart, you weren't involved, this was entirely my responsibility. You've done nothing wrong. You are not in any kind of trouble. Nothing bad is going to happen to you – it is my job to protect you and keep you safe." (Continue to repeat these messages.)

For me – the ADULT/Loving/Actual Parent, the following mantras will always work, for any reason and in any circumstance:

- "I love myself unconditionally...!"
- "I will never, ever abandon my kids...!"
- "I can take care of myself (and my kids) no matter what circumstance we are in...!"

May theses closing mantras serve you and your Inner Child(ren) to manifest great healing, thriving health and well-being.

Blessings!

Robert N