



## More About Healthy Boundaries

Before listening to this, do try out the Boundaries exercise in the Practices box.

Even if you've never developed a language for the concept of boundaries, you may have felt that uncomfortable sensation of someone being in 'in your space', or even 'up in your face'. If you're a cyclist, you'll have felt it when a car or a truck drives too close to you.

It's a metaphorical as well as a physical concept. If you suspect you're too nice, often saying 'yes' too readily when you wish you'd said 'no', and then regretting it, I hear you. Maybe you have managed a firm 'no' occasionally and been so glad you did, even if it was hard to do.

At the other extreme, maybe you've kept someone too much at arm's length and alienated them. Personal boundaries can swing from too soft to too hard, if not well managed; which is why it's good to be clearer about the whole idea of them, and work with them continually on a healthy, moderate scale.

And what about other people? You may notice someone being quite cold and hard. They've made their boundaries fierce and fortress-like because, for whatever reason, they need them to be.

It's so important to be able to say a clear 'no' when necessary, and to not be swayed from it. It's been so drilled into many of us that we should be polite and accommodating, that it can become harder than it should be. Yet it's by no means always rude to say no. You can say it perfectly politely. If you're not good at saying no, you need to get practising. Far worse than a straight no is silence or uncertainty; because that leaves people hanging and not knowing where they are. ...

Of course, you want to be able to say 'yes' too, sometimes; you want to be kind and generous, and build and maintain wonderful, nurturing relationships.

But if someone is looking to take advantage of you, or being inconsiderate, consciously or unconsciously, they can trample all over you if you let them. Give 'em an inch, and they'll take a yard, as the saying goes. So, it's important to be clear about your boundaries; when you know how you stand, it makes life easier and saves time all round.

Bullying is more likely when boundaries are undefended and therefore open to attack. Bullies feel unsafe and insecure inside, and they have no appreciation of boundaries, so striking out is a weird way of feeling safe and strong, with an added, addictive, sad little adrenalin shot.

But it's important to remember that it's not just bullies who violate boundaries. So many good, well-intentioned people are also unaware of the concept of boundaries, so they don't notice subtle signals to keep their distance. A great example of this is the uninvited "Let me help you with that." In this instance, your "no thanks, I've got this" may need spelling out with greater force.

Greater clarity on where you draw the line - a boundary metaphor if ever there was one - in any situation, or with any issue, can help you feel less susceptible to threat and triggering, and more in control over things.

To have empathy means also means paying attention to other people's boundary flags yourself, and not brushing past them. The signals may be subtle: a momentary expression of discomfort that flashes across someone's face before the smile returns. A less than enthusiastic, "ahh... yeah, OK..." which is really a 'no' wanting to get out.

Respect other people's boundaries, and look after your own. You can relax better when you know how to use them well.