

Family Voice Bulletin – Issue 34 (April 5th/2022) Boundaries

Summarized by KJ (Krystal-Jyl) Thomas, MSW, RSW

In this week's session, facilitators KJ Thomas, MSW, RSW and Jillian Crab, MSW, RSW, were joined by guest speaker, Brynna Lemmex, MSW, RSW, for a talk about setting boundaries.

Boundaries are clearly established limits we put in place to connect safely with one another and protect our well-being. Often confused with *rules*, a boundary is not in place to control another person's actions, even if this stems from it. Boundaries are established to help communicate what is safe, comfortable, and needed for our own well-being. Boundaries are unique to each person, developed around our own limits, capacity, and comfort, and as such there are no universal boundaries. Boundaries are for the benefit of proper self-care and help us avoid burnout. Boundaries are important for everyone, so speaking with, or learning about the boundaries your loved ones have for themselves can be useful in building effective communication and healthy relationships.

Setting boundaries takes time. It begins with some introspection and figuring out what is most important. Some of the following suggestions may help guide you:

- Be realistic in what you can enforce for yourself and what your loved one is capable of doing.
- Be aware of things that trigger you and where you may need added safeguards.
- Know your rationale. Being able to convey your reasons for a boundary may help others understand and accept it.
- Know the consequences. It is important to enforce and maintain your boundary, so give some thought about how you will respond if someone crosses your boundary.

When boundary crossings arise, we can try these steps to resolve the issue. First, identify the situation, approach it free of judgment and stick to the facts. Second, think about what the potential boundary conflict is. Consider your own safeguards and concerns of your loved one. Third, explore the options. This includes looking at the pros and cons of flexing your boundary. Fourth, when you are not sure, consult with someone you trust. Lastly, follow through on steps you have decided on and evaluate the outcomes. This will help you prepare for the future.

Some helpful approaches for addressing a boundary crossing include:

- "I understand where you are coming from and at the same time I have to say no, because..."
- "No, I can't do that because... However, this is what I can do."
- "I can't do that because it's important to me that..."
- "I am concerned that... because..."
- "I am worried about your safety/well-being, so I need to tell...."

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The acronym D.E.A.R.M.A.N can help prepare for conversations around boundaries. D.E.A.R are the principles to help lay out our “ask” and M.A.N reflects how we ask for what we want.

- D: Describe (Describe the situation, stick to the facts with no judgement.)
- E: Express (Let others know how the situation makes you feel. “I feel... because...”)
- A: Assert (Avoid beating around the bush. Be direct when stating your needs.)
- R: Reinforce (Reward people who respond well and reinforce why the outcome was positive.)
- M: Mindful (Be mindful of the objective of this interaction and stay on track.)
- A: Appear (Appear confident. Consider your posture, tone, eye contact and body language.)
- N: Negotiate (We can’t always get what we want. Remain open to negotiations.)

Watch this video about empathy by Dr. Brené Brown: [youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw).