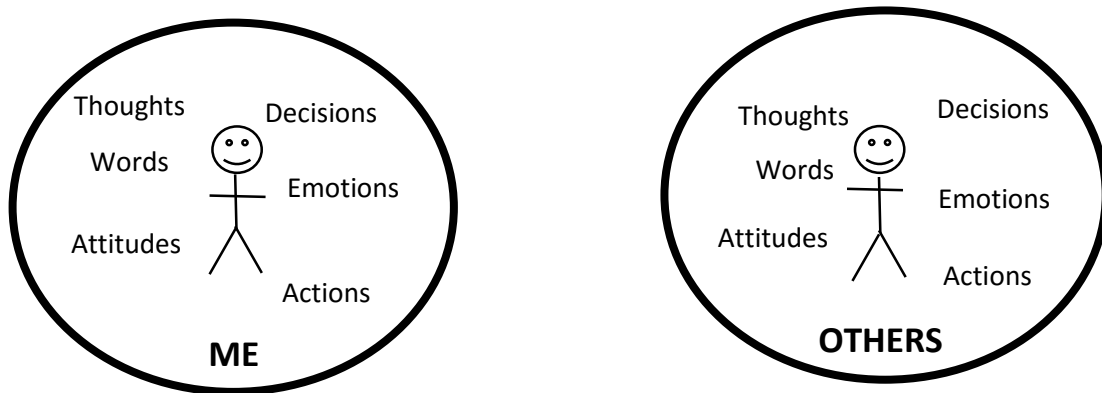




What are Boundaries?

Boundary lines define where my property ends and yours begins. And so boundaries in your life mark what is yours and what is not yours.



They are like a hoop that's around you. Inside your hoop are all the things that you and you alone are responsible for:

- Your actions, your words, your thoughts, your decisions, your attitudes, even your emotions

Outside your hoop are all the things that you are not ultimately responsible for:

- Another's actions, words, thoughts, decisions, attitudes and emotions.

For example,

You're at a family reunion and cousin Bob comes up to you and says "So, have you figured out how to hold down a job for more than 6 months yet?"

This immediately fills you with a flood of negative emotions:

- You feel angry because that's just a tactless and insensitive thing to say, especially coming from Bob, to whom you're not close;
- you feel embarrassed because there's some truth to what to what your cousin is referring to;
- and you feel indignant because he doesn't know the whole story, yet he's passing judgment on you.

What is inside your hoop, and what isn't?

What isn't in your hoop is Bob's words – those are his; he is responsible for what he says.

Bob's tactless personality is not in your hoop – it's not your job to change Bob into a nice person – that's his job, if he ever cared to do that.

Even Bob's repentance isn't inside your hoop – you can ask for an apology, but whether he does or not is up to him

So, what is in your hoop? What parts of this are yours to own?

- First, your feelings about Bob and his comment are yours – they are not Bob's. Bob's words triggered them inside you, but they are still yours. Bob didn't insert them into your body, like he has so much control over you that he can program your emotions.
 - When we say, "he makes me mad" – the truth is, my insecurities about what he's referring to brings out my anger.
 - I am responsible for my emotions of anger, embarrassment, or indignation and I'm the one who must do something about them.
- Second, how you choose to respond to Bob is inside your hoop – if you blow up at him, he didn't make you, you chose to. If you jab him back and try to embarrass him, he didn't make you, you chose to. If you smile and say "thanks for asking, Bob, maybe someday I'll tell you the whole story", he didn't make you, you chose to.
- Third, what you do with his words after the incident is over is inside your hoop
 - You can dismiss them because Bob is tactless and everyone knows it
 - You can let them haunt you, and bother you until you absolutely feel worthless and want revenge on Bob
 - Or you can say, "that was tactless of Bob, he's not someone I'll seek out at family gatherings. But it's true I've had a hard run in the employment area lately – I wonder what I can do to fix that?"

This is just a small example of what we mean when we talk about boundaries, and what's inside your hoop and what's outside your hoop.

What do Boundaries do?

Boundaries are important in order to have healthy relationships with others.

Healthy boundaries accomplish several things:

- For one, they keep us from becoming too enmeshed with another person, to the point that we are trying to live each other's lives, and I am barely an individual apart from this other person. Their emotions are my emotions; I can't make everyday decisions like whether to buy myself new socks unless I check first; if I try to grow and better myself, it's a big threat to the relationship; if I have a different view of politics, it's a big threat to the relationship; if I want to include someone else in an outing, it's a big threat to the relationship. These are the kinds of things that go with enmeshment and healthy boundaries help because they differentiate you from someone else.
- Boundaries also keep us from trying to take onto ourselves a responsibility that is actually somebody else's and only theirs to carry, or trying to control another person's behavior.
 - For example, say you have a loved one who drinks. Is it your responsibility to make him quit? Do you run around and check all his hiding places and throw away all his booze? Do you drive him to all the AA meetings because he won't go on his own? Do you tell him and tell him and tell him that he can't drink? If that's what you're doing, then you

have stepped out of your hoop and into his by taking the responsibility off of him and onto yourself.

- Having healthy boundaries means that you take responsibility for what's in your hoop and you don't take responsibility for what's in his. What is in your hoop? Your safety. Your sense of peace in your own home. Your money. Your desire to not be yelled at and berated by a drunk person.
- So, staying in your hoop in this case would mean you say to him lovingly and compassionately, "I don't like what your drinking is doing to you and it's hurting me. It's costing us money, it makes me feel unsafe, it disturbs the peace in our home, and I feel berated and put down by the things you say when you're drinking. What I want is for you to seriously get into recovery and be sober, otherwise, I and the kids are not going to be around you and you'll have to get along without us. You are going to have to find another place to live until you take recovery seriously and are sober."
- Staying inside your hoop, you are no longer trying to micromanage his behavior, but you are taking responsibility for your own peace, safety, and well-being.
- Healthy boundaries help keep us from allowing others to control us. Others may influence me, they might persuade me in some way, but if I have good boundaries, I won't let them control me.
 - For example, suppose you have someone in your life who demands your constant attention – besides a toddler. A toddler demands it, needs it, and if he belongs to you he's inside your hoop.
 - But suppose it's an adult – a spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, parent. They call all the time. If you don't answer, they get upset and let you have it. They have to know everything you're doing. Not only that, but they expect you to get their permission to go anywhere, or talk to anyone, or buy something, or do something without them there.
 - This is a serious violation of your personal boundaries. They are jumping into your hoop and trying to control your life.
 - Having healthy boundaries in this case means you need to *enforce* your boundary. You need to kick them out of your hoop. You need to have a serious talk with them and spell out exactly how your boundaries are being violated by this person, and how you will respond from now on when you feel they are jumping into your hoop. You'll be respectful – you're not going to violate their boundaries in order to enforce yours.
 - "Loved one – I am my own person and I alone will decide what I'm going to do, who I'm going to talk to, and where I'm going to go. If I feel like you are trying to control me, I will put up my hand and say 'back off'. If you persist, I will separate myself from you for a period of time. If you constantly call me, I will only answer three times per day. If you blow up my phone with texts, I will block your number. If you can't stop trying to control me, then I will re-evaluate our relationship and may need to create more distance between us."
- But we need to not only set healthy boundaries on others, we need to set them on ourselves. Healthy boundaries allow me to be more in control of my life and to step up to what is inside my hoop to handle. Like performing at my job, getting a handle on my debt, cleaning up my language, teaching my children right from wrong, being consistent with discipline of my children, taking care of my car. These are all boundary issues – they are things that are inside my

hoop that I am responsible for and must take care of. The Bible calls these kinds of self-boundaries “self-control”. In Galatians 5:23 self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit in us. God works in my heart to strengthen my self-control – my sense of boundaries on myself – so that I truly take ownership of what’s inside my hoop and deal with it.

A good boundary lets the good in, while keeping the bad out

A great resource is the book Boundaries by Henry Cloud and John Townsend.

If you would like help establishing and enforcing healthy boundaries in your life, call Practical Christian Counseling, Inc. (605-484-7089) for an appointment.