Boundaries and Communication

Healthy boundaries and communication are essential for healthy relationships, and can even help protect you from harmful or dangerous situations.

What are “Boundaries”? Boundaries are the limits we set around ourselves physically, emotionally, personally, sexually, and spiritually. They are the ways we create personal or physical space to safely make decisions about our lives. “A boundary helps determine where I end and you begin.”

Boundaries involve:
- Confidence (knowing that it’s okay to say “no”, set limits, and be assertive when you need to be)
- Clear communication
- Willingness to allow others’ discomfort, disappointment, or even anger when you set limits.

Signs of Healthy Boundaries
- You are aware of your personal space, and know how to speak up when someone is invading it.
- You take the time to get to know people before you trust them with your emotions, time, personal information, or physical touch.
- You believe in and trust your feelings, judgments, hunches, and intuitions.
- You pay attention your intuition or “gut” when you aren’t feeling safe or comfortable, and remove yourself from those situations even if others don’t understand or agree.
- You know that it’s ok to say “No” or walk away when you feel pressured, unsafe, or not ready for something.
- When a relationship is destructive, you are able to let go of it without experiencing disabling depression. You have a circle of supportive friends and healthy interests to see you through crises.
- You accept others for who they are without pressuring them to please you or fulfill your wants/needs, and you speak up when others are pressuring you.
- You don’t go against personal values or rights to please others.
- You know and accept that sometimes you are going to change your mind, make mistakes, and “mess up”.
- You know how to communicate your boundaries clearly and confidently.
- You let relationships enrich your life without completely defining it.

Tip: Figure out what your boundaries are before you are in certain situations. (ex. What you are comfortable with on a first date, where to draw the line physically with someone you’re seeing, what are you comfortable with or uncomfortable with re. strangers, what words are offensive vs. teasing, what’s going to make you feel safe in general, safety plan if you’re out on the town, etc.)

Healthy Communication Tips
- State what you want or don’t want very clearly. Avoid generalities, hinting, or vague language.
- Use confident body language (esp. eye contact). Try to get your body language to match the words you are saying.
- Use “I” statements (“I want…” “I feel…” “I need…”)
- Don’t expect others to “mind read”, and don’t assume you know what others mean if they haven’t said it.
- Seek to understand what the other person is saying, while seeking to be understood.
- Make sure that both parties are sober, rational, and capable of having clear communication before attempting a conversation.
- Know when to walk away (and know when to run) from a conversation if it turns destructive, hostile, or abusive.