

Live. Work. Well.

Issue 20, November 2022



Celebrating 35 years!!

Dear Readers,

Before we bounce boldly into the topic of boundaries in it's many different forms, I have some news to share with you. This November, 2022, marks the **35 year Anniversary of Upper Island Counselling!!** Well, that wasn't our name in 1987. We were *Campbell River Assessment and Referral Services*. Then later we became *Upper Island Assessment and Resource Services*. Then finally, *Upper Island Counselling*. Many things have changed over the years, and many things have stayed the same. Today we house 4 professional counsellors, 2 professional administrative staff, a Master's Intern, a Board of 12 Directors, and 75 member organizations. Our commitment to affordable and accessible employee, family, and community counselling and wellness services is stronger than ever. On behalf of all of us at UIC, I'd like to extend a heartfelt thank you for 35 years of supporting our nonprofit agency, so that we can support all of our clients.



With gratitude, Kelsi Baine

Good for You, Good for Everyone: *Setting Boundaries with an Addicted Loved One*

Watching someone you love battle addiction is heartbreaking. I've done it, and considering that almost a quarter of Canadians meet criteria for addiction in their lifetime, chances are you have too. Addiction is insidious – It will snake its way into every aspect of an addict's life, and often the lives of those close to them. Perhaps you have heard addiction referred to as a "family disease"? In part this alludes to the innate genetic component of addiction, but more poignantly I think it recognizes the sprawling reach of its consequences affecting whole families, communities, and societies.

So what can you do if someone you love is struggling with addiction? One word – boundaries. Okay, two words – healthy boundaries. An addict may desperately need your support, and might seek that support, but you will need to maintain healthy boundaries in order to sustain your own wellbeing. Often in the field of addictions and recovery we use the analogy of the oxygen mask –always put on your oxygen mask first before trying to help others. Make no mistake, many before you have run out of air trying to help an addicted loved one – healthy boundaries will help to ensure that you don't.

You may now be asking, "What are these boundaries of which you speak? And how does one go about implementing them?" I'm glad you asked! Perhaps the best way to begin is to emphasize what boundaries are *not*. Often we feel uncomfortable with

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assertively setting boundaries because we don't want to be controlling, or tell someone else what to do. We feel it isn't our place to *make* someone else change. Thankfully, setting boundaries isn't about any of that. It's about establishing how you want to be treated, and cultivating space for self-preservation. When we're talking about a relationship with an addicted loved one, the importance of healthy boundaries cannot be overemphasized. These relationships can be particularly depleting: mentally, emotionally, spiritually, financially. The boundaries you set may be the only thing that stands between you and total burnout. It helps to start with an honest assessment of the relationship. If something doesn't feel right, first and foremost trust that. When someone is pushing your limits you're likely to notice you feel uneasy, resentful, or downright exhausted. Here are some other common indicators that it's time to strengthen your boundaries with your addicted loved one:

- ✓ You find yourself bringing up past transgressions, over and over
- ✓ You find yourself telling them what to do and use threats to try to control them
- ✓ You find yourself covering for them, or making excuses
- ✓ You're taken advantage of, or stolen from
- ✓ You walk on eggshells with them in order to avoid conflict

If you've experienced some or all of these, it is time to create clear boundaries in the relationship, and work towards being firm and consistent with them going forward. We set boundaries by first, recognizing our limits, and then being assertive and direct in communicating them. Start small if necessary, grant yourself permission to say "no" to your loved one. This may be a totally new experience for you, so expect it to feel uncomfortable. It's okay to make your own needs a priority. I'll say it again – it's ok to make your own needs a priority.

In Al-Anon they talk about "detaching with love". If you have been in an enmeshed relationship with an addict, this idea may feel completely foreign, even scary. Detaching with love shows your loved one that you have not stopped loving them but have chosen to focus your time and energy on yourself. This allows you to view situations more realistically and objectively, and ideally helps to prevent the consequences of addiction from damaging your mental health. To be fair, this is not easy. You may find that you detach and reattach a few times before you get the hang of this, and that's ok. But a sort of magical thing will start to happen when you're able to do this consistently with your addicted loved one – the power differential will shift. So long as you keep rescuing them, indirectly granting permission for their behaviour, they are not compelled to change. When you create healthy boundaries, and detach with love, this creates an opportunity (a necessity?) for your addicted loved one to take more responsibility for their choices and their life. And as an added bonus you start to get *you* back.

For those new to the art, here are the nuts and bolts of boundary-setting:

1. Set the Boundary – Be clear and concise, polite but firm

Please don't come home intoxicated or drink alcohol in our home

2. Give the Reason – This can be anything that is affecting you or children in your care

I don't like how you behave when intoxicated and I don't want our daughter to see you that way

3. Consequence – The consequence should be a natural consequence, fitting to the behaviour.

If you are intoxicated I will ask you to leave and sleep at a friend's, and I will dump any alcohol

****most importantly, you must follow through with the consequence!**

Boundaries need to be clearly established in advance, and then reiterated during any transgression: "We decided you would not drink at home, so I am going to dump out your wine and ask you to stay at a friend's". Remember, loved ones can't read your mind, so it's important to communicate your needs and intentions in clear and assertive ways.

Like any other skill, boundary-setting will take practice. When push comes to shove, "no" can be a complete sentence, and it's ok to use it. If you take a few minutes to practice saying it aloud to yourself, it may feel easier to find when you need it. And remember, it's most effective when you keep your emotions in check. Take a few deep breaths, and remind yourself that maintaining healthy boundaries has loads of benefits – less resentment, less burnout, increased self-respect, less enmeshment with the addicted person, and overall, better mental wellbeing. In the end, whatever you are willing to put up with is exactly what you'll get. Practice healthy boundary setting and you just might get what you deserve.

Upper Island Counselling would like to thank all of our member companies, board members and clients for your continued support over the past 35 years!!

Setting Interpersonal Boundaries

(Please note that the intention of this article is to offer ideas for responding to relationships that are difficult, but not dangerous. If you find yourself in a relationship that seriously endangers your safety, you are encouraged to seek professional help. Contact info for some local services is provided below.)

Finding oneself in a difficult relationship can be a stressful and confusing situation to navigate. Many people have had the experience of being in relationships with others who do not show respect, kindness or consideration for other people's feelings and needs.

Sometimes the solution can be as simple as ending the relationship completely, but other times the circumstances can be more complicated. For example, the relationship could be with a family member or a co-worker, or someone else with whom it is not easy, or currently desirable, to walk away from altogether. Even then, if the relationship is causing distress, some form of action is necessary to safeguard our mental and emotional well-being.

Setting and maintaining interpersonal boundaries is a way to renegotiate the parameters of difficult relationships in order to feel at least safe and content, if not also happy. Following are four aspects to boundary-setting that can be helpful to keep in mind when doing this work:

1) Self-awareness

Self-awareness is the essential starting point for realizing that a relationship is not working for us in its current form. It involves a recognition of how we're feeling in the relationship combined with an understanding of how we want to feel. Ideally, we believe that we deserve to be treated with respect, kindness and consideration, and feel good in our relationships. When we don't feel this way, it is a sign that something needs to change.

2) Clarification

The next step is to clarify for ourselves what our needs are in order for the relationship to work for us, and what we intend to do if those needs are not met. It is important to be honest and realistic – both in terms of our needs and the consequences we are willing to enact if our boundaries aren't respected. Here it can be useful to write our thoughts down or talk it out with someone supportive.

3) Communication

The next step is to communicate these needs to the other person. When doing this, it is useful to communicate with assertiveness and respect. Assertiveness involves being confident, clear and forthright in our expression, and respect demonstrates care for the other person and an example of how we expect to be treated in return.

4) Follow-through

The final aspect of boundary-setting is following through. It is quite common when setting boundaries for the other person to not abide by the parameters that we set out at first. Sometimes this can be out of defiance or sometimes just habit. In some cases, the other person will push back against the boundary you've set, hoping you will give it up. When this happens, things can get harder before they get easier. Whatever the case, persistence, determination and tenacity are called for on the part of the boundary-setter, and a readiness to enact the consequences previously communicated.

With some effort it is possible to change difficult relationships in ways that are more aligned with our personal needs. By practicing self-awareness, clarifying our needs and intentions, communicating assertively and respectfully, and following through on our intentions, we can help avoid the distress of difficult relationships and enjoy respect, kindness and consideration.

Local Services (for support with dangerous relationships)

- 1) Campbell River and North Island Transition Society 250-287-7384
- 2) Community-based Victim Services (CR Family Services Society) 250-287-2421
- 3) Campbell River RCMP 250-286-6221

Boundaries with Yourself; the ultimate self-care

We hear a lot about self-care and boundaries these days, but the intersection of the two is sometimes overlooked. Self-care is frequently associated with 'me time', bubble baths, long walks, dinner with friends, and yoga. Boundaries are often thought of as simply saying 'No' when we are asked to share our time, emotional energy, or money with others. And, while these are, certainly, examples of self-care and boundaries, they fail to illustrate the depth and importance of these practices.

At UIC, we consider boundaries to be an integral component of self-care. Boundaries help keep us safe and healthy. We do our best to adhere to them because we care about and respect ourselves and are seeking a meaningful life that aligns with our values.

Before you can take the time to exercise, you have to create space in your day and prioritize that activity. If you can't engage with your family in the evening because you're looking at work emails on your phone, you might need to revisit your personal boundaries with work. When you find yourself going over-budget every month because of online shopping, your financial boundaries have likely become too loose.

Boundaries with yourself sound like:

- "I will not spend more than \$\$\$ on take-out this week"
- "On social media, I will unfollow or mute people when I find my mental health, mood, or self-confidence negatively impacted by their posts"
- "I will spend no more than 1.5 hours a day scrolling on my phone"
- "After work hours and on weekends, I will not check my work email"
- "I will not guilt myself when I miss a workout"

Now, setting boundaries isn't always easy, in fact it's often quite difficult. If it were easy, none of us would be sitting around thinking "wow, I can't believe I just watched that whole series on Netflix". Get curious about the barriers to setting and maintaining boundaries with yourself. When you notice that your boundaries feel loose or too rigid:

- Pause, take a breath, check-in with yourself
- How are you feeling? Do you feel bored, anxious, stressed? How do you usually cope with these feelings?
- What are you doing right now? Are you engaged in something meaningful?
- If you could do 1 thing, right now, that would help you feel more engaged with life in the way that you want – what would it be?

If you notice an ongoing struggle to set and maintain boundaries, it can be worthwhile to take stock of additional challenges you may be facing. Are you experiencing any mental health struggles like anxiety, depression or substance use? Do you have a history of trauma? Were boundary violations frequently modeled and/or celebrated in your family of origin? These factors, and many others, can impact our ability to set and maintain boundaries with ourselves and others, and it's okay to seek help when these factors are getting in the way for you. Also – keep in mind that no one does boundaries perfectly! It's an ongoing practice that will, inevitably involve some challenges, miss-steps, and do-overs (think about aiming for 80% vs. 100%).

Practical books to help you set and maintain boundaries:

Set Boundaries, Find Peace: A Guide to Reclaiming Yourself, by Nedra Glover Tawwab

The Set Boundaries Workbook: Practical Exercises for Understanding Your Needs and Setting Healthy Limits, by Nedra Glover Tawwab

The Better Boundaries Workbook: A CBT-Based Program to Help You Set Limits, Express Your Needs, and Create Healthy Relationships, by Sharon Martin MSW LCSW

The Voice

There is a voice inside of you
that whispers all day long,
"I feel that this is right for me,
I know that this is wrong."
No teacher, preacher, parent, friend
or wise man can decide
what's right for you - just listen to
the voice that speaks inside.

~ Shel Silverstein

We talk a lot about boundaries; emotional, physical, personal, relational. Sometimes it can be a tough concept to grasp, and even tougher to put in place. Who knew that the great Shel Silverstein wrote of it so beautifully, simply, and poignantly many years ago - without perhaps knowing that he was. This is boundaries. It's that line between "I feel that this is right for me", and "I know that this is wrong".