

Boundaries

Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship of La Crosse, WI, Diane Haines, September 2013

Candle Lighting and Opening Words

And this is one of the major questions of our lives: how we keep boundaries, what permission we have to cross boundaries, and how we do so.

A.B. Yehoshua

Check in:

What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for loved ones, issues you are facing.

Focus

An individual person also has a physical boundary, the skin, and if that skin becomes too broken or too unyielding, the person's health takes a turn for the worse. However, when we speak of a person's boundaries, we are usually talking not about our physical selves but our social selves, and the importance of functioning well in the social systems of which we are part.

We've probably all known someone whose boundaries are way too broad and make us feel encroached on. They might stand too close to us, feel hurt if we don't share their tastes, or do way too much for us. They might ask questions which are too personal, violate our privacy, share our stories too broadly, or expect personal favors without regard to our needs and desires.

On the other hand, we've probably all known people whose boundaries are too rigid. They have a hard time taking in new information or getting to know new people. They have difficulty with give-and-take. If they don't get their way, even in minor things, they feel threatened to the core of their being. They just don't get along.

Appropriate boundaries change. A caregiver will grab the back of a toddler's pants to stop him from running off. But the caregiver of a disabled or sick adult will be much more respectful when guiding their footsteps, for adults have strong boundaries about physical contact.

When our boundaries are crossed, we don't just notice the error, we feel it. People who stand too close or ask questions that are too personal irritate us.

Groups of people also have boundaries that help the group function. In Covenant Groups, for instance, it is clear who is in the group. People don't bring their spouses or houseguests; that would be a violation of the group's boundaries and make people uncomfortable. These boundaries help people be comfortable in the group.

Activities/Questions

1. We learn powerful lessons about appropriate boundaries by being part of a family. Think back to your family as you were growing up. Who was distant, and who was close? Did you ever feel that you were enmeshed with someone else?

2. Have there been times in your life when you felt too involved in another person's life, or they in yours? What happened? How did things change? How do you feel about that experience?
3. When people are hurt, they often overreact to protect themselves and create overly rigid boundaries, thinking, "No one can hurt me now!" When and with whom have you created a rigid boundary to hide behind?
4. Think about boundaries in your family that are shifting now or have changed over the years. Describe a time when you consciously decided to soften, firm up, or alter your boundaries.
5. If you have a tendency to be a people-pleaser, list a couple of ways you might change this tendency. Think of someone who bullies you into accepting his/her ideas. What are some different ways to deal with this person?

Closing Words: