BOUNDARIES

worksheet

ARTICULATING BOUNDARIES

THE ART OF ASSERTIVENESS

When mutual respect is present in a relationship, we don't always need to craft precise boundary statements. Sometimes hints or remarks cloaked in humor are enough to get our point across. For example, Jen's ex-husband often comes over to spend time with their daughter.

"When he sprawled across my couch and lounged like he still lived here, it was awkward, and I felt somewhat disrespected. It wasn't his house anymore."

Jen tried a subtle approach first. "I patted my arm on his feet propped up on the arm of the couch and flashed a quick smile while I remarked, "Dude, this isn't your house anymore!"

Unfortunately, he didn't take the hint. That's when Jen knew that it was necessary for her to be direct and assert what she wanted.

"I know this used to be our home together, but it's not anymore. From now on, I'd like you to sit up on the couch when you come to visit."

It went against Jen's usual empathetic nature to be assertive, but she'd learned that passivity and timidity were not God's best for her. The more she learned to speak her truth, the more confident and empowered she felt.

In a perfect world, men would be able to read our mind and respect our thoughts and wishes before we even express them. But we must learn to be assertive and take responsibility for our desires by articulating what we want.

Before we look at how to practice assertiveness, let's take a look at unhealthy ways to express our boundaries. Sometimes the easiest way to explain a concept is to first explore what not to do.

What Not To Do

DON'T ACCUSE

As you noticed in last week's discussion on defense mechanisms, it's easy to accuse others when you're frustrated, but when you begin conflict resolution statements with accusations like you always, you never, you're so _____ or if you would just _____, you'll rarely accomplish the type of resolution you want. Instead, your pointing fingers only escalate the conflict. In fact, when your defense mechanisms are projected onto others, it causes them to respond in kind with their brand of defense. Then you just volley back and forth with the conflict, never reaching a resolution.

DON'T IGNORE

Ignoring behavior that hurts you because you're afraid to confront is equally destructive. Suppressing your feelings boils over into resentment, destroys your peace and weakens your relationships.

DON'T DISGUISE

Passive women often disguise how they feel because they're afraid of rejection or disapproval. Instead of stating their opinion or desire, they think it's easier to resort to hints or vague statements that camouflage their real feelings. For example, Your partner wants to plan a couple's night out and suggests that the group go bowling. You don't like to bowl, but instead of being honest, you come up with objections like, "It's too far to drive at night," or "My knees have been hurting lately."

When we replace our defense mechanisms with assertiveness, we take ownership and responsibility for our feelings and we handle conflict in a mature manner.

Maybe you've thought assertiveness is rude, but it's actually a good quality. It shows that we respect ourselves and expect it from others as well.

WHAT IS ASSERTIVENESS?

Being assertive means expressing your thoughts, feelings, and needs in a clear, direct, and respectful way, while also considering the thoughts, feelings, and needs of your partner. It involves standing up for yourself and communicating your wants and needs effectively, without being aggressive, passive, or manipulative. Assertive behavior is not the same thing as aggressive behavior, but when you've been accustomed to being passive, being assertive can feel awkward, so let's take a look at the differences.

Aggressive is defined as:

- characterized by or tending toward unprovoked offensives
- making an all-out effort to win or succeed; boldly assertive and forward; pushy
- vigorously energetic, especially in the use of initiative and forcefulness

In contrast, assertive is defined as:

- positive; confident
- decisive and bold
- self-assured communication

The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak what is just.

PROVERBS 27:30

Which characteristics of being assertive are most appealing to you?

When you've been used to being passive, being assertive can feel aggressive.

Assertive communication involves using "I" statements to express your own thoughts and feelings, rather than attacking or blaming others. It also involves active listening to the other person, showing empathy and understanding, and finding mutually beneficial solutions to conflicts.

So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" (Hebrews 13:6)

Being assertive can have many benefits in personal and professional relationships, including:

- **Building self-confidence and self-esteem**
- **Improving communication and reducing misunderstandings**
- **Reducing stress and anxiety**
- **Creating healthy boundaries and relationships**
- **Resolving conflicts effectively**
- **Achieving goals and objectives**

TAKING OWNERSHIP

Assertive women take responsibility for their feelings and communicate what they want in a non-threatening and non-defensive way. They use "I" statements instead of "you." They state want they expect in a polite, straight-forward way.

When assertive women communicate their expectations, they state the following:

I feel _____.
I want _____.

Sometimes expressing what you feel and want is enough to get others to honor your wishes. But when your expectations are repeatedly disrespected, you'll need to add a third statement, an "if you _____, I will _____" statement. These statements verbalize a consequence or repercussion that you'll enforce when your boundaries are not honored.

If you _____, I will _____.

I'd like to note that communicating a consequence or repercussion is not always necessary at first. In a relationship where mutual respect is honored, communicating an "if you ____, I will ____" statement can seem combative. In a relationship where the other person is not willing to respect your wishes or cooperate with your request, however, it will become necessary to create a consequence when you've stated your needs previously and they've been ignored or disrespected.

Let's look at a few examples. (For each I've included the optional "if you ____, I will ____" statements to give you examples of articulating your own consequences.)

ACCUSATORY VS. OWNERSHIP

You're frustrated because your husband never helps with the household duties.

Accusatory: You're so lazy! You always watch TV and never help me with the dishes.

Ownership: **I feel** overwhelmed and frustrated when you don't pitch in with the housework. **I want** you to help in the evenings before you watch TV and on the weekends before you go golfing. **If you** don't start helping, **I will** hire a housekeeper instead.

Note: Consequences must be something you are willing to enforce and have the capacity to enforce. While they are not meant to be punitive, they must also be something that will hopefully motivate your partner to action.

Leverage is essential. In this example, hiring a housekeeper might be a good motivator for a partner who prioritizes saving money. On the other hand, another partner might not flinch at spending money to hire a housekeeper. Everyone is different. That's why leverage is key. It's vital that you consider what your partner values. Remember, you're not trying to teach him a lesson. You're trying to motivate him to help to build a more secure relationship centered on mutual respect and consideration for one another and at the same time guard your heart from the mounting frustration and bitterness that is steadily accumulating.

It may take a while to brainstorm, pray and consider what a viable consequence would be. Don't be hasty. You'll likely relent later if you utter a consequence in frustration. Be patient while you consider what you're willing to carry out and what you think will influence change.

Another idea in this example that you might consider would be to reduce the time spent on shared activities with your partner such as watching TV together or going out for dinner until the housework is done. If you partner values quality time, this might be a great motivator.

Another idea would be to reallocate household expenses, having your partner pay a greater proportion of the expenses. This can be a way to acknowledge the extra work you do to take care of the house.

Have you had continual conflict with your partner refusing to share household duties? If so, what would a healthy boundary look like for you? What consequences would you implement?

ACCUSATORY VS. OWNERSHIP

Your boyfriend spends too much time on his phone when you're together.

Accusatory: You're always so self-absorbed and distracted when we're together. If you loved me you'd pay more attention to me!

Ownership: I feel ignored when you're on your phone. **I want** you to put it away when we're on a date. **If you** continue to text and answer calls when we're together, **I will** call an Uber and go home early.

Have you had continual conflict with your partner refusing to give you his undivided attention when you are together? If so, what would a healthy boundary look like for you? What consequences would you implement?

IGNORING VS. OWNERSHIP

Your guy is always late.

Ignoring: You say nothing, but resentment grows and you snap at him for other things. When he asks what's wrong, you smile between gritted teeth and say, "Nothing!"

Ownership: **I feel** embarrassed when we're late to events. **I want** to leave at 5:30 in order to arrive on time. **If you** aren't ready, **I will** meet you there.

Have you had continual conflict with your partner's punctuality or honoring his time commitment? If so, what would a healthy boundary look like for you? What consequences would you implement?

DISGUISING VS. OWNERSHIP

Your guy teases you with sarcastic comments about your weight in front of your friends.

Ignoring: You smile and laugh. It hurts you but you don't want anyone to think you're overly sensitive.

Ownership: **I feel** disrespected when you poke fun of me. **I want** to refrain from making sarcastic comments about me. **If you** continue, **I will** sleep in the guestroom tonight.

Does your partner constantly use sarcasm or verbal putdowns to ridicule you? If so, what would a healthy boundary look like for you? What consequences could you implement?

DEALING WITH PUSHBACK

When a partner has continually disregarded your requests, he will not likely believe that you'll follow through with what he perceives as empty threats, In order to get you to refrain from enforcing your consequences, he'll likely amplify what has worked in the past to intimidate you. When your boundaries are met with scorn, don't let that detour you from your follow through. Otherwise, you'll only validate his beliefs that you don't mean what you say.

When your boundaries are met with scorn, don't let that detour you from your follow through. Otherwise, you'll only validate his beliefs that you don't mean what you say.

Stay calm and assertive: It's important to remain calm and confident when setting and enforcing your boundaries. If you react defensively or aggressively, it may escalate the situation and make it more difficult to resolve.

Be clear and consistent: It's important to be clear and consistent with your boundaries. If you are wishy-washy or inconsistent, it will send mixed signals and make it harder for him to respect your boundaries.

Be patient and steadfast: It takes time to retrain others that you mean what you say. Your actions will communicate your wishes much louder than your words. That's why follow through is the most essential part of setting healthy boundaries.

Don't take his pushback personally: Remember, setting and enforcing boundaries is an important part of maintaining healthy relationships and taking care of yourself. Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself and prioritize your own needs and well-being.

CHANGING YOUR MINDSET

In a moment, I'm going to challenge you with probably the most difficult assignment of this entire course--writing your own boundary statements. You've come this far and I know you can do this! But first, let's talk about some limiting beliefs that must be replaced once and for all. These limiting beliefs must be replaced with new mindsets. These mindsets are prerequisite truths that provide a foundational support for your ability to follow through with the implementation of any necessary consequences.

It's important that you nullify any agreements you've made with yourself about how you've allowed yourself to be treated. Otherwise, your partner's pushback will intimidate you into compliance.

Changing your mindset is an internal commitment that you make with yourself. Your own validation and worth must come first. If you don't believe that you're worthy of being treated with respect, your limiting beliefs will have a negative impact on your behavior.

Remember, you can't change your partner, but you can change your reactions and responses to inappropriate and disrespectful behavior.

Look over the lies, truths and renewed mindsets on the following page.

- **Cross out the lies that you've struggled with.**
- **Circle the truths that resonate with you.**
- **Put a star by the renewed mindsets that you are committed to embrace.**

LIE	TRUTH	RENEWED MINDSET
It's my fault. If I had more faith, he wouldn't treat me like this. I need to pray and stay.	With their mouths the godless destroy their neighbors, but through knowledge the righteous escape (Proverbs 11:9).	I won't tolerate name-calling or insults. If my partner can't speak to me with respect, I will disengage from the conversation.
I always need to defend or explain myself.	Do not speak to fools, for they will scorn your prudent words (Proverbs 23:9).	I won't engage in arguments or conversations that are meant to hurt me. If he can't communicate without being hurtful, I will remove myself from the conversation. And I don't need to defend myself. Defending intensifies conflict.
My **needs** are selfish. He's the head of the house, so his **desires** come first.	In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself (Ephesians 5:28).	I won't sacrifice my own **needs** to accommodate his selfish **desires** and demands.
I can't trust what I hear from God alone. My discernment is not enough. I have to have proof of any suspicions.	My daughter [my emphasis], do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight, preserve sound judgment and discretion; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck (Proverbs 3:21-22).	I won't ignore my own feelings or intuition. If something doesn't feel right to me, I will speak up and address it.
When my partner is manipulative or abusive, if I protect myself, I'm not trusting God.	Like a muddied spring or a polluted well are the righteous who give way to the wicked. (Proverbs 25:26).	I won't accept manipulation or abuse. When necessary, whether it's temporary or permanent, I will remove myself from the relationship.

Crafting your Boundary Statements

Now it's time to put your boundary statements together. First, I'll have you break this down into bite sized pieces. Then you'll combine everything together. I know this is a challenge, but trust me. You got this!

1

List three situations in the past or present in which it's been hard to assert yourself and take ownership.

Situation 1: _____

_____

Situation 2: _____

_____

Situation 3: _____

_____

2

How did you feel? If you need help identifying your emotions, click here to use this Feelings Chart.

Situation 1: _____

Situation 2: _____

Situation 3: _____

3

What did you want to happen?

Situation 1: _____

Situation 2: _____

Situation 3: _____

4 **If your partner or others continue to violate your wishes, what is an appropriate consequence that you can and are willing to enforce? (Remember, this is not to punish the other person. Pray and ask for wisdom. Take your time. This is the hardest part of boundaries, but without a consequence, you have no leverage.)**

Situation 1: _____

_____

Situation 2: _____

_____

Situation 3: _____

_____

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 5

5 **Now it's time to put your complete boundary statements together. Using the pattern below, fill in the blanks from the answers you recorded for each of your situations.**

Situation 1:

When you _____ I felt _____.

I want _____.

If you _____, I will _____.

Situation 2:

When you _____ I felt _____.

I want _____.

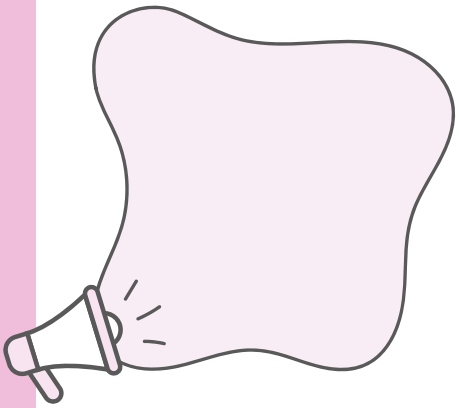
If you _____, I will _____.

Situation 3:

When you _____ I felt _____.

I want _____.

If you _____, I will _____.



PRACTICE CONFIDENCE

Practice makes perfect. Try saying your boundary statements out loud either in front of a mirror or role playing with a trusted friend to build your confidence. Pay attention to your posture, your tone of voice and your eye contact. Stand up tall. Don't slouch or look down. Speak clearly and imagine yourself looking the other person in the eye. Your nonverbal cues will communicate just as much as your words, maybe even more.

Don't throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

HEBREWS 10:35

Your Comeback

You'll use wisdom when you anticipate the initial reaction to your boundary statement. Prepare yourself by thinking about how you'll respond to any pushback by creating a final reply.

Often your partner or others are angered that you're finally standing up for yourself. They may protest with accusations like, "I can't believe you're going to do that!" "Who do you think you are?" "Don't try to tell me what to do!" That's why it's important that you prepare for pushback and refrain from defending yourself.

What kind of comments or protests does your partner (or others) typically use?

You don't have to respond. Sometimes silence communicates more clearly that a rebuttal. If you do choose to reply, remember not to JADE. Don't justify, argue, defend or explain. Instead keep your comments short, simple and direct by practicing a calm reply to potential protests and pushback.

Here are some examples.

- I trust you'll respect my decision.
- This is best for our relationship.
- I'm sorry you feel that way.
- I hope that you'll honor my wishes.

When you mentally prepare and practice your comeback, you'll be more likely to maintain your confident composure and earn the respect you deserve.

CONFIDENCE TRUTHS

For each situation you described above, consider how you think the other person will respond. Write out a reply that you think would work best for you.