

UNDERSTANDING AND MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES

- 1) You have the right to decide who touches you in any way. For people you choose to allow to touch you, you have the right to determine what level of intimacy they touch you with. This is an *inalienable* right; you can't lose it. So no one has the right to say, "Well, I get to go ahead and touch you because of something you did or said, or because you owe me money, or you owe me this or that." You can never owe anyone your body.
- 2) You have a similar and equally powerful right to decide who enters realms that are private to you: who knows your inner thoughts and feelings, who reads your diary, who looks through your belongings, who is in your house or car or bedroom. In other words, someone doesn't have to touch you to violate your boundaries. Demanding to know what you think or feel when you don't want to share that, or telling you what you (supposedly) think or feel, are violations of your boundaries.
- 3) Children whose boundaries are respected, and who are supported to set the boundaries they want and need, learn to establish the boundaries they crave and to know when they're being violated.
- 4) On the other hand, people who have grown up having their boundaries frequently or severely violated can lose their sense of where their boundaries are and where they want them to be. They can develop difficulty recognizing when their boundaries have been violated. They may blame themselves when they feel violated by others. They may start to feel a generalized mistrust toward everyone and, for example, may come to dislike being touched even by trusted people. These effects can become even more severe for people who not only grew up with boundary violations, but were blamed for those violations ("It's your own fault I'm invading you" or had to listen to those violations being justified ("This shouldn't bother you, there's nothing wrong with what I'm doing to you."))
- 5) Boundaries are like a gate to our inner world. When we have strong, healthy boundaries, we feel in control of who comes close to us and who doesn't. We feel like our gate is working well to let the right people in and keep everyone else out. When we have unclear boundaries or feel that we don't have the right to defend our boundaries, the gate doesn't work well; we end up having people coming into our inner world that we don't want there. And we may end up also shutting certain people out that we later wish we had made more room for and had let in closer.
- 6) It isn't healthful for us to allow intimacy, physically or emotionally, that we don't really want. At the same time, it isn't healthful for us to keep intimacy away that we would have benefited from. *However, no one has the right to tell us which intimacy would be good for us and to pressure to accept intimacy we don't want.* It's entirely up to us to decide when and how we want to make that gate open more, if that's one of our goals.

7) Healing well depends on safety. Therefore it's very important in the Peak Living Network that we respect each other's boundaries, and that pressure never be used on anyone to open up more than they choose to. Awareness and knowledge about boundaries needs to be shared and spread through our network.

8) If you feel that your boundaries have been violated during a co-counseling session, don't co-counsel with that person again until you're fully confident that the violation will not be repeated. If you believe that the violation was deliberate, please share what happened with at least one other person in the network and consider how best to confront the behavior. If you feel that your boundaries have been violated in any other PLN activity, the same principles apply.

9) If anyone you meet through PLN asks you out, that is inappropriate conduct. (Furthermore, anyone whom you meet through co-counseling, or whom you get to know primarily through co-counseling, shouldn't be asking you to get together socially at all, even if the intention is not romantic.) *PLN is not to be used to seek partners*; we are not a dating club. It's also not a place to look for clients for your practice, members for your organization, or congregants for your faith community. We want to have safety in our network, and a key way we do that is by asking people to participate in PLN to pursue their own healing and not for any other purposes.

10) People who were already friends or partners before becoming part of PLN are of course welcome to continue their relationship.

You can find a longer discussion of boundary issues, and why maintaining strong boundaries is important in PLN, in *The Healing Partnership*.