

# Notes From Melba

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Melba W. Benson, Ph.D.

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## Setting Boundaries

### Where Do You End and I Begin?

Boundaries are limits that define each of us as separate from others.

Boundaries come in assorted shapes, sizes, and varieties.

- They can be rigid, flexible, permeable, or impermeable.
- They can be set at a great distance or very close.

**The goal of a person who wants to be healthy is to form boundaries that:**

1. Have some flexibility and some definite limits.
2. Move appropriately in response to situations, such as — out for strangers, in for intimates.
3. Are distinct enough to preserve our individuality, but open enough to admit new ideas and perspectives.
4. Are firm enough to keep our values and priorities clear, and open enough to communicate our priorities to the right people.
5. Closed enough to withstand assault from those who are thoughtless and mean.

When boundaries are very rigid, new ideas or experiences can't get in. A person who has very rigid boundaries:

1. May be difficult to bond with.
2. Has a narrow perspective on life.
3. Sees things his/her own way.
4. Can't discuss matters that lie outside his/her field of vision.

**A person whose boundaries are too flexible:**

1. Often feels overwhelmed with life.
2. Is distracted by each new demand.
3. Has difficulty setting priorities and following them.
4. Gets started on one thing only to get sidetracked by something else.
5. May appear disorganized.

**The two main types of boundaries are:**

#### 1. Physical

Boundaries we set by choosing who can touch us, how and where we are touched, and how close we will let people come to us.

#### 2. Emotional

Boundaries we set by choosing how we will let people treat us, and setting limits on what people can say to us.

We learn about our boundaries by the way we are treated as children. Then we teach others where our boundaries are by the way we let them treat us.

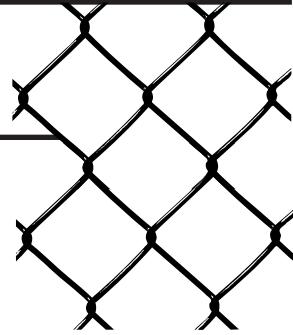
Most people will respect our boundaries if we indicate where they are, but we must actively protect our boundaries.

Building good boundaries requires continued attention and maintenance. Even well-meaning people will continue to intrude on personal territory.

Sometimes we think that if we have let someone do something once, we have to let the person do it again. However, we can change our minds, discover we didn't like something someone said, and set new standards of behavior.

Most of our problems in life have to do with relationships, and the source of many problems in relationships is tied to boundary issues. We will continue to have problems in relationships if we do not establish healthy boundaries for ourselves.

Learning about boundaries and learning how to practice healthy boundaries takes time. Boundaries are not established automatically. We will always have to pay attention to them in order to maintain them, or we may revert back into old boundary habits.



The articles this month at <http://www.melbabenson.com/articles.php> are designed to assist you in understanding boundaries, how we sometimes violate boundaries even with ourselves, how we sometimes violate the boundaries of other people, questions that will assist you in setting boundaries, and a special category that so many people are struggling with: dealing with parents.

#### "Boundary Violations Against Self"

##### "Boundary Violations Against Others"

##### "Cleaning Up Boundaries With Parents"

*"When you have boundaries in place, you are free to risk because you know your limits."*

—Rhonda Britton

*"Those who trim themselves to suit everybody will soon whittle themselves away."*

—Charles M. Schwab

*"Love without boundaries is like a missile without a guidance system. You have no idea where it is going."*

—Phil McGraw

*"Any time you give up your power to someone else, you lose yourself, and the price you pay is too high."*

—Unknown

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