

I Can't Keep Doing This: 5 Reasons Your Boundaries Aren't Working

by Lysa TerKeurst

Hi friend,

I personally know the frustration of saying *something* has to change in a relationship but feeling stuck when the other person isn't cooperating with those needed changes.

I also know what it feels like to be paralyzed by another person's choices that break your heart over and over and not know what to do about it. Your body tenses and your pulse quickens because all you really want is for the other person to stop doing this!

You've prayed about this behavior or situation. You've talked about this. You've tried to navigate it. You may have even tried to stop it. But in the end, nothing has worked.

Here's what I've been learning: **You can love them, but you can't change them.**

It's a terribly hard truth to accept, but it's actually one of the most freeing truths I've learned to embrace. If you have a relationship in your life where you know something is wrong, but you can't figure out what to do, I believe this resource will help you uncover the reasons why boundaries may not be working and what to do instead. Boundaries aren't going to fix the other person. But they are going to help you stay fixed on what is good, what is acceptable, and what you need to stay healthy and whole.

Oh friend, you're not alone in your desire to see healthy progress. I've been in your shoes. And I want to be the trusted friend you can turn to when you reach your breaking point of saying, "I can't keep doing this ... Something has to change."

Let's do this together,

Lysa TerKeurst

5 Reasons Your Boundaries Aren't Working

1. You aren't sure that it's OK to set boundaries with *that person*.

What's Actually True?

I don't know who comes to mind when you read that statement above, but what I've learned is this: Good relationships require good boundaries. Even healthy relationships still need boundaries! So how much more is a boundary necessary in a relationship where dysfunction is roaming wild? But in order for this to work, we have to approach each situation with confidence in this truth: Drawing boundaries doesn't make us unkind, unchristian or uncaring. Setting boundaries is actually all about pursuing good for you and all your relationships.

Questions To Consider: What events or conversations have occurred that make you feel as if it's not acceptable to put relational parameters in place in this relationship? Are there certain behaviors this person exhibits that make boundaries seem unrealistic or even seem like they're not an option? What good might be possible in this relationship if you set boundaries?

Remember This:

It's not unchristian to require people to treat you in healthy ways.

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2. This person's role in your life makes you feel like normal boundaries don't apply.

What's Actually True?

Have you ever said to yourself, "Normally I would say I need to draw a boundary in this type of situation, but this person is my _____ (mom, sister, best friend, boss, husband, child, etc.)"? It's challenging when you feel you must respect this person or care for this person because of the type of relationship you have with them. That's when we must remember healthy boundaries communicated properly aren't disrespectful or uncaring. Actually, they may be the only fighting chance you have to keep the respect and care intact with this other person you deeply care about. Boundaries aren't a way to peace out or tap out with our responsibilities. But they are a way to fulfill our role while appropriately communicating what is and is not acceptable in this relationship. Even when it's challenging, we can still implement boundaries in a God-honoring way with respect, kindness and love, but we have to know how to spot dysfunction, what to do about it and when to recognize it's no longer reasonable or safe to stay in some relationships as they are.

Questions To Consider: If this person didn't have the title or role in your life that they do (example: mom, sister, boss, best friend), what boundaries would you see as appropriate or necessary? What parameters are you able to consider implementing now that you've **momentarily** put their title to the side to really determine what you need? What responsibilities will you need to navigate carefully as you think through the boundaries, and consequences for broken boundaries, with this relationship (for example: responsibilities in the workplace with a boss, or responsibilities with your child or aging parent)?

Remember This:

Boundaries are supposed to bring relief to the grief of letting other people's opinions, issues, desires and agendas run our lives, no matter what roles those people play.

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3. You fear what will happen to this relationship because of this boundary.

What's Actually True?

Sometimes we fear putting or keeping boundaries in place because we fear losing something we like about this relationship. Or we fear losing the relationship altogether. But if we fear that person will walk away when we establish boundaries for healthy reasons, then chances are they will eventually walk away regardless. There **will be** changes in the relationship when boundaries are put in place. That's why you will have to remind yourself over and over that the purpose of this boundary isn't to try and get the other person to change. It's so that you can protect yourself from hurtful patterns and behaviors that you are no longer willing to tolerate. It is helpful to think through the best way to communicate this boundary with the other person and what the consequences will be if the boundary is disrespected or disregarded. Think through these parameters ahead of time when you are in a non-emotional, non-confrontational mental space, maybe even alongside a trusted, wise friend or with a Christian counselor. It's important to prepare in times of security for times of insecurity. It's important to prepare in times of health for times of dysfunction.

Questions To Consider: What am I willing to live with? What is and is not acceptable behavior? What are my deal breakers that would pull me from a place of health into unhealth? What is a healthy boundary I need to implement? What are the consequences that I can realistically maintain with this other person if the boundaries I establish are crossed?

Remember This:

Healthy relationships don't feel threatening. Loving relationships don't feel cruel. Secure relationships don't feel like everything could implode if you dared to draw a boundary.

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4. You've already tried to control their uncontrollable behavior with boundaries that didn't work.

What's Actually True?

Drawing boundaries is not about controlling someone else's behavior. It's about paying attention and being honest about how someone's poor behavior and lack of responsibility is possibly controlling *you*. And when people close to us are acting out of control, that's when we run the greatest risk of lacking self-control ... which is a gift from God we must protect. (2 Timothy 1:7, ESV) Drawing boundaries helps us identify where our capacity ends and where someone else's must begin. If you find you are working harder on someone else's issues than they are willing to work on themselves, it's time for some boundaries. Actually, boundaries may be the only chance there is for you to stay healthy and the relationship to stay intact. Remember, health cannot bond with unhealth ... So either the boundaries will encourage them to pursue better choices or the boundaries will make it clear that you need to take a step back in order to ensure that you can continue to pursue your own health and well-being.

Questions To Consider: What am I actually responsible for? What am I not responsible for? (Example: I am responsible for showing up to my job on time. I am not responsible for my co-worker's harsh reaction or response in a conversation.)

Remember This:

Healthy people who desire healthy relationships don't have an issue with other people's healthy boundaries.

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5. You fear what this person will think of you personally because of this boundary.

What's Actually True?

This is a core fear around setting boundaries. We fear if we set a boundary, someone will no longer see us as we want them to see us. They will no longer know us as we want them to know us. They will no longer believe the best about us, and there's something inside of us that really wants them to believe the best about us. If we are afraid that this person will think poorly of us, potentially abandon us or try to make us feel crazy for taking a step toward making the relationship healthy, chances are even higher that, without wise boundaries, they will eventually do all three of these things to us. But here's what we have to cling to: Someone being disappointed in our boundaries doesn't make us a disappointment. We must let God's words about us be the only words we live by. We may not be able to control other people's feelings toward us, but we can make progress within ourselves through seeking godly wisdom; being devoted to reading and meditating on God's Word; making thoughtful, prayerful decisions; and more.

Questions To Consider: What are some of the qualities you like about yourself that you want to make sure the people you love experience when they spend time with you? How can boundaries help make your best qualities more and more apparent?

Remember This:

When God is the source of our identity, we are much less prone to others feeding our insecurity.