

# Where You End and I Begin

## An Invitation to Intimacy Through Healthy Boundaries

■ by Kathy Krentkowski, MA, LCPC, LMHC

Personal boundaries aren't easy to establish in relationships. There is no litmus test that tells you when or what sort of boundary is needed at any given time. There are no concrete measurements that reveal when a personal boundary is too rigid or too loose, or when it needs to be adjusted. Navigating boundaries in your relationships requires that you know yourself, and that is an individual journey. Although challenging, it is well worth the effort and can deliver rewards such as intimacy and closeness in a relationship.

### What Makes You, "You"

Your most fundamental personal boundary is one that tells you who you are and what makes you, "you". Without a boundary that tells you who you are, there is no "you" to be in relationship with. You need to know where you end and where the other begins in order to relate to another person in a healthy way.

The boundary around who you are includes identifiers such as your name, gender, height, etc. It also includes preferences such as your favorite color, movie, or song. The boundary around who you are likewise includes your feelings and thoughts. It is this personal boundary that once established and maintained can bring deeper knowing and intimacy. Simply stated, your feelings belong and happen to you. You do not *feel* my feelings; I do. Similarly, your thoughts are *your* thoughts. They come to *your* mind. Your thoughts are not my thoughts, no matter how in sync we may be. The Bible tells us to have the mind of Christ, and this involves the persistent effort to take each thought captive (see 1 Corinthians 2:16; 2 Corinthians 10:5). Doing this first requires you to take *the thoughts that belong to you* captive. Once captive, you bring them to Jesus in order that they may be challenged and renewed to reflect truth. You don't take *my* thoughts captive. That's a job only I can do.



### Freedom from Other People's Thoughts and Feelings

Think about the implications of this. If your feelings and thoughts belong to you, then you are responsible for them. You may not be able to prevent feelings and thoughts from happening to you, but you are accountable for what you do or say in response to them. Here's the freedom piece: You are not responsible for what does not belong to you. And so, you are not responsible for the feelings and thoughts of others. Let me say that again. You are not responsible for the feelings and thoughts of another person. And yet, we put a lot of effort into trying to create or prevent someone from feeling or thinking a certain way. With best intentions we try to stop someone from having a particular emotional or thoughtful experience. The effort may be valid: you likely

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Article taken from the Jul | Aug 2018 issue of *PRESSING ON*, a Publication of Chicago Christian Counseling Center  
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don't want someone you love to have the feelings of pain or disappointment; you don't want them to think something that is not true. Although understandable, the effort remains unproductive, and may even be counterproductive. Truly ask yourself, "what's wrong with feeling pain or disappointment?"

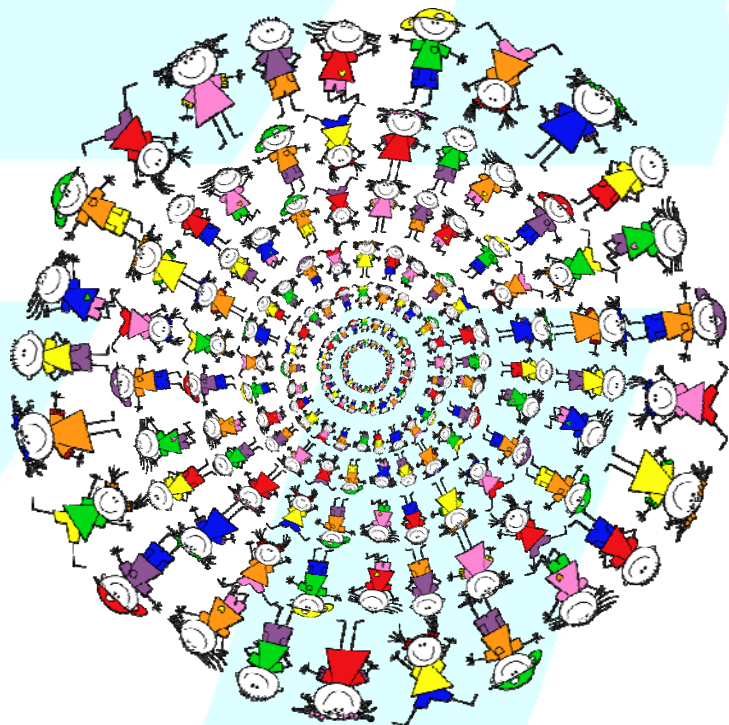
### It's OKAY to Feel!

NEWS FLASH: it's ok to feel! In fact, it's empowering to feel. Feelings can be our greatest teacher. We may experience things we might not have otherwise learned had we not felt the feelings. Trying to control the feelings and thoughts of others, albeit impossible, may actually prevent them from learning a needed lesson. Instead, when we accept that how someone feels and what they think is first and foremost a reflection of *their internal experience*, we free ourselves to manage and take responsibility for what **IS** ours (i.e. our feelings and thoughts). As I busy myself with managing my own thoughts and feelings, I free you up to manage your own thoughts and feelings. Once we see that we are each responsible for our individual thoughts and feelings, we can get busy relating to one another in a more authentic, and intimate way.

May you seek first to know the One who makes intimacy possible, and in knowing Him, may you come to find yourself and the courage to be vulnerable and share who you are with others. ■

For a deeper look at boundaries and responsibility, consider the following titles:

- *Boundaries* by H.Cloud & J.Townsend
- *Boundaries for Your Soul: How to Turn Overwhelming Thoughts and Feelings into Your Greatest Allies* by A. Cook & K. Miller



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