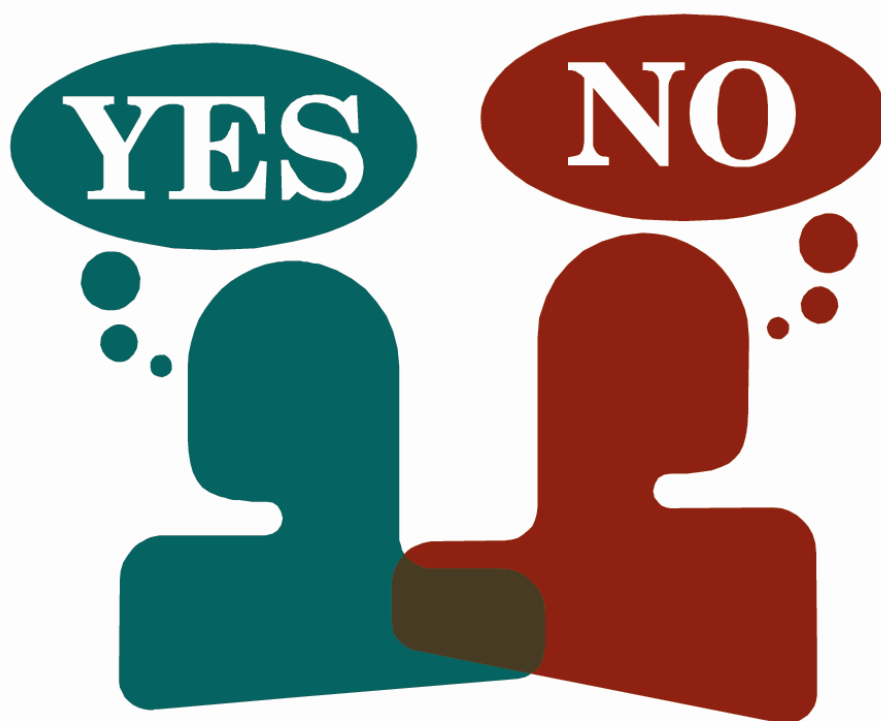


Is that the reason I get abused?



*Learn how to create and maintain
healthy boundaries in your
relationships*

By Jef Gazley, M.S., LMFT
www.asktheinternettherapist.com

Is that the reason I get abused?

This discussion about boundaries stands alone, but it should also be viewed as a corollary to the Dysfunctional Family paper, the Codependent paper, and the Communications section, because a person can't really be a good communicator without good boundaries. The definition of boundaries is the ability to know where you end and another person begins. It is also the ability of a person to defend themselves while not offending someone else. Another aspect is the ability to take good care of themselves, and not attempt to take care of or have responsibility for another. Secondarily, for our purposes, it is fair fighting and conflict resolution. There is no way that a person can have good healthy boundaries, unless they were taught appropriate boundaries at some point in their life, and one cannot teach good boundaries unless they have good boundaries.

In order to have good, appropriate boundaries, a person has to know themselves, and very often, in dysfunctional families, as a number of people come from, they are taught systematically some very crazy rules that make this self-knowledge problematic. These rules are addressed more in the Dysfunctional Family paper.

One of these dysfunctional family rules is the idea of being perfect which is a crazed thought. If a person believes that they have to be perfect, they will be shut off from a very large part of their emotional and intellectual self-knowledge, which does not allow for the establishment of healthy boundaries. There is no way a person could have good boundaries if they buy that particular logic. If parents feel that they have to be perfect, then that parent will systematically disagree with a number of aspects that someone has that would simply be human.

An example is a child who is sick and tells their parents that they feel sick. The child is making a boundary statement. What they're saying is, "Inside, in my reality, this is going on. I'm sharing it with you, a separate person," if a parent then turns around and says, "No, you're not sick," that is crazy making for the child. The child will look inside, they'll look out at the parent, they'll look in, they'll look at the parent, and because kids need to feel that parents are always right, and that they are solid and powerful so that the child will feel safe, they will assume that they are wrong and bad. They will take on the blame and assume that their perception is faulty. As a result a large part of their reality is now dissociated out of their body, out of their awareness and their self-esteem

suffers. The effects are even worse than that because they begin to look towards other people to define who they are, and what they feel. That is a very fundamental aspect of codependence and this type of interaction tends to cause this problem.

If someone doesn't realize who they are, if they don't have a good sense of reality testing, then they fail to develop the capacity to defend themselves or even to assert their own reality. The result of this type of parenting is learned helplessness. To give an example, about ten years ago I took up fencing, and because I came from an abusive, alcoholic family where I had a very physically abusive father, what I learned is that he had a right to do things to me, but I did not have a right to do anything to him, except defend. In fencing when somebody comes at you with a sword, you are supposed to block it and then immediately repost or stab back. It's called marrying the repost to the parry. It took me several months to change from simply parrying, which I felt comfortable with, to actually taking a physically aggressive action and thrusting, because I had developed learned helplessness from my family of origin.

At first, children have no boundaries at all. They are egocentric. That means, very simply, that they are concerned with themselves. If one really looks at the whole idea of being a child, it's a full-time job. Children are terribly vulnerable. They lack mastery in almost everything. It would be as if a person had a tremendous case of the flu, which makes their focus go inside until the person feels better. They care about others, but they don't have time to show the action. That kind of egocentricity is perfectly understandable. Children are immature, they're egocentric. They're needy, they don't think a lot about other people, and they're human, which means they make mistakes. If parents do not understand this is normal and natural, then the child is not going to develop appropriately. They are going to be blamed for simply being human, and they are not going to be able to develop boundaries. People are often told that immaturity and egocentricity are bad, but it's not. It's just age-appropriate. Kids need time, attention, and direction. When parents attack a child's neediness, that child learns to hate themselves and try not to need. At that point, they don't develop boundaries, which is simply where one ends off and someone else begins, but they set up walls and erect barricades to keep themselves inside and safe, and other people out. Walls are not permeable, walls are permanent, and they tend to enslave people inside. They are also not very effective boundaries.