HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

To be aware of inappropriate and potentially dangerous behavior, you must have healthy physical and emotional boundaries. Your physical boundaries delineate the area surrounding your body that you feel is your own space. When someone crosses into it, you feel violated or uncomfortable. The space can be sized differently based on your personality, family size, culture, and mood. It can be a different size for different people. If a friend comes up behind you at home and rubs your shoulders, it could be a lovely gesture. If your boss does the same at work, it could be an unwanted invasion of your personal space.

Before you can expect yourself to defend your boundaries, you must be able to notice when they've been violated. For example, you might notice that for some reason you're feeling uneasy and wishing you didn't have to work on the shoulder rubber's project. You can react immediately and directly by affirming the boundary, "Please do not touch me" or "You're too close."

Boundaries are also emotional. We each have our own level of comfort with sharing and hearing personal information, emotions, and intimate details. You may have one friend or family member who is completely happy to discuss the details of his digestive tract with you, whereas another would be shocked and appalled to hear it. An acquaintance might cross emotional boundaries by asking overly personal questions, by expecting you to do something for her without asking first, or by bursting into sobs at a professional meeting and expecting you to take care of him. Before you can defend your emotional boundaries, you must first recognize how you feel when they've been crossed.

Awareness Drill 4. *Healthy and Unhealthy Boundaries*

To begin to assess the current state of your physical and psychological boundaries, read each of the following statements and mark each trait with N (I Never do this), S (I Sometimes do this), F (I Frequently do this), or A (I Always do this). Examine the traits in light of your own relationships. Consider your behavior around family members, partners, coworkers, ex-partners, children, and friends. There are no right or wrong answers. Allow yourself to answer honestly; this information is only for you. Most of us (even self-defense instructors) display some healthy and some unhealthy boundaries from time to time.

Signs of Unhealthy Boundaries

_____ Trusting no one at all or everyone you meet
_____ Saying yes when you really want to say no
_____ Talking at an intimate level with people you've just met or when you don't really want to
_____ Talking at an intimate level because someone else does and you feel obligated to respond
_____ Falling in love immediately before you know someone
_____ Falling in love with anyone who reaches out to you
_____ Acting on your first sexual impulse
_____ Being sexual for your partner, not for yourself
_____ Going against your values to please others in your life or being afraid to displease anyone
_____ Not noticing when others seem to lack appropriate boundaries
_____ Not noticing when someone crosses your boundaries
_____ Accepting food, gifts, touch, or sex that you don't want

_____ Touching someone without asking first
_____ Taking as much as you can take for the sake of getting
_____ Giving as much as you can give for the sake of giving or allowing someone to take as much as they can from you
_____ Letting others make your decisions for you
_____ Expecting others to anticipate your needs
_____ Wanting others to fulfill your needs automatically
_____ Falling apart so that someone will take care of you

Signs of Healthy Boundaries

_____ Developing trust in other people gradually, over time, as you get to know them
_____ Being your own primary caregiver and protector
_____ Revealing a little of yourself at a time
_____ Moving step by step into social, emotional, and physical intimacy with others
_____ Making your own decision about whether a potential relationship will be good for you and not basing your decision on the other person's wish to be with you
_____ Keeping focused on yourself–your life, plans, and goals
_____ Weighing the consequences before acting on sexual impulses
_____ Being sexual when you want to
_____ Maintaining personal values despite what others say, do, or believe
_____ Talking to yourself gently, with respect, love, and appreciation
_____ Noticing when someone else displays inappropriate boundaries or invades yours
_____ Saying no to food, gifts, touch, or sex you don't want
_____ Asking a person before touching him or her
_____ Respecting others, not taking advantage of someone's generosity, time, or money
_____ Respecting yourself, not giving too much in the hope that you will make someone like you
_____ Not allowing someone else to take advantage of your generosity, time, or money
_____ Trusting your decisions
_____ Defining your truth as you see it
_____ Knowing who you are and what you want
_____ Recognizing that friends and partners are not mind readers and clearly communicating your wants and needs

To Increase Difficulty

Make a few copies of the traits, and then consider each one separately for three important people in your life. Look for patterns specific to one person or group of people. For example, do you always expect your partner to meet your needs but never expect this of your employees?

Score Your Success

Complete all questions = 20 points
Compare patterns in various relationships = 10 points