



EMPLOYEE

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BOUNDARIES, WHY THEY MATTER AND WHY THEY CAN BE SO HARD TO SET

Melissa Young, EAP Counselor



Recently I had a client who said to me “boundaries are love.” I couldn’t agree with her more. Despite the fact that most people would also agree with my client, boundaries can be incredibly hard to set. So what are boundaries in the first place? Wikipedia defines personal boundaries this way;

“they are guidelines, rules or limits that a person creates to identify reasonable, safe and permissible ways for other people to behave towards them and how they will respond when someone passes those limits.” In essence boundaries help others know how to treat us and help us to know where we “stop” and others “begin.”

Personal boundaries are the emotional equivalent to our physical nerve endings, they help us to know what feels good, what feels bad, what’s tolerable and what is not. In many ways they are a vital part of how we emotionally protect and care for ourselves.

In spite of their important role in our, and others emotional well-being, many people find them very hard to set. Establishing clear boundaries or limits can be difficult for a variety of reasons. Many clients tell me that they worry if they set a limit with someone that they will lose the relationship as a result. Others express concern that setting a boundary is unkind or that the other person may become angry with them, retaliate in some way or feel rejected themselves. Many people have not had good role models for how to set respectful and non-punitive limits, or perhaps, how to set a boundary at all. Some clients express not feeling as though they are valuable enough to warrant establishing boundaries with others.

What does a healthy boundary look like then? There are many examples, however here are just a few thoughts regarding vital aspects of one:

- A feeling of self-respect after a limit has been set
- The boundary helps to stop or limit another’s behavior which is uncomfortable, hurtful or encroaching in some way

- An initial sense of relief, often followed with anxiety, that you are doing something to care for yourself
- A greater sense of clarity about what is your responsibility and what isn’t
- Often healthy boundaries feel permeable, they let the “good stuff” and keep the bad out
- They are not rigid or punitive, but firm and respectful to all involved
- Effective limits help to put into effect actual change in one’s own or another’s actions in the relationship
- The limits are clear, honest and not manipulative, deriving from a true need for improved care of self and others
- Healthy boundaries can feel VERY hard to set and maintain, but in the end, feel worth the effort

There are many other aspects of what might be included for each of us in setting clear and healthy boundaries in our lives. Here at the Employee Assistance Program we would love to help in any way we can in your journey toward healthier relationships with yourself and others.

HOW ARE YOU SLEEPING?

By Susan Murphy, EAP Counselor

Most people are aware that sleep deficiency can lead to physical and mental health problems, injuries,



and loss of productivity. But did you know that about 100,000 car accidents a year are attributed to sleepy drivers, resulting in about 1500 deaths?

A good night's sleep improves your ability to learn and enhances problem-solving capabilities. Whether you're writing a paper, studying for a chemistry test, or trying to work on new guitar-strumming skills, sleep also helps you to pay attention, make decisions, control your emotions and behavior, cope with change and increases

creativity. Sleep deficiency has also been linked to depression, suicide, and risk-taking behavior.

Getting enough quality sleep at the right time helps you function well throughout the day. People who are sleep deficient are less productive at work and school, and may not even realize it. Even with limited or poor-quality sleep, they may still think that they can function well, and if you've ever spent time with a sleep deprived coworker, you can vouch that it takes them longer to finish tasks, their reaction time is slower, and often make more mistakes —not to mention, grouchy!

And lack of sleep may lead to a condition called microsleep. Microsleep refers to brief moments of sleep that occur when you're normally awake—you can't control it, and you are often not even aware of it. Can you recall a time when you drove somewhere and didn't remember going through that green light? Microsleep can affect how you function in your daily tasks—you might have unknowingly "slept" through part of a lecture or an important presentation.

Sleep and mental health are closely connected. While sleep problems are quite common in those with anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), research indicates that insomnia and other sleep problems also increase the risk of developing depression.

You can work on changing your negative sleep experiences, however, by using some or all of these fundamentals to getting adequate sleep:

Life changes: Most people know that caffeine contributes to sleeplessness, but so can alcohol

and nicotine. The effects of alcohol wear off in a few hours, and nicotine stimulates the nervous system. It might help to avoid alcoholic drinks, strenuous exercise and/or large meals within a couple of hours of bedtime.

Physical activity: Regular aerobic activity (even a walk around the block), helps people fall asleep faster, spend more time in deep sleep, and awaken less often during the night.

Sleep hygiene: Good "sleep hygiene" is the term often used to include tips like maintaining a regular sleep-and-wake schedule, using the bedroom only for sleeping or sex, and keeping the bedroom dark and free of distractions like computers or television. Getting to bed an hour early for quiet time to read or meditate sets the stage for restful sleep experience—watching tv or using your laptop in bed can interfere with rest because the bright artificial light may signal the brain that it's time to stay awake. Some experts also recommend sleep retraining: staying awake longer in order to ensure sleep is more restful.

Relaxation techniques: Meditation, guided imagery, deep breathing exercises, and progressive muscle relaxation (alternately tensing and releasing muscles) can counter anxiety and racing thoughts. There are some great apps available, such as "Headspace" for meditation techniques.

Cognitive behavioral therapy: Because people with insomnia often worry that they can't or won't fall asleep, cognitive behavioral techniques may help to them change negative expectations and increase the confidence that they can have a good night's sleep. Therapy is also beneficial for working through some issues that may increase the incidence of anxiety and depression, often a cause of sleeplessness.

WARM AND COZY MINESTRONE SOUP

By Ginny Bayuk, Billing and Reporting Specialist

Any tiny pasta, such as Israeli couscous or acini di pepe, will do. This version also takes a little time to cook; longer cooking time melds the flavors and enhances the bioavailability of more nutrients, such as the lycopene in tomatoes and carotenoids and other antioxidants. A shorter cooking time will make a tasty dish as well, but nutritionally inferior. Traditionally, the minestrone is accompanied with slices of French bread, or Sardinian flat bread.

Technique tip: Use the stalks and fronds that come off a fennel bulb for the most intense flavor. No feathery fronds on the bulb? Add a teaspoon of fennel seeds to the aromatic vegetables you sauté to begin the dish.

Swap option: You can vary the beans in the minestrone: pinto beans make a good substitute

for cranberry beans; great northern or cannellini beans, for the favas. Add other fresh vegetables from the market, such as zucchini, cabbage, green beans and cauliflower or broccoli florets. Want a stronger tomato taste? Stir in a tablespoon or two of tomato paste.

INGREDIENTS

- 7 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 medium yellow or white onion, chopped (about 1 cup)
- 2 medium carrots, peeled and chopped (about 2/3 cup)
- 2 medium celery stalks, chopped (about 1/2 cup)
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic

PREPARATION

1. Warm 3 tablespoons of the olive oil in a large soup pot or Dutch oven set over medium/high heat.

2. Add the onion, carrots and celery; cook, stirring often, until soft but not browned, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and cook until fragrant, about 20 seconds.
3. Stir in the tomatoes, potatoes, fennel, parsley and basil, as well as the drained beans and chickpeas. Add enough water (about 6 to 8 cups) so that everything is submerged by 1 inch.
4. Raise the heat to high and bring pot to a full boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer slowly, uncovered, until the beans are tender, adding more water as necessary if the mixture gets too thick, about 1½ hours. If using canned beans, simmer for only 10 minutes.
5. Stir in the pasta, salt and pepper. Add up to 2 cups of water if the soup seems too dry. Continue simmering, uncovered, until the pasta is tender, about 10 minutes.
6. Pour 1 tablespoon of olive oil into bowl before serving.

SERVINGS: 4

DRINKING IN MODERATION: A POTENTIAL TREATMENT OPTION FOR HEAVY DRINKERS

By Jared Belsher, EAP Counselor

Many of us grab the occasional drink after work with co-workers or friends or enjoy the occasional glass of wine or beer with dinner. There are also occasions when we might drink a little more than usual during holidays or special events.

But how do we know when we have a drinking problem? And if we have a problem, does that mean we have to stop drinking or is there another option?

Treatment options for heavy drinkers are generally geared toward drinkers who are dependent on alcohol (also known as alcoholics) and treatment usually requires the person to abstain from alcohol. However, some experts believe that many heavy drinkers aren't dependent on alcohol and may be able to learn to moderate their drinking. A recent CDC study seemed to back this belief up when it found that most of the heavy drinkers in their study didn't meet the criteria for alcohol dependence.

Recently, there has been a growing interest in providing a non-abstinence based treatment option for non-dependent, heavy drinkers that helps them moderate their drinking.



What does it mean to drink in moderation?

According to the U.S. Dietary Guidelines the definition of moderate drinking is 1 drink per day for women and up to 2 drinks per day for men, which corresponds to a maximum of 7 drinks per week for women and 14 drinks per week for men. A drink is defined as a beer (12 fluid ounces), a glass of wine (5 fluid ounces of wine), or 1.5 ounces of 80 proof liquor.

Excessive drinking, such as heavy drinking and binge drinking, can cause problems with your health, your relationships, and with work. Heavy drinking is defined as the consumption of more than 14 drinks per week for men and more than 7 drinks per week for women. Binge drinking is the consumption within 2 hours of 4 or more drinks for women and 5 or more drinks for men. In the U.S., an estimated 9 percent of men and 4 percent of women qualify as heavy drinkers.

Some of the health problems that excessive drinking can cause includes cirrhosis of the liver, hypertension, stroke, type 2 diabetes, cancer of the upper gastrointestinal tract and colon, and increases in violence and injuries. Because of the many problems that come with excessive drinking, an excessive drinker should work on reducing their alcohol intake or pursue some type of treatment.

Help to Moderate Your Drinking
Moderate Drinking (moderatedrinking.com) and

Moderation Management (moderation.org) are two online programs geared towards helping heavy drinkers moderate their drinking without needing to abstain from drinking. These online programs allow people to participate in web-based interventions and obtain resources to help them learn how to moderate their drinking.

Features of the programs include online forums, listservs, chatrooms, assessments, and online and face-to-face meetings. Some of the reasoning behind having the programs online is the fact that people with drinking problems often don't seek help and by providing treatment information online there is a better chance that they will get some sort of treatment.

For heavy drinkers who are hesitant to stop drinking but realize they need to cut back, these online programs might be a good place to start. For drinkers who have had trouble moderating or stopping their drinking in the past, an abstinence-based program such as Alcoholics Anonymous may be a better option.

There are also other treatment options available, including individual and group counseling, inpatient treatment, medications, and other types of support groups. If you believe you have a drinking problem, it is best to talk with your doctor or EAP counselor to find out which option might be right for you.

NEUROSCIENCE REVEALS: GRATITUDE LITERALLY REWIRES YOUR BRAIN TO BE HAPPIER

Reprinted from dailyhealthpost.com

When you say “thank you”, do you really mean it or is it just politeness to which you give little attention?

Neuroscientists have found that if you really feel it when you say it, you’ll be happier and healthier. The regular practice of expressing gratitude is not a New Age fad; it’s a facet of the human condition that reaps true benefits to those who mean it.

Psychologists Dr. Robert Emmons of the University of California at Davis and Dr. Michael McCullough of the University of Miami published a study in 2015 that looked at the physical outcomes of practicing gratitude. One third of the subjects in the study were asked to keep a daily journal of things that happened during the week for which they were grateful. Another third was asked to write down daily irritations or events that had displeased them. The last third of the group was asked to write down daily situations and events with no emphasis on either positive or negative emotional attachment. At the end of the 10-week study, each group was asked to record how they felt physically and generally about life.

The gratitude group reported feeling more optimistic and positive about their lives than the other groups. In addition, the gratitude group was more physically active and reported fewer visits to a doctor than those who wrote only about their negative experiences.

Better Physical Health

Other research into the physical effects of gratitude report even more tangible results. Focusing on the positive and feeling grateful can improve your sleep quality and reduce feelings of anxiety and depression. Furthermore, levels of gratitude correlate to better moods and less fatigue and inflammation, reducing the risk of heart failure, even for those who are susceptible.

Gratitude and Your Brain

The reasons why gratitude is so impactful to health and well-being begin in the brain. In a neurological experiment conducted by researchers at the University of California at Los Angeles, brain activity was measured using magnetic resonance imaging as subjects were induced to feel gratitude by receiving gifts. The areas of the brain showing increased activity were the anterior cingulate cortex and medial prefrontal cortex—those associated with moral and social cognition, reward, empathy, and value judgment. This led to the conclusion that the emotion of gratitude supports a positive and supportive attitude toward others and a feeling of relief from stressors.



Gratitude activates the hypothalamus as well, with downstream effects on metabolism, stress, and various behaviors. The hypothalamus is located at the base of the brain and regulates hormones responsible for many critical functions, such as body temperature, emotional responses, and survival functions like appetite and sleep. One of the neurochemicals associated with the parts of the brain affected by gratitude is dopamine, a pleasure hormone.

The positive influence of gratitude on mental health continues past a particular event if the emotion is relived:

“...a simple gratitude writing intervention was associated with significantly greater and lasting neural sensitivity to gratitude—subjects who participated in gratitude letter writing showed both behavioral increases in gratitude and significantly greater neural modulation by gratitude in the medial prefrontal cortex three months later.”

In fact, this lasting effect is psychologically protective. In adolescents, feelings of gratitude have shown an inverse correlation with bullying victimization and suicide risk. Gratitude affects brain function on a chemical level and its practice promotes feelings of self-worth and compassion for others.

We can perceive and experience gratitude and its many characteristics in a very broad spectrum. Openness and willingness to experience gratitude affects not only the individual but her/his interpersonal relationships; a common strain in relationships is caused by repeated negative feedback by one or both partners without off-setting gratitude.

3 Steps to Becoming More Grateful

In times of hardship or stress it might seem

difficult to be grateful. But if you really think about it, we all have something to be grateful for. If you engage in only one prayer, let it be simply a heartfelt “thank you.” Here are three easy ways to put yourself in the mindfulness of gratitude.

- Keep a daily journal of things you are grateful for—list at least three. The best times for writing in your journal are in the morning as your day begins or at night before sleep.
- Make it a point to tell people in your life what you appreciate about them on a daily basis.
- When you look in the mirror, give yourself a moment to think about a quality you like about yourself or something you have recently accomplished.

Through the power of gratitude, you can wire your brain to be optimistic and compassionate, making you feel good. The more you look, the more you can find to be grateful for. This positivity can extend to those around you, creating a virtuous cycle.

Saint Alphonsus Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Regular Appointment Hours:
8:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m., Monday-Friday
(special appointment hours by request)

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