

246: How to Know if You Need a Boundary



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Jen Riday

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You're listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast, episode number 246. We're talking about how to know if you need a boundary. Stay tuned.

Hi, I'm Jen Riday. This podcast is for women who want to feel more vibrant, happy, aligned, and alive. You'll gain the emotional, physical, and spiritual tools you need to get your sparkle back and ensure that depression, anxiety, and struggle don't rule your life. Welcome to the Vibrant Happy Women Podcast.

Hey there. I'm Dr. Jen Riday and welcome to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast. For those of you who don't know me I help busy moms get off the hamster wheel so they can find balance and create a life they love. I'm a mom of six. I have a PhD in human development and family studies. And I take those two areas of expertise and meld them so I can create tools that work, tools like the Be Her Morning Ritual or the Feel It to Heal It method. And if you've listened for a while you've heard me talk about both of those tools on past episodes along with other tools.

Today I'm going to be talking about boundaries, specifically how you can know when you need to set a boundary. First I want to share our review of the week and that is from Jess843. She wrote, "I've listened to Jen for a long time now and she's like a soul sister that really listens and gives good advice. Her Vibrant Happy Women Club is so useful and I'm so thankful for all her great wisdom." Thank you, Jess. Listen, my friends, my listening friends I want to ask you for a Christmas gift and a birthday gift all wrapped into one. You're like, "Wow, okay." It's easy.

I would love to invite you to leave a review for this podcast on iTunes by going to jenriday.com/itunes – i.t.u.n.e.s. And let me know what you think. Let me know what you like. What would you like more of? This feedback will help me to plan and deliver some awesome topics throughout 2021. So thank you again Jess for leaving your review and everyone else. I look

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forward to your gift of a review on iTunes. Again that's at jenriday.com/itunes. Thank you in advance.

Well, boundaries, this is such a fascinating topic. I was recently talking to a friend and she remarked that she had been giving out a questionnaire asking people about their boundaries. And she noticed that the older generation, like generation X, the boomers, the silent generation, boundaries were really hard for them. But she found a difference in her data and in the responses for millennials, specifically millennials are really good at boundaries.

However, there is a however here, oftentimes millennials on average, don't be offended if you're a millennial, on average millennials don't fully understand boundaries yet. Many people have the belief which is a half truth that boundaries are all about making sure that we protect, preserve and maintain our precious time, energy and happiness. We should feel comfortable. We have this belief, there is some truth there.

We all should take a hard look and be able to maintain and preserve our time, energy and happiness to spend time doing the things we want and not doing the things we don't want to do, to be true to ourselves and speak up for what's important to us. However, with this idea, among many of the younger generation, there is this idea that we should not ever be uncomfortable, that the rest of the world should, yes, you hear that, should, should bend and adapt to honor our desires and wants. We believe falsely that that is a boundary.

Now, a couple of episodes back I talked about unconditional love being this idea of allowing others to feel, think, believe and do what they want. Boundaries relate very closely to this. A boundary is taking 100% responsibility for your thoughts, feelings and actions and not taking responsibility for the thoughts, feelings and actions of others. So what does this mean? This tendency right now in our society for many people to

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demand that others behave in the way that we want can at times be us infringing on their boundary.

Now, we have to be careful here. Society needs to make progress as a whole. We need to speak up for our truth. We need to demand that we are heard, that is fair. But it can become a boundary infringement when we don't allow others to think, feel and act in the ways that honor their truths. We could argue about this for weeks. Truth is relative, hear me out, we all have experiences, we all have a lens, we all have priorities and values that are important to us.

For example, I have a friend, his top priority is to be wealthy. I used to think that was crazy because that wasn't my top priority. And I thought all his decisions on that priority to be wealthy made him selfish, less righteous and wrong. And I came to understand over time that it wasn't fair, it wasn't okay. I have values, I have priorities and mine are different, they're just different.

What would happen in our world if we could step back just a little and allow others to feel, think and act in the ways that are aligned with their values insofar as their actions do not infringe on another person's right to do the same? So rather instead of being upset with my friend for prioritizing wealth and being horrified at how wrong that is in telling him about it and being upset and frustrated. I could just say, "Hey, those are his priorities, how cool is that?" Because his desire to chase after wealth does not infringe on my right to live after my priorities and values.

Now, like I said, this is a fuzzy line sometimes. Some people have values and priorities of racism, or thinking that being white should give you inherent privileges. That does infringe on another person's rights to live their priorities and values. So we have to be careful here.

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So I'm going to repeat that definition again. Having a healthy boundary means you are 100% responsible for your thoughts, feelings and actions, and I would add your priorities and values. And not responsible for the thoughts, feelings, actions, and priorities, and values of another person as long as it doesn't infringe on someone else's right to do the same.

So, how does this work? How do you know when you need to set a boundary? Let's talk about in the home. In the home, many – many of us have the false belief that once we marry another person, particularly marriage, I don't know why this is. Sometimes partnerships, we have the same ideas, once you live with someone somehow we have this belief that we have the right to demand that our partners behave in certain ways.

For example, I used to believe that the house should be clean to my standards. My mom had a certain standard of cleanliness. I was going to live in a certain standard of cleanliness. And I would demand that my husband participate equally because I had read the data about women doing way more than their share of the housework. I was going to have this be equal because I'm all about women's rights, and I'm a bit of a feminist. And I wasn't going to be one of those oppressed women.

Well, one day my husband came to me and said, "You seem to believe that you can demand that I clean things to your standard. However, I have a different standard of cleanliness. I don't want to live in a house that is this clean, it feels stifling, it feels like we can't be creative. I don't want our kids to grow up feeling uptight about how clean this place is. This doesn't seem normal to me.

So I propose that we take the least common denominator, take the amount that we can agree on, take the lower, the lesser standard of cleanliness and we split that. And if you want it cleaner than that you can hire a housekeeper, you can do more. But I don't think it's reasonable that you

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demand that I honor your standard of cleanliness.” And I thought wow, something cracked open in my brain and I thought he’s absolutely right.

Remember, boundaries, I am 100% responsible for my thoughts, feelings and actions, my values and my priorities. I am not responsible for my husband’s thoughts, feelings, actions, values and priorities. He gets to decide his standard. He gets to take action based on his standard. If I try to make it any other way I am violating his boundary. That’s a shocker, isn’t it? And that can really be depressing at first when you first learn about this.

But at the same time if you can learn to honor the difference, the space, the boundary between where you end and another person begins, you will have healthier boundaries. Not only will you be less likely to infringe on another person’s boundary, but you will be less likely to allow them to infringe on your boundary.

So memorize this definition and again it’s very similar to my definition of unconditional love from two episodes ago. The definition of a healthy boundary is this, you are 100% responsible for your thoughts, feelings, actions, and I would add your values and priorities, and not responsible for the thoughts, feelings, actions, values and priorities of another person. When you can honor what other people want to think, and feel, and do, and prioritize, you’re no longer codependent. You’re allowing them to be a whole, and complete, and thriving individual.

They get to decide what’s important to them based on their experiences, their thoughts, their priorities and it’s beautiful to watch how someone prioritizes their life. It’s okay that my friend prioritizes wealth above everything else. You can watch his life and see that he’s using that wealth to help a lot of other people. And it turns out really interesting. And on my side perhaps prioritizing my family first, or prioritizing my mental health first is necessary for me to get the outcomes that I like to see in my life.

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So you get to decide and it becomes a beautiful creative expression of one way to live a life. How do you know if you need to establish healthier boundaries? Let me share some thoughts on that. You need healthier boundaries if ... you go against what you want to please others. You feel you're not complete without another person. You rely on others for your happiness. You let others define you.

You expect others to meet your needs and blame them for your problems. Like I was doing when my husband wasn't cleaning the house to my standard, I blamed him. I could have just cleaned it myself to my standard, couldn't I? You need a healthier boundary if you don't speak up when you're treated badly. You feel guilty for saying no. You treat other people's needs as more important than your own. You fall apart, so someone else can take care of you. You don't allow others to experience the natural consequences of their actions. You don't have time for what's important to you.

So if any of these ring true for you, just come back again and again to this definition of boundaries. Healthy boundaries mean you take 100% responsibility for your thoughts, feelings and actions and not taking responsibility for another person's thoughts, feelings and actions.

Now, I'm going to give you a quick visualization. I might have shared this before but I want you to let this soak in a little deeper. Imagine you have a backyard with a fence around it. And this fence represents your boundary – your boundary. This boundary allows you to do, think and feel what you want in your yard. And it stops you from going to the side yards on the sides of you and stops you from telling them what to do, feel or think in their yards.

So in your yard you might choose to have a pool, a cute gardener, a lawn chair, pretty begonias, whatever else, to your yard. Maybe you play some of your favorite music. This is where you prioritize your happiness, your

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time, your energy to live true to yourself. To know what you like and dislike, to know what energizes you and what drains you, to be confident, responsible, to meet your emotional needs, to have stability and control over this yard, representing your life.

To communicate openly and respectfully, where you don't allow others to affect your own mood, to know what you think and feel and to prioritize yourself in meeting your needs. Beautiful, we need this space. It does not allow you to decide how other people should behave.

So imagine on one side of this yard you have your spouse, your partner, they might want to play loud music over there. They might want to let weeds grow. They might want to throw their trash on the grass. And that doesn't match your values or your priorities. It doesn't match what you want. And it could be so irritating but if you have a healthy boundary you have this fence. And you keep your eyes in your yard. You take care of you, you live to your standards in your yard and you don't demand that everyone else match up to what you want. That can be tricky.

Your spouse can do, feel, think, believe what he wants. That is unconditional love and that is a healthy boundary. Now, imagine your mother's on the opposite side of your yard, same thing. She can do whatever she wants over there. She can stand at the fence and yell at you for not raising your kids the right way or not growing the right flowers. And you can just build your fence higher or you can put in your earplugs, you can walk away, you don't have to listen.

Your healthy boundary gives you the choice to take whatever actions you want. You don't have to listen to other people. You don't have to be affected by criticism or their moods. And you can allow your mom or anyone else, whoever else is on the sides of your yard to be responsible, to take charge of, to think, feel and do what they want, to have their values and priorities.

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How does this work with kids? Allow your kids to think, feel and do what they want as much as you can, so they can have autonomy and ownership over their yard/their life. When kids have this autonomy, this choice, this ownership, this responsibility they step up faster, they mature faster. They take actions that often have better results than if you're controlling and telling them what to do in their yard.

For example, a preschooler can choose their own clothes, they don't have to match for a regular day at preschool. Your eight year old can choose when she wants to do her homework. And she can experience the natural consequence of not having it done when the teacher reaches out to you. We don't need to control what's happening in all these other yards.

So how do you know if you need a healthy boundary? I'll share a few more examples. You feel responsible for another person's feelings. You don't have a consistent self-care and health routine. You often feel frantic, in a hurry and end up late and rushing. Your life has little joy or fulfillment. You don't take time to develop your talents. You rarely do things just for fun. You answer the phone during dinner or spend too much time on social media. You feel like a mule carrying everyone else's loads. You believe being a good person requires self-sacrifice.

You don't have a space to call your own. You cry when other people aren't doing what you want. Ooh, who knew that was a place where you need a healthier boundary? You often do things and attend events you don't want to do or attend. You feel powerless to make your life better. You yell, withdraw, pout, complain or act passive aggressive when you don't like what's happening. You get angry when someone tells you no. You might need a boundary if you feel like people take advantage of you or use you.

You might need a boundary if you feel incomplete without a partner, or you feel jealous of your partner or others, so many other ways.

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Now, one big way to know you might need a boundary is if you feel frustrated, resentful or angry. Now, oftentimes we think other people, like our spouse, kids, mother, mother-in-law, friends, neighbors, we think they make us angry. Not true. As you know from listening to this podcast, all of our feelings come from a thought. More often than not we think that these people should change something, that's why we're angry, they should change something. And that might be true.

But if you're doing this from the place of holding a healthy boundary, remember, healthy boundaries mean you are responsible for your thoughts, feelings and actions, and not responsible for the thoughts, feelings and actions of others. People, the fact is, people can be jerks. People can be 'selfish' in a way that seems selfish to you. People can have values and priorities that are different from yours, and that can be so frustrating.

So we have a couple of options. Number one, clean up your thoughts and make sure you're not shoulding on other people. But number two, listen to that frustration, and that resentment, and that anger because it's there to tell you something. And usually that is that you need to change something, you need to take an action.

Maybe that action is to hire that housekeeper, or to tell your kids there will not be any Wi-Fi when they're not doing their share, kind of a natural consequence when they're not helping out. Or to tell your spouse, "Well, when they're late for work you're going to be getting takeout because you can't manage everything."

Taking ownership of what it takes for you to have the time, the resources, the energy and the happiness that you desire. Not demanding others to change, but specifying how you will change. How will you respond when you feel like your time, energy and resources are being drained? That is a healthy boundary.

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So I want you to think about the thing that's upsetting you the most now, the thing making you most frustrated, causing the most resentment, causing anger. Let that be a signal to you that you need to set a boundary, that you need to make a change. Now, this does not mean you need to be martyr or sacrifice yourself. Often it means you need to clarify a rule. You need to say, "Hey, this will not stand when this happens. Here is the action I will take."

Boundary, it is in your court. You're not trying to change another person, you're taking ownership for how you behave, what you say, what your rules are, how you clarify those rules to your mother, your kids, your spouse. For example, let's say when you go home for the holidays, you dread it because – by the way, if you're going home I hope you've quarantined, that's the only way you should be going home right now, in my opinion. But that is an opinion, don't be offended. You can have different priorities and values, I respect those.

Okay, let's say you're going home for the holidays hypothetically, and you dread it because you know your mother or your mother-in-law is going to criticize how your children behave. And you could go there thinking, she should not criticize me. But what are you doing there? You're telling her how she should or should not behave. Healthy boundaries mean you step back and recognize, hey, she can think, feel and do what she wants, it doesn't have to affect me.

But when she does criticize me I'll either not let it bother me. She can think and feel, and do whatever she wants. Or I'll say, "Hey, mom, I love you so much but when you get critical I don't want to hear that. I like to feel good, so I'm going to go take a walk." Boundary, no hard feelings, no anger, no resentment, you've set that boundary.

Now, if you go there and you find yourself feeling frustrated, resentful, angry, again, that is a signal, a cue that you need a boundary. What is your

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boundary? What action are you going to take to protect your time, your energy, your mood, and your happiness? Remember, it's not getting them to change, it's telling them what you're going to do under certain conditions. That is a healthy boundary.

Try this out, memorize this definition, healthy boundaries mean you take 100% responsibility, you take ownership of your thoughts, feelings and actions and not taking responsibility for the thoughts, feelings and actions of others. This means your spouse can dislike you sometimes, and it's okay. Your spouse can be angry, your teenager can be angry or sad, and that's okay. They're responsible for their feelings. It means nothing if you're a whole and complete person, it means nothing to you what they think, feel or do as far as it doesn't infringe on another person's right to do the same.

Own your happiness. Own your energy. Own your time. Make sure you feel the way you want to feel and are true to yourself. And you do this by speaking up and telling people in a calm and loving way. "Hey, when this happens here is the action I'm going to take because I want to be happy." And I'm going to walk away, or I'm going to hire some help, or I'm going to get the takeout, whatever you need. You've got this. This is your birth right as a human to get to decide how you feel, how you think, how you will act, and how you will behave.

Please, do this for yourself and allow others the privilege, the human right of doing the same. Yes, you can speak, and communicate, and try to align your values with your spouse, with your friends, with society at large. But angrily throwing tantrums and demanding doesn't really work and can be more of a boundary infringement. So try this out. I hope it will help you to have happier holidays in the weeks ahead. And I thank you so much for listening.

And if you want to practice the art of boundary setting in a community where everyone is getting frankly really good at boundaries, join us in the

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Vibrant Happy Women Club, doors are opening soon. Stay tuned for more details. Thank you so much for listening my friends, make it a vibrant and happy week, weekend, holiday and I'll see you again soon. Take care.

If you enjoy this podcast, you have to check out the Vibrant Happy Women Club. It's my monthly group coaching program where we take all this material to the next level and to get you the results that will blow your mind. Join me in the Vibrant Happy Women Club at jenriday.com/join.