Do you need better personal boundaries?

1 February 2018

So how are you feeling at the beginning of the second month into this year? Hopefully you are feeling enthusiastic and energetic. In comparison to the end of November when everyone is so exhausted they slump about downing plenty of caffeine to get through the day. One of the ways to be less stressed, and keep your energy, is to set and enforce personal boundaries.

Personal boundaries refer to the rules we set in our lives for how others may speak and act around us. Personal boundaries are not there to keep people out. They are there to stop unwanted behaviour from entering your space. They are essential for mental and physical health as they act like filters permitting what is acceptable in, and keeping what is unacceptable out.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you frequently do things for others that you don't want to do?
- Do you avoid others for fear of them asking you for favours?
- Do you feel powerless to say no to people?
- Do you hate disappointing others?
- Do you always put the needs of others above your own?
- Do you feel harassed by some people?
- Do you feel overwhelmed by demands?

If you answered "yes", then you need to relook your personal boundaries, especially your boundaries related to your time, your emotions and your energy.

Time is something crucial in most of our lives. Yet we often don't set boundaries around our time. Are there people who are always dropping by unannounced and unexpectedly demanding your attention? Are you taking on the work of other people? Do others expect you to drop what you are doing and attend to their needs right this minute?

We can feel drained emotionally. Are there people in your life who say and do hurtful and cruel things? Are there people in your life who criticise you and belittle you constantly?

What do others do that robs you of energy? You can feel when you have been around someone who saps your energy. You feel like everything has been sucked out of you - like a dried out raisin is how I sometimes think of it. Are there people in your life who are always creating turmoil or making scenes? Do you get time for rest and relaxation? Do you get time to eat and hydrate properly?

Setting Personal Boundaries

1. Firstly identify the people you want to set boundaries for.
2. Write down what is unacceptable. Be specific. Think about situations in the past when people acted in ways that made you uncomfortable or even afraid. What comments and behaviours make you uncomfortable? What comments and behaviours infringe on your time, emotions and energy?
3. Once you are clear of what behaviours are not acceptable you need to make this clear to the parties concerned. You need to tell people - in a calm and respectful way - what is not acceptable.
4. Then you need to enforce the boundary. If you set and communicate a boundary and don't enforce it you send the message that people can treat you how they wish to and you will just accept it. Give someone the benefit of the doubt the first time they cross the boundary. They may still be learning. If they never learn, then realise that person does not respect you.

The more you set and enforce personal boundaries, the better you will get at it. So start practicing now.