

## 2a. LEARNING TO USE YOUR BOUNDARIES – [Terry Real](#)

This is a visualization exercise intended to give you a felt sense of containment and protection without becoming walled off. Healthy boundaries help you to be connected and protected.

### Step One: Containing Yourself

Put one hand flat just in front of your stomach, palm facing toward you, as if you had just stopped short of patting your tummy. This is how to imagine the containing part of your psychological boundary. Pull the muscles of your gut in. Feel the strength of the containing force against you. This is the feeling of you reining in you - your thoughts, feelings, emotional energies, and impulses. Every time you feel moved to blurt out or act out, this is the force that will stop you. Imagine it throughout your day and use it to stop some action or word. The more you practice the stronger it will get.

### Step Two: Protecting Yourself

Now, stretch your other arm straight out in front of you, parallel to the floor, and bend your hand back so that your fingers point up toward the ceiling, like a policeman signaling "Stop!" This is how to imagine the protective part of your psychological boundary. In your mind's eye, feel the strength of that force field represented by your powerful outstretched hand. Understand that nothing gets inside your emotional space unless **you** agree to let it enter. If you agree with something someone says about you, let your "Stop!" hand relax so that you "open up," with the hand now facing palm up, toward the sky. You have let down your barrier and allowed something in. Immediately put your hand and the barrier back up, waiting for the next thing to evaluate. Keep your arm straight out and your hand straight up. Feel the power in this gesture. You have the power to protect yourself, letting in nothing that is untrue or unkind.

### Step Three: What Containing and Protecting Yourself Feels Like

Stand or sit with your hands in the positions described above. Think to yourself, "Stop! until I decide to let you in." Imagine anything coming at you going splat against that force field, hanging there against your perimeter until you've evaluated it. Then either lower your hand, as if opening a hatch, and let it in, or keep the hand vertical and closed, keeping it out. Practice with the statements below, letting your hand drop to the open horizontal position & letting in the statements that are true for you. If not, keep your hand vertical and strong, keeping it out. Remember to go back to the vertical, closed position immediately after you let something in.

- I believe that you are reading this out of a sincere desire to make your relationships better. (React.)
- I believe that you have some doubts about whether your partner will be as thrilled with all this as you are. (React.)
- I believe that you care about your partner and are committed to making yourself healthy for both of your sakes. (React.)
- I believe that you've always maintained a secret fetish for Labrador retrievers in black lingerie. (React.)
- You stole your brother's rubber ducky and you know in your heart that he's never been the same since. (React.)

Okay, got it? As you listen (or read), you're thinking, "Yes," "No," "Well, maybe a little," "Are you kidding me?" and so on, letting the statements gain entrance or not as you choose. Congratulations! You now possess a working psychological boundary.

Now take it out into the world. When you wake up, imagine that force field surrounding you. Cloak yourself in it as you would put on your clothing. You don't want to go out into the world emotionally nude, do you? As you go through your day, remember to exercise your boundary whenever someone speaks to you. Do your best to hold yourself and the speakers respectfully even as you protect yourself from their possible projections.