Creating Light in the “Dark Winter”

We have had many opportunities to practice setting personal boundaries as they relate to the pandemic. Have you asked someone to wear a mask in your presence? Have you said no to a large gathering? Have you asked that the topic of a conversation change to maintain your sense of calm? Maybe you are thinking, no, but there have been a few times when I wish I had spoken up to honor myself.

Setting and maintaining physical, social and psychological boundaries protects our mental health and relationships. We can prioritize our wellbeing during the upcoming holiday season by considering and setting boundaries that honor our priorities.

Our development and maintenance of boundaries is a foundation for acting with compassion. Compassion requires that we can be mindfully present with another who is in pain, that we can set aside our biases to seek to understand the person’s experience and find empathy for authentic engagement, and that we can spotlight the wisdom that pain has masked so the person can find their way to their next best action. “Without boundaries, you

We are engaging in social solidarity by practicing social distancing - maintaining physical boundaries, with, and for, one another. How is that feeling nine months into this pandemic?! Any ‘pandemic fatigue?’ Felt any resentment lately? Brene Brown may have some insight into that in this popular quote of hers, “Compassionate people ask for what they need. The say no when they need to, and when they say yes, they mean it. They’re compassionate because their boundaries keep them out of resentment.”

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will act, sleep, work, groan, feel used and fulfill basic responsibilities rather than make choices to live and love fully, to fulfill your purpose and to contribute passionately to your world.” (Black, J. and Enns, G, Better Boundaries: Owning and Treasuring Your Life. Oakland, CA. Raincoat Books)

Creating Light: Setting Holiday Boundaries
To identify where we need to set boundaries to maintain our wellbeing during the holiday season, consider your priorities and values. Ask yourself how setting a boundary could support them. In the 3 examples below, notice how each begins with naming a priority or value.

Key: *italics = priority*  *non italics = boundary*
1. *To maintain my family’s health,* I will not be coming to your house this holiday.
2. *I am working to assume positive intent of others,* let’s not judge her choices around who she sees and where she goes;
3. *To support my wellbeing,* please do not send me sweets this holiday season.

Once we are mindful of our priorities and values, we can define what is helpful and acceptable behavior from others to best support us. Here are 6 tips for setting and maintaining compassionate boundaries.

1. **Know what you want to say “Yes” to in your life—your priorities and values.**
2. **Be proactive.** Discuss boundaries early in relationships and ahead of specific situations.
3. **Just say it!** Use simple and direct language.
4. **Give explanations that are specific, relevant to the other person,** and offer shared solutions.
5. **Back up your boundary with action.** Point out violations in the moment. You teach people how to treat you.

We all have uniquely nuanced priorities, values, and needs. COVID-19 brings new needs to light during the holidays. Setting boundaries will help us face this wintertime with more enjoyment and authenticity in our relationships.

Learn more ways to “Create Light in the Dark Winter” with our other new blogs: Compassionate Action Steps; Compassion Fatigue and Self-compassion; Expectations and Structure; Mindfulness; and Stress Resilience.