Good Boundaries With Bipolar

by ERIC PATTERSON

Keys to Healthier Relationships

Do you ignore your own feelings? Do you go overboard helping people with no thought of your own well-being? Do you pretend that you like certain things just because someone else does? Do you blame yourself for someone else's poor decisions? If you answered "yes" to any or all of these questions, you may be having issues with poor boundaries.

Personal boundaries are the space between yourself and others. Too little space leads to enmeshment where you may ignore your own feelings or feel pressured to act or think the way someone demands. Too much space will lead to isolation and failure to make or maintain connections with other people.

Making Space

People with bipolar disorder are typically poor at maintaining healthy boundaries due to changing moods, energy levels and impulsivity. Healthy boundaries are always the goal, though. Here is how to get the right amount of space:

- **Self-monitor.** Knowing yourself and the people around you is an important step for so many aspects of well-being. Your boundaries will likely stretch the continuum from very poor to very good as you have different boundaries with different people. Begin to notice your relationships and the people that drain your energy (a sign of poor boundaries) or leave you feeling refreshed (a sign of good boundaries).
- **Personal bill of rights.** A personal bill of rights is a list of statements that define what you expect and deserve in relationships. A quick online search will yield many examples to consider. Borrow some and create some of your own. Listing "I have the right to be happy" is a profound statement that boosts self-esteem. Many issues with loose boundaries come from low self-esteem. Improving self-esteem will strengthen boundaries.
- **Lines in the sand.** A line in the sand is something that no one can ever cross and remain in your life. Would you accept someone hitting you? What about someone calling you a harsh name or degrading you verbally? Hopefully, the answer is "no." If someone crosses a line in the sand, you end the relationship immediately. Remember that personal boundaries move constantly and once someone crosses one line, it is only a matter of time before another is crossed. You are worth too much and deserve respect. Establishing your lines and listing them helps by taking your subjective judgment out of the equation at the moment the line is crossed.

- **Be assertive.** Assertive communication is the communication style of healthy boundaries. People with weak boundaries tend to be passive in communication and people with overly rigid boundaries tend to be aggressive with communication. Assertive communication is the balance of the needs of the person you are speaking with and your own. Assertive communication focuses on "I statements" and feelings. For example, "I feel angry when you keep asking me for more money. I would appreciate it if you no longer did that." is appropriate, assertive communication.

- **Take your time.** If your boundaries are loose, you may desire quick, intense relationships with people. If your personal boundaries are rigid, it may take you months to invite someone for a cup of coffee. Pace yourself by understanding your tendencies. Work to move towards the middle ground.

The Power of Setting Boundaries

Without support, bipolar disorder will be more difficult to manage. Having good boundaries increases the likelihood of having a high quality and quantity of relationships in your life. Understand your tendencies and modify your expectations and communication. Good boundaries are within reach.