

Experience, strength and hope from Al-Anon members for times when you can't get to an Al-Anon group

Dear Loners

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Sarah writes:

BOUNDARIES: Protecting ourselves and not harming others: How the 12 Steps have guided me

In life, people will fail us, however, the Steps and Traditions will not. Every real problem I have had in life can be solved with the Steps and Traditions. As annoying as that may be, when those simple concepts are applied to any given issue, solutions can be found.

When I came into these rooms, I was a mess. I was in a marriage that I have slowly come to see contained a lot of emotional abuse - from both sides. He was cruel, and I was reactive.

How did I get into that mess? It was because I had no boundaries. Because I had no boundaries, I had no sense of self. No boundaries means: not knowing where you end and other people begin.

How have the Twelve Steps and Traditions helped me?

Take the focus off other people and put it on myself; Self-care; Take ownership of my part to play. Stay calm, compassionate and kind. Don't react. Impose consequences.

WHATEVER other people do, it is my responsibility to have integrity and ethics as laid down by the blueprint of the Twelve Steps.

So where in the Twelve Steps do we learn self-care and self-protection?

This is the most powerful and subtle part of the Twelve Steps. We never have to give up our compassion and our serenity. In not reacting with 'like for like', but keeping focus on self, we do not escalate the situation.

In that space of no reaction, the other person can shift.

We can also treat people kindly, whilst imposing consequences. Consequences are not punishment but a natural progression of what they are doing.

Therefore, when we are caught up and bogged down in FEAR (False Evidence Appearing Real) it becomes completely clear - we impose consequences and hold people accountable for their actions.

I used to be very confused about this in my boundary-less, codependent state. If I set a boundary, that was me being MEAN! and CRUEL! And it wasn't a boundary unless it came with lots of emotion. And aggression to show how angry I was. Hmm, how did that work out for me....

But it isn't. Boundaries and imposing consequences signal clarity and help others clarify themselves ('shall I continue this or shall I modify and shift?').

If someone is violent, boundaries become clear. Call the police. Have them bear the discomfort of their choice to behave abusively. A visit by the police, a visit to the station, the writing down of a statement - even if charges are not laid - is a powerful disincentive to behave like that again.

If a tenant pushes the boundaries, give them notice. Clear and unambiguous. In the clarity of the programme, what was confusions and fog, becomes clear.

If a friend signals that they are not kind, safe, reliable, or come with lots of drama - it is not 'disloyal' to calmly and without reactivity distance oneself. And, with the guidance of the programme, choose friends who ARE safe. There are so many lovely people out there.

In business, decline to deal again with people who are not reliable.

In any problem, to not take it personally, but work on the solution.

When I crawled into these rooms, I was shattered. I had been broken down by a lot of behaviour that was specifically designed to convey, "You are nothing". I co-dependently thought that I was responsible for 'fixing' the behaviour of another.

But the Twelve Steps have taught me: - he has the right to be whoever he wants to be, and do whatever he wants to do. I have been taught RESPECT for the autonomy of another human being. That is a strong boundary I have learned.

On the other hand, I do not have to endure the harm of abusive behaviour, and I don't have to manage or negotiate it.

What do the Twelve Steps teach me? First of all, to stay calm. Second, don't react. I can choose not to engage in drama.

But nobody ever said this stuff was easy! But recently, my Higher Power has sent me some little episodes to show me how far I have come. Shifting towards calm, kind, self-respect, gets me calm, kind respect.

Adopting the lessons from *Easy does it but do it, Live and Let live, Let Go and Let GOD, First things First, Service, Keeping my side of the street clean and go where it's warm*, are the virtues that save me.

These things can actually be lessons and blessings if you channel the trauma into the right place.

Everything positive that has ever happened for me has been a result of Twelve Step recovery and it's the only way I have been able to cross over to the most serene place yet.

I have been able to come to see the character defects that had me engaged in all this nonsense from the get go. I am certainly a more compassionate, integrity filled, less manipulative and loving person, who no longer feels the need to attach myself to others in fear of not being good enough. I MIND MY OWN BUSINESS so much more. That is a really powerful spiritual slogan about boundaries and self-care. MIND. MY. OWN. BUSINESS. Nobody likes being taught a lesson, and I cannot believe that I ever thought that approach was a good idea or that it was going to ever end well! (It never ended well).

I have also gained valuable insight on trusting my instincts, as well as letting relationships go in faith as soon as I get the messages that they are not such good ones. I have learned to listen to the signals instead of denying them or trying to manage them.

So, although this is a complicated topic, boundaries work - boundaries of self, boundaries towards others, implementing those boundaries with compassion and clarity.

New Al-Anon groups are starting up all over! Please check the website for details. Remember help is a phone call away. We do care and would like to help you. Our office relies on contributions from members to keep this service running. If you would like to contribute our banking details are:

ABSA Bank, Oakdene, branch code 632 005). Current account no 1118881482.....in the name of Al-Anon Information Service . Please put your name or group as a reference .

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