



Lesson 5: Setting Boundaries for Yourself and Others

Hi, everybody. Welcome to day five of the Healthy Mindset Masterclass. I hope that already you are spending some time reflecting on what I've talked about in these videos. Hopefully you've attended one of the question and answer sessions and maybe have written some or read responses in the forum. So today's topic is boundaries and this is a topic that often brings up a little bit of tension for people because many of us have not learned how to have appropriate boundaries, to ask for what we need, or to set boundaries for getting those needs met. Please be open to doing some reflecting on this after you watch this video.

So the first thing I want to talk about is what are boundaries? Boundaries are kind of our lines in the sand, places that we don't allow people to cross because they're meant for protection of our energy, of our physical being, of our emotional being and so we have to have clear boundaries. What a lot of us struggle with at this stage in life is that we've allowed people to be in and out of our boundaries. We allow some people to get too close, get too much into our business, and we have kept other people really far out and we don't have a good sense of where are our safety boundaries. When it comes to our health and our weight, that can get really confusing because this is all about meeting our needs and making sure that we don't have things interfering with our needs.

I want to first talk about what self-care is, being selfish versus being self-indulging because these often get kind of lumped together. So self-care is doing the things that you know you need, taking care of yourself emotionally, taking care of yourself physically, spiritually, any way that you have needs. Most of us are pretty good at not recognizing that we have needs or we learn that it wasn't safe to acknowledge our needs or express them. But self-care is key. Very big difference between self-care and being selfish. And sometimes we have learned by this stage in life, that when we focus on self-care, when we set boundaries, the feedback we get from other people is that we're being selfish. Taking good care of you is not a selfish act. Other people might not like it though, because it means that you're not focusing first and foremost on what they want you to be focusing on. But if there's someone who is close enough and important enough to you, this will be an important thing for them to learn too. You are best able to be your best self when your needs are being met, when you are doing good self-care. Being selfish means you put yourself above all else without any regard for how those actions affect anyone else. So very different self-care and being selfish.

Then the last word in this trio that I like to think about is self-indulging. Some of us struggle so much with our self-care that what we label as self-care is going overboard in the other direction. We overdo it. We don't draw any limits for ourselves. If we're struggling, we eat whatever we want. If we are maybe in a bad mood, we buy anything we want. We don't have those internal boundaries to limit ourselves from doing things that actually aren't helpful, even though in that moment they might feel pretty good. Your self-care is very important and the more you take responsibility for your self-care, rather than leaving it up to other people and allowing other people's behaviors and attitudes to interfere with your self-care, the better you're going to do.

The first area in which I often talk about boundaries is thinking about what information about yourself you share with other people. Now you might be someone who's quite open and you share openly or you might be someone who's a little more guarded, but you might be excited about this new information you're learning or this new lifestyle that you've been doing over the past few months, the past few weeks, or maybe even the past few years. You talk about fasting. Perhaps you're someone who started doing a different style of eating and so you talk about that. I can totally relate. I feel sorry for some people years ago who got stuck with me waiting for a flight at an airport. They all heard all about fasting. They heard all about eating a low carbohydrate diet, whether they wanted to or not. So, thinking first about what you share with people. Some of what you are doing won't sit well with some people. That doesn't mean you can't share it, I just want you to be aware it may stir up some conflict or tension with those people. So first and foremost, you get to decide what you share about what you're doing.

Let's say you are at work and you're deciding not to eat a meal because you're fasting and someone else says, "Hey, what's up? Aren't you going to eat with us today?" You're put in this position of what do I say? How do I respond? I want to really encourage you to own that. You don't have to say anything you're not comfortable sharing. You can say something as innocuous as, "Oh, I'm not hungry right now." You could say, "Actually, I'm not eating today." That is going to raise some concern for some people and it might even raise some criticism from some. So you get to decide how much do I share and when do I not share?

For example, I was a teacher in my first career. If I didn't go to the lunch room, no one thought anything about it because often someone would stay in their classroom and do some extra tasks or something. So there are lots of ways you can address something like this, but what I want to emphasize is that you get the choice of what you share or don't share. What questions, what lines of conversation will you allow people to engage in with you and where do you draw your line? Where do you put your line of "I'm not crossing this with you anymore."

So let's say, for example, someone is starting to notice that you're not eating with the family, or with a group of friends, or at work and they start to question it. "Why aren't you eating? What's wrong with you? Why are you doing this? This looks unhealthy." You can at

any point respond and say, "Thanks for your concern. Actually, I'm doing something that's really healthy. I have a lot of support on this and I don't want to talk about it beyond that." If they keep pushing, you might need to set your boundary more firmly and say, "Listen, how I eat and when I eat, that's my focus, not yours. So it's something I'm no longer going to discuss with you." I know that for many of us this makes us uncomfortable because it's butting up against what we've learned about being polite and being open, but when someone's crossing your boundaries, you have to defend the boundary. You have to draw it real clearly so that people don't keep overstepping it. It's okay to do this. You're not doing something wrong to have a clear line of what you'll discuss and what you won't.

Let's say they think they have a better idea of what you should be doing and they tell you, "Actually, if you just started counting your calories and if you started drinking these protein shakes every day, you'd do a lot better." Again, draw your line. You might want to say something like, "You know, I really appreciate that you want to help. This actually isn't something that I'm seeking help on right now. I have my support, so I'd like us not to talk about this." You can draw that line very clearly. If you allow people to badger you, they will continue to badger you. We teach people how to treat us. So if I let people know that it's okay for them to critique and talk about my eating and my fasting, there's no reason for them to stop doing it. Versus if I say this is a topic that off the table for us.

And if you think about it, many of us have lots of topics or certain topics we don't talk about. So for example, at work, I've never had people sit down and have a debate about religion. We all kind of know that's a boundary, don't ask about that. We don't ask about how much money someone makes. So if someone starts pushing you, "Why are you eating this way? And why don't you eat now?" You can let them know, "Actually, that's a personal topic for me and it's not one that I'm going to discuss with you." You're not being rude. You can handle that boundary however you need to handle that boundary.

Different relationships might require different boundaries. So for example, a work colleague that used to share lunch with you, now they have questions. Well, why aren't you eating with us? What happened? What are you doing? That looks really strange. Then you might kind of give a more pat answer. I'm taking care of my health in a different way. Versus if it's someone really close to you, a best friend, a sister, a partner. You might need to say, "Look, I understand this might seem strange to you. If you are wanting to know the research, if you're wanting to know the ins and outs of what I'm doing, I'm happy to share more about it. I'm happy to share the resources, but what I can't have right now is to feel critiqued or judged for doing it." So even with people with whom you're very close and that you love, you may need to set these really clear boundaries. It's okay to say that's too far, I'm not going to discuss that further.

Now, clearly some people who are more invested in your life, they might have what they think is a vested interest. They might be concerned. You've started eating this and not eating this and this goes against what I believe is healthy. So you may want to engage in a

conversation. I often would say to someone like that, "I am happy to engage in this. I'm not willing to be judged by it. If you want to show me your information, books, and research that you've done, I'll be happy to look at that and I can show you the research and the books that I've looked at and you can be educated on my approach." For some people this is going to quiet it down because they don't want to do the research. They want to go with their beliefs. Some people are going to push your boundaries because they're antagonistic. Some people are going to push your boundaries because they're concerned and they don't understand. Very different responses in how you might want to handle those.

Sometimes you might feel pressure. For example, someone brings you a cake for your birthday. Ah! What do you do if you're no longer eating cake or if it's a fasting day? One thing I encourage is, as much as possible, the people who are closer to you, start to let them know what your limits are. So for example, your birthday's coming. You might say to people, "Hey, next week for my birthday I'm thinking of doing this. Because I don't eat cake anymore, this is how I want to celebrate my birthday." I put it out there so that there's no kind of surprises when the day comes.

I also can ask people to not bring me things. I can let them know. But let's say for example, someone brings it to me and they didn't know and I feel a little bit awkward about it. Again, I can make some kind of pat answers about "That was so kind of you. That was so generous that you made this for me. I'll have to have it later because I'm really full right now." or "My stomach's not feeling real well today and so I'm going to wait, but thank you so much." Now, it may sound like I'm encouraging you to lie. That's not really it. I'm encouraging you to navigate a boundary in a way that doesn't feel like you're going to hurt someone's feelings because I know, for a lot of us, that's a reason why we don't honor our own boundaries.

I also want to talk a little bit about what to do with people close to you who might do some behaviors that make it really difficult for you to eat in a way that's healthy or to fast. So let's say for example, you have a spouse or a partner you share food with, you're around most of the time when you're at home, and they have food in the house that is really problematic for you. How do you navigate this? How do you set a boundary with them? This is challenging and I think one, you need to kind of reflect on what's the norm in our relationship? What can we ask each other for? What do I feel safe enough to ask? So for example, I might ask, "I know that you like to have these treats and kind of junk food in the house. What I'd like to ask is that we keep it all in this cupboard over here because I will just ignore that cupboard." Hopefully your spouse, or partner, or family member would be willing to honor that boundary.

Let's say it's something a little more challenging for you, like when you sit down to watch TV at night, your partner or spouse sits next to you munching on this snack food. How do you manage that? Probably after the first time or two you experience it and realize that it's a trigger for you, it would be good to have a conversation and let them know, "I'm working

on this. I'm working on my health." They probably know I'm working on my weight, or I'm working on my diabetes, or whatever concerns you're addressing with this. And to say, "It's been challenging for me and I'm learning new skills. I'm wondering if you would be willing to not eat that around me while I'm learning this skill." Even if you can postpone it a couple of months and then renegotiate with them as you get further into your own journey. Maybe it means asking them, "I'm not asking you to stop eating that food, but I'm wondering if you would be willing to not eat it at home. Could you keep it at your office? Could you keep it in your car? Could you keep it in the garage?" Somewhere where they spend time.

I had one friend who did a great job with her own eating plan change. And what she did with her partner is she asked him not to have certain things in the house, but she found that there were, for example, with cookies, there were certain ones that she loved and couldn't be around without eating them and there were certain kinds that she didn't like and she didn't care if he had those around. So that was a great compromise that she could make with him. "Hey, can you do me a favor? If you bring cookies into the house, can you not bring in these cookies? I'm fine if you have these cookies." For me, they probably all would be a no go because of my own struggle with being around that kind of food.

But I think some of us struggle with is it okay to ask for something like that? Does my change and my focus on my health mean that someone else can't have something? And I try to differentiate that. I'm not saying they can't eat it. I'm asking for them to honor me and not having it around me. But let's say for example, you suddenly developed a severe peanut allergy. Or let's reverse it, let's say your spouse, or partner, or brother, or whomever this is suddenly developed a severe peanut allergy. Would you sit on the couch next to them eating peanuts? No, you would honor their need and you would be really mindful. Where is it okay for me to eat peanuts? Where is it not? How can I respect what they need and protect them? So you asking someone to not engage in certain behaviors around you, my hope is, in your relationship that's not too much to ask, but it might be something that you feel a little bit uncomfortable asking. Again, many of us have learned from the time of being small that having needs and asking for someone to honor our needs puts us in a difficult position, so this might be something that takes some extra practice.

Let's say that you and your spouse or partner used to eat a particular food together and now you either no longer eat that food or you're just not eating on that day because it's a fasting day and your spouse or partner might feel a little bit left out. "What's wrong? We used to have this together. We enjoyed this. Remember how much fun we used to have eating this? Remember this is our favorite food that we order at every restaurant we go to? You changed things on me. What's going on?" And so I think it's important to just kind of acknowledge it with someone. "I know this is new for us. I know that we used to engage in this together and I'm not going to be engaging it anymore." And then again, navigate what the boundary is.

Where I hear some of us struggle with this is we have a partner, or a spouse, or a parent, or an in-law, or someone who thinks they're well intended by offering us something because they know we really like it. So let's say for example, there was a dessert that you used to love and you're no longer eating desserts, or you're eating them pretty rarely and they make you this dessert, or they keep talking about this dessert. They go to the store and pick this dessert up for you because you've had a rough week or because they just want you to be happy. That's really hard because the reality is that's no longer a pleasant thing for you. If you've determined you're not going to have it, them offering it puts you in a challenging position. So again, I think it's okay to set that boundary and say, "I know you're doing this because you think it will make me happy. Actually, it no longer makes me happy. It puts me in a really difficult bind. I don't want to sabotage myself with these foods and I don't want you offering them in a way that sabotages me either."

The last thing I'm going to say about boundaries is our own personal boundaries. I'm going to talk about this again when I talk about self-sabotage and when I talk about habit change, but I think it's so important that I think it's worth talking about multiple times, that is honoring your own boundaries. Let's say, for example, you decide that you're not going to eat junk food anymore, whatever that means for you. But you decide it's Saturday night, I'm going to have junk food because it's the weekend. Is this really honoring your boundary? You are doing something that's good for your health. You want your pancreas and liver to be functioning well. You want your blood sugar to be good. You want your body burning body fat. But it's Saturday night, so it's okay. That's really not honoring your own boundary. Your pancreas and liver don't know that it's Saturday night and you get a night off, so they have to work harder. It doesn't really fit with how you've identified your goal.

Let's say, for example, you have stopped snacking and maybe you're going without sugar. And we'll talk about that in a future video. And it becomes Halloween in your home and you have kids or you don't have kids, but you pass out candy for Halloween. So a lot of us get some slippery slope thinking going on during this and we say, "Well, it's just Halloween. It's okay. What am I supposed to do? There's candy in the house." Again, that's not really honoring your own boundary. If you have said, "I'm not eating sugar anymore." Why does October 31st become a reason why that's okay? Why does your body have to go through this overload of processed sugar and things and all of the negative consequences that come with it. You might fall asleep. You might feel sick the next day. You might have super strong cravings the next day. Why does October 31st change your boundaries? It really doesn't, but a lot of us use that as a reason to break our own boundary. We use it for justification.

But I want you to think about honoring yourself, setting boundaries that you need to implement for yourself and setting boundaries to implement for other people. And then start thinking about what are those boundaries? What are the things that you're going to be working on? How might you share those with people? You might even want to start writing out some sample dialogue, some sample statements that you can practice. I guarantee if you have to say something that's difficult to say to someone, practicing it, saying it in a mirror, saying it out loud, say it to someone else and let them give you feedback, but

practice that skill so that when you have to set that boundary with someone at work, or a family member, or a friend, or a spouse or a partner that you feel confident and safe in saying it. So, boundaries for yourself and boundaries for other people.

Self-care is not being selfish and being over indulgent or enabling to yourself is not good self-care. Again, these are themes that we'll continue to talk about. I hope everyone is having a great week. Please don't forget to share some information in the forum. How are you doing? What questions do you have? What awareness's are you coming to during this process and where might you be hitting some challenges? Love to hear from you in the forum. Take good care everybody. Bye bye.