

Fight for Your Right

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....to party! If you grew up in the 90's you may remember this song. It's about a teenager who, instead of fulfilling his school and home responsibilities, would rather party. He is raging against the consequences that follow his behaviors.

If you are a parent, you have had to deal with children fighting against reality. (Yes, your body really does need sleep. Or, no you cannot play video games for hours on end without becoming a vegetable.) This experience is probably quite familiar and you may or may not have set down the appropriate boundaries and consequences with your own children.

But what about the rest of life? Even if you don't have children, you have likely come across people who rage against boundaries. Boundaries are property lines. What belongs to me? To you? Things like thoughts, feelings, actions, choices, attitudes, etc. It's not uncommon to have confusion about what belongs on your property. It's a marker of what you will allow and will not allow, what is important to you and what is not.

And to take that even further, what happens when others are confused about boundaries and actively try to overtake yours? Typically the resistance encountered from boundary breakers consists of: angry reactions, guilt messages, physical resistance, and several others. The book *Boundaries* by Drs. Cloud & Townsend speaks directly to these reactions and others.

When someone responds to your boundaries with anger this person is displaying a character problem. This person lacks self-control so he or she tries to exert "other-control". When the "other" does not bow to that control the boundary breaker gets angry.

The neat thing about boundary development is that, as you develop healthy boundaries, you do not have to take that other person's anger on yourself. You can respond with, "It appears that you are angry because I choose to ..."; "It's hard for you when I have other things to do, isn't it?", or "I realize this is disappointing to you. I would be willing to help by doing something." In these responses you're empathizing with their upset but you're making it clear that it's their upset. In other words it's their feeling and their choice to feel that way. (If the person is physically threatening in their anger, be sure to create distance.)

You can use this same tactic with those who try to make you feel guilty for making a choice that they do not like. ("I can see that this is frustrating for you. I'm sorry you're having a hard time with it.) Recognize that guilt is not used for your good, but to manipulate and control and it only works if you let it. If a guilt message works on you, it was your choice to allow it to work. Take control back by deciding in your heart what you are willing to give (2 Corinthians 9:7) and give whatever it is with cheerfulness and not out of guilt.

Developing boundaries can be a tough road – but it's worth it! For more help with boundaries, check out the book referenced above or call the Center for Family Healing in Menasha, WI to schedule an appointment or inquire about Boundaries therapy groups.

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