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Working with Boundaries in Bioenergetic Therapy

"Boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me. A boundary shows me where i end and someone else begins, leading me to a sense of ownership. Knowing what I am to own and take responsibility for gives me freedom. Taking responsibility for my life opens up many different options. Boundaries help us keep the good in and the bad out. Setting boundaries inevitably involves taking responsibility for your choices." -Henry Cloud

Many of the challenges which impact people coming to our attention as social workers relate to the issue of boundaries - how a person experiences their personal boundaries, how they express their boundaries to those around them, and how they experience the boundaries of others. We use the term boundaries to describe a variety of things - such as the physical boundaries in a sport, to the boundaries as a dividing line between areas, to the boundaries of a person's knowledge or experience. As humans, our boundaries occur on all levels - physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Fundamentally what we are describing is what the Cambridge Dictionary defines as: "a real or imagined line that marks the edge or limit of something." When a person does not have a clear sense of their own boundaries and does not have a sense of their right to their boundaries, violations can occur repeatedly - either from their world against them, or from the person against their world. This can be the source of significant unhappiness. Conversely, when someone is too strong in their personal boundaries this can lead to an inability to reach out for what they want leading to isolation and loneliness.

Boundary violations often begin in our childhood. If we have not been supported as children to express and experience our boundaries, and that we have the right to these boundaries, we go through life without a clear sense of our personal boundaries, let alone an ability to assert our boundaries. Boundary violations can occur in a variety of ways either through direct invasions such as incest or abuse, or through more subtle trespasses such as not allowing our expression and/or our truth not being respected, An important aspect of our work as Social Workers is to support people in developing healthy boundaries - both feeling their right to keep out what they do not want to take in from the world and

their ability to reach out for what they do want.

Working with boundaries in an intellectual way is limiting. Working with the body lends itself to practicing and experiencing a felt sense of one's boundaries. Exercises designed to help people get stronger in expressing their boundaries both physically, mentally and emotionally form a foundation of Bioenergetic Therapy.

Basic Bioenergetic Boundary Building exercise: Stand with your knees slightly bent and your feet hip width apart (~8" - 10"). Bend and straighten your legs a few times to feel the ground beneath you and press down in your feet. Extend your arms outward with your wrists bent back. Keep your elbows soft - extended but not locked. Press out into your wrists. You can move your arms to experience the boundary around your body. If there are words you wish to express, like "it's my space" or "keep away" you may add this. To reach out, extend your fingers forward and reach out instead. Feel the reach coming all the way from your heart. Practice asking for what you want.