

Boundaries Session 8

Boundaries Surrounding Friends

Caution: Possible conflicts arise when healthy boundaries are not set in our friendships.

1. Compliant/Compliant

Having the difficulty to saying no to your friend.

Symptoms: Conflict is dissatisfaction—a sense that you allowed something you shouldn't have.

Background: People who tend to avoid saying no to keep others happy. If two friends struggle with always being compliant, it is often hard for them to help each other.

Boundary Conflict: Compliant people politely deny their own boundaries to keep the peace.

Hopeful Outcome: As the two compliant people become more open about their likes and dislikes, they may find themselves separating more from each other. They need to remember that having different friends for different activities is not blot on a relationship—and it might even help in the long run. (Proverbs 18:24) (p. 141)

2. Compliant/Aggressive Controller

Usually, the aggressive controller is insisting on using some of the compliant's time, talents, or treasures. He or she has no problem demanding what he or she wants. Sometimes, he or she just takes what he or she wants without asking. "I needed it" is enough reason for he or she to help his or herself to what the compliant has... car keys, sugar, or three hours of time.

The compliant feels intimidated and inferior in the relationship; the aggressive controller feels irritated at being pestered by the compliant.

Background: Compliant likely grew up in a family who taught to avoid conflict rather than embrace it. The aggressive controller never received training in delaying gratification and in taking responsibility for herself or himself.

Boundary Conflict: Two specific boundary conflicts are the inability of the compliant to set clear limits with his or her friends. For the aggressive controller, the inability to respect the compliant's limits.

Symptoms: The compliant feels controlled and resentful; the aggressive controller feels good, except she or he doesn't like to be pestered.

Hopeful Outcome: When the compliant confronts the aggressive controller friend, he or she sets limits to let her know that his or her control hurts him or her and wounds their friendship. The aggressive controller may feel empathic remorse for the pain he or she has caused or experience the consequences of her actions and begin to take responsibility for the control that ran his or her friend off. At this point, if both are willing, the two can renegotiate the relationship and build a new friendship. (Proverbs 27:17) (p. 143)

3. Compliant/Manipulative Controller

Clarification: A manipulative controller may not be consciously trying to manipulate his or her friends. However, no matter what his or her intentions are, when he or she is in a jam, he or she uses them. He or she takes them for granted, thinking that they shouldn't mind doing a friend a favor. Often the emergencies that arise that need help from a friend are self-induced.

Symptoms: The Compliant will feel resentment but will try to repress it even when the requests are last minute; feeling like this friendship is being taken for granted. The compliant may begin to avoid his or her friend. (pg. 143)

Boundary Conflict: The Compliant: Will choose to accommodate to his or friends last minute requests but will continue to feel frustrated inside while being flexible for his or friend.

The Manipulative Controller: Will take his or her friend for granted... thinking that they shouldn't mind doing a friend a favor. (pg. 143)

Hopeful Outcome: When the compliant feels strong enough, she or he confronts the manipulative controller, tells about feelings used and taken advantage of, and explains that he or she wants a more mutual friendship. The manipulative controller, unaware of how he or she was hurting her friend, may be genuinely sorry and has the option to begin taking more responsibility. The friendship can then grow and deepen (Proverbs 10:18) (pg. 144)

4. Compliant/Nonresponsive

In a compliant/nonresponsive conflict, one friend does all the work while the other coasts along. One party feels frustrated and resentful; the other wonders what the problem is (pg. 145)

Symptoms: Compliant- Feeling sad, resentful, and unimportant.

Nonresponsive- may feel guilty or overwhelmed by her friend's needs and demands.

Boundary conflict: Compliant: takes on too much responsibility for the friendship. She is not letting her friend bear his or her own load.

Non-responsive: Does not take enough responsibility for the friendship. If the compliant seems to be willing to do all the work, why work when someone else will?

Hopeful Outcome: The compliant begins to set boundaries by telling the non responsive about his or her feelings and informing him or her that he or she will need to take equal responsibility for the friendship in the future. The compliant hopes that the nonresponsive will call, if the unresponsiveness continues, the compliant has learned that it wasn't a mutual connection. This kind of confrontation either exposes the friendship as a one sided relationship or provides a foundation for rebuilding a better one. (Galatians 6:5) (pg. 146)

The Friendship: A Loving Relationship

“Even when we commit to a loving friendship, bad things happen. We let friends down. Feelings go sour.... As we stay connected to God, to our friends, and to our support groups, we are filled with the grace to hang in there and fight out the boundary conflicts that arise. (pg. 147)

- What do Romans 8:1 and Ephesians 4:32 suggest about a strong basis for a friendship?
- When has being in “Christ Jesus” strengthened one of your friendships? When, for instance, has it helped you weather the storm of disappointment, hurt, or even betrayal? Be specific...
- The Bible teaches that all commitment is based on a loving relationship. Being loved leads to commitment and willful decision making—not the reverse. What is your commitment to God based on? How did first being loved by God lead to your commitment to Him (1 John 4:19)?
- What does the truth that “all commitment is based on a loving relationships” say to you personally about friendships?

All friendships need to be based on attachment rather than some kind of obligation, or they have a shaky foundation. An attachment rooted in Christ's love is the strongest of all. (pg. 147)

* Resource: Henry Cloud & John Townsend, “Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No, to Take Control of Your Life”