Loving another person does not mean we should enable him or her to mistreat us. Loving means not abusing or mistreating anyone for any reason.
Many of us are not taught what it means to give or receive love. To show love, we behave in positive ways. To be loved, we receive positive treatment. But when we hurt, we often thoughtlessly project our pain onto others. When other people hurt, they project their pain onto us through mistreatment.

Mistreatment is the practice of treating someone or something badly. Abuse, for example, is defined as a systematic pattern of behaviors in a relationship that is used to gain and/or maintain power and control over another. Mistreatment is to use wrongly or improperly; to treat in a harmful, injurious, unkind, or offensive way; to speak insultingly, harshly, and unjustly to or about; or to commit sexual assault upon.

As a child, I was powerless to set boundaries with the adults in my life. So growing up, and for much of my young adult life, I did not know I could say no to mistreatment. When conflict arose, I did not want to make waves or rock the boat. I wanted to keep peace and be the one who smoothed over unpleasant situations.

Because I grew up with mistreatment, my boundaries were virtually nonexistent. For many years I let the opinions and behavior of others overrule what I knew was acceptable and best for me. Every time I did what other people wanted, or behaved in ways that went against my values in order to fit in with the crowd, or ignored abusive treatment, I suffered.

Through counseling, I learned that not setting and enforcing my boundaries was codependent behavior and allowed those who would abuse me to do so. It took great courage, and practice, but when I stopped permitting people to treat me badly or stopped blindly following others, and instead took the actions I knew I needed to take, I felt strong and proud of myself. I no longer cared about being disowned by others when I realized disowning myself and my values was the ultimate betrayal.

Loving another person does not mean we should enable him or her to mistreat us. Loving means not abusing or mistreating anyone for any reason. People who do not treat us with kindness, respect, and courtesy are not expressing love. So, it is necessary to learn to set boundaries out of love for ourselves. We do so by learning what boundaries are, what they are not, and the steps involved in establishing clear limits.
What Boundaries Are

A boundary is a limit we set to protect and take care of ourselves. People will treat us as we allow them to. Boundaries let other people know our availability, values, and the conditions under which we will interact. Healthy, clearly communicated boundaries identify our needs, feelings, and rights in relationship to others. Boundaries let others know we respect and value ourselves. The ability to establish and maintain guidelines is necessary to be responsible for ourselves and to create positive relationships with others. Boundaries help us determine the things we want to do and those we don’t and to stand up for ourselves without guilt for putting our needs first. Without establishing the behaviors we will and will not tolerate from others, we leave ourselves open to becoming angry and resentful about how we are allowing ourselves to be treated. And, we must respect the boundaries other people set for themselves.

What Boundaries Are Not

Establishing how we want to be treated is not about control or manipulation. We do not set boundaries to change other people. We do so to change us —to create a better, more positive life for ourselves by defining acceptable behavior, claiming the status of healthy adult, and demonstrating a commitment to self-respect. We know our boundaries have been set in a healthful manner when we clearly state what behavior is hurtful to us, yet we do not have expectations of a particular outcome. We set the boundary for ourselves while realizing the other person is completely responsible for making changes to his or her behavior.
Have you heard the song, “You Always Hurt the One You Love”? The truth is love does not hurt. Love does not mistreat. Love does not take advantage. Love is not impatient. Love is not judgmental. Love is not controlling. Love is not critical. Love is not angry. So for much of life I was very confused when people told me, “I love you.”

We learn how to behave from our parents, family members, friends, peers, and television. But that does not mean the behavior we were taught or exposed to is acceptable. Hitting, screaming, inappropriate touching, humiliation, rage, control, dishonesty, irresponsibility, blame, jealousy, lying, cheating, stealing, sexual abuse, physical and psychological abuse, denial, etc., are not the behaviors that create a positive life. Negative behavior hurts. Acceptable behavior is that which aligns with love:

Steps to Setting Boundaries

1. **Define acceptable behavior.**

   Have you heard the song, “You Always Hurt the One You Love”? The truth is love does not hurt. Love does not mistreat. Love does not take advantage. Love is not impatient. Love is not judgmental. Love is not controlling. Love is not critical. Love is not angry. So for much of life I was very confused when people told me, “I love you.”

   We learn how to behave from our parents, family members, friends, peers, and television. But that does not mean the behavior we were taught or exposed to is acceptable. Hitting, screaming, inappropriate touching, humiliation, rage, control, dishonesty, irresponsibility, blame, jealousy, lying, cheating, stealing, sexual abuse, physical and psychological abuse, denial, etc., are not the behaviors that create a positive life. Negative behavior hurts. Acceptable behavior is that which aligns with love:
To establish and grow positive relationships is the foundation of a happy life. These positive relationships involve mutual respect, patience, responsibility, understanding, cooperation, regard, support, and clear communication. A relationship that lacks these qualities lacks loving behavior. That includes the relationship we have with ourselves. Understand that being a doormat is a lowly lack of self-respect and love, because if we abuse ourselves, then we will allow others to abuse us. Stop self-abuse by making love’s behaviors a real part of your heart, so you treat yourself lovingly. Know that it is healthy to set boundaries with people. It is part of loving yourself.

2 Love yourself most.

Who do you most love? Whose face appears in answer to this question? Is it your husband or wife, a girlfriend, boyfriend, or partner? Is it your daughter, son, mother, father, a grandchild, best friend, or a beloved pet? Is it the higher power of your belief? Regardless who causes your affection to swell, a truth to engrave upon your heart about love is this: To love others well, you must love yourself most.

Taught to place the wants and needs of other people above my own, I learned the truth through resentment and disappointment. Loving ourselves most is not egotistical or selfish. It is responsible.

Love is more than a concept or the expression of emotion. Love is the state of living aligned with your soul. Loving yourself and others is consistently expressing the positive behaviors of your highest wisdom and most radiant beauty.

To show love, both to yourself and to others, you behave in forgiving and encouraging ways. To love is to be patient, honest, and enduring. To love is to give the best of you. To give your best requires remaining aligned with your heart, because it is only possible to give to others what is already a real part of you.

When you make peace with yourself you begin to live in peace with others. When you are your own best friend you can be a good friend to others. When you treat yourself with the positive actions of love, you are able to share those same behaviors with others without
resentment, feeling taken advantage of, or losing yourself in the relationship. Loving yourself most is heart-motivated and inspired by the spiritual understanding that you must consistently give love’s behaviors, such as empathy and cooperation, to yourself before you can genuinely give these to others.

3 **Accept that doing nothing is condoning bad treatment.**

Many years ago I dated an alcoholic. I did not know it in the beginning, but over time it became clear as the number of intoxicated incidents began to add up. After each occurrence there was an apology, a request for forgiveness, and a promise it would not happen again. No matter how much I wanted the drinking to stop, it did not. No matter how much I prayed for follow-through on the promise to seek help, there was none. For too long I chose to believe what was promised rather than accepting the repeated actions as proof of what was actually true.

While I thought turning the other cheek was how I loved someone, it wasn’t. I realized not standing up against abusive and disrespectful treatment was actually helping to keep the abusive and negative situations alive. Doing nothing was enabling others to continue behaving badly. When they refused to honor my boundaries, it was clear they were not willing to treat me with respect.

Albert Einstein said, “No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.” With the realization that I could change my situation by changing myself, I found tremendous power in learning to set boundaries with people who disrespected and mistreated me. I also left those people who were physically abusive. No matter how many promises were made or how many times they apologized for their behavior, I finally realized that people who abuse will say anything to keep the situation as it is. Physical abusers are not going to change unless they truly want to and get professional help to do so. Only by leaving did my situation change for the better—regardless if theirs did or not.

You do not have the power to help people who consistently abuse you. But, you do give them the power to continue abusing when you stay, rather than setting that boundary and, if necessary, leaving.
4 Calmly and clearly express your feelings.

Have you ever told someone you loved them in the morning, then screamed at them in the evening? I have. It feels horrible.

One day I had a talk with myself. “Regina, how do you justify treating the people you ‘love’ badly? How can you tell your friends you love them then treat them with disrespect or rudeness? How do you justify telling family you love them then turn around and be dishonest or speak to them harshly? How can you really show love to your pets if you are impatient, rough, or expect them to reason like a human being?"

When I hurt people, it was because I was hurting. I took my frustration and disappointment out on others instead of looking within to find the source(s) of my pain. One day I found the courage to honestly look at myself. That is when I began to find and heal my emotional wounds. Responsibly dealing with my emotions is what helped me stop taking my pain out on others and on myself. And, owning and being able to express my feelings helped me understand the feelings of others and to communicate calmly and clearly.

When setting boundaries, it is vital to communicate without blaming the other person. That requires you to stay focused on and responsible for yourself, to communicate directly about someone’s behavior, how it makes you feel, and what you want.

For example:

♦ When you speak to me disrespectfully, I feel sad, blamed, and attacked. I want you to treat me with patience and respect.

♦ When you watch television and I have to repeatedly say your name to get your attention, I feel angry, hurt, discounted, and insignificant. I want you to answer me when I talk to you. I want you to acknowledge and communicate with me.

♦ When you leave your dirty clothes on the floor, I feel disgusted and used. I want you to pick up after yourself.

♦ When you rage and raise your fist, I feel fearful, intimidated, and unsafe. I feel like you
are going to hit me. I do not want you to threaten me, ever.

♦ If you ever hit me or the children or abuse the pets, I will call the authorities. I will file a complaint and press criminal charges. I will leave the relationship.

When you identify hurtful behavior, it is not necessary that you defend, debate, or over-explain your boundary. The goal is to communicate peacefully and directly, and be specific. If they refuse to cooperate, let them know of the possible consequences of disregarding your request. In the case of violence, contact the authorities.

Unless you are in immediate physical danger, or the situation has escalated to the point you and the other person have stopped listening to one another, establish the boundary in the moment. If there is clear communication, then do not wait to express your needs. Make an immediate request that they stop the behavior.

Regardless if the boundary is set over dirty laundry or to prevent physical harm, you must be willing to do whatever it takes to remain true to your word. If you are not willing to leave the relationship, then do not say you will. It is one thing to set a boundary, but unless you are willing to enforce it, no matter how small or large, the people (children too) with whom you have set the boundary will not take you seriously. Consistency is a critical part of maintaining your self-respect.

It is important to understand that changing behaviors, such as learning to communicate feelings clearly or asking for what you want, takes time. Unless physically threatened, be patient with others and allow them the opportunity to change. Also, make sure the consequence impacts the other person more than it does you — grounding a teenager for a month, for example, leaves you on call to provide transportation for their commitments, etc.

5 Be comfortable with being unpopular.

I have set countless boundaries with people over the course of my life, and I was not popular for doing so. When I decided I was worth more than how I was being treated, it was like shining a spotlight on other people’s behavior. I did what I knew in my heart was the more
enlightened and peaceful thing to do and I did not budge.

Recently I was “obligated” by the unwritten rules of society and family to attend an event that I said I would not attend again. I did not confirm I would go. It was assumed.

Several years ago I walked out of a similar family gathering, setting a boundary out of love for myself. Prior to that day, I had endured misdirected and irresponsible anger. Each gathering turned into a shouting match, or a denigrating discussion of politics, or an argument over a movie. After a history of consistently negative events, I had had enough.

I know people change, and I have forgiven each of the parties involved. But forgiveness does not mean I have forgotten the pain. So I completely understand how hard it is to set boundaries with those we care for who do not know how to behave in loving and respectful ways.

If setting a boundary with someone becomes uncomfortable for them, it does not mean we must back down. We do not have to be unkind, but we do have to remain strong. Remember that saying no and setting a boundary with abusive, irresponsible, or controlling people is challenging the hold they think they have on you. You are completely in charge of your own power, so do not give it away by feeling guilty or allowing them to talk you out of the decision you made for your greater good. Part of treating yourself with love’s behaviors is to bravely and firmly stay the course, no matter what anyone else says. We are responsible for setting and upholding the boundary, but we are not responsible if the other person chooses to test or ignore the boundary. After sufficient time without positive movement, you will know it is time to set the boundary again or refuse to participate.

While you are powerless to control or change other people, you do have the power to cut off associations with people who bring you down, are consistently negative, expose you to dangerous circumstances, or who tell you who you should be rather than supporting the best of who you are.
Define the acceptable behaviors aligned with love. Love yourself most by standing up for yourself through communicating how you desire to be treated. Do not allow abuse or mistreatment to continue, hoping the other person will change. Learn to calmly and directly express your feelings without blaming the other person. Accept that setting boundaries is not necessarily going to make you popular. Once you set a boundary, stand by it. Remain strong in the truth that by setting boundaries against mistreatment, you are aligning with the positive, loving way of living.

Love yourself by setting boundaries with anybody who believes it is okay to “hurt the ones they say they love.” If what is being dumped on you is abuse, jealousy, projection, anger, guilt, fear, blame, or attempts to manipulate or control, remember, none of these is LOVE.

Blessings,

Regina Cates
Spiritual Teacher & Author

Do you want assistance with learning to set boundaries?

- Join my free Sunday Gatherings
- Join my daily Facebook blog
- Work with me privately
- Register for upcoming teleconferences
- Bring me to your city for a workshop

Tel: 1 (800) 601-7929
E-mail: info@RomancingYourSoul.com