

just say

By Travis E. Frye, MA, LPC

It is late on a work night when Fred's buddy calls. "Dude, the game's on and I just ordered pizza," he says. Fred knows this is an open invitation and up until a few years ago this would not be a problem. It's just that now he is married, has kids, and a much needed job. He hesitates because he knows this will cause a lot of problems, but his friend insists and he eventually gives in.

Why is it that, like Fred, so many of us have difficulty with boundaries? Before I go further in answering this question I first want to talk about what I mean by boundaries. Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend in their book, *Boundaries*, refer to them as being a "personal property line" that helps to distinguish where you begin and end. It is much like the same way a fence is used to mark property. It is meant to keep those who are not wanted in out, and to protect the house and its inhabitants.

One of the best ways to enforce boundaries is by using that wonderful two letter word, "no." The problem is that many of us have a weak "no" muscle. The best way to build up and strengthen that muscle is to use it. Saying no is one of the best ways we can let others know our boundaries. It teaches others how we want to be treated.

People like Fred have poor boundaries and struggle saying no because they worry about disappointing others, feel guilty, and are people pleasers. It is like they have a broken down fence. Friends, family, and even strangers can come in and out of their property any time they like. In fact, they can even go straight into their home, eat their food, put their feet up, and stay as long as they want.

There are others who have the opposite problem which can be equally unhealthy. They have a property line that is a twenty-foot-tall brick wall. The outside of the wall is covered with signs warning of danger and there is electrified barbed wire. They are closed, rigid, and inflexible. They do not have a problem saying no. It is just that they never say yes.

Then there are those with a well-defined boundary surrounding their property with a gate built in for visitors. They allow only those whom they want to come through the gate and into their home. They also



have a strong "no" muscle and do not worry about pleasing others or struggle with feelings of guilt. Teaching others how to treat them comes as no problem and they feel a sense of freedom and mastery.

People with good boundaries have worked out those feelings of guilt and people pleasing. Saying no to others helps to define where they begin and end as a person. They have a sense of freedom because the pressure put on by others is not allowed to affect them. Ultimately, they realize it is their responsibility to teach others how to treat them.

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QUESTIONS? ASK TRAVIS!

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