

The Genesis Therapy Center

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Holiday and Beyond Boundaries

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For many people the holidays are a mixed bag, and not the bag that Santa carries with him. The holidays are filled with cheer, beautiful sights and sounds, delicious food, and nice gifts. However, even people with close, friendly, and functional families can get overwhelmed. Unfortunately, many families don't meet those characteristics and for those people the holidays can be downright dreadful. Families often have rules and expectations both spoken and unspoken. In the same family a member can have a very different life and priorities that others know little about or don't understand. One family member can have one house to visit for the holiday while their sibling or aunt/uncle can have 4 families they are trying to please. Those with less of a hectic schedule can pull those with a full schedule to do more than is reasonable, without understanding how exhausting it can be. Even when all family members are getting along this can lead to feeling pulled apart and worn thin, leaving little for enjoying the season. This is when boundaries make the season more enjoyable.

When families aren't getting along due to current or past differences or trauma, being ok with setting boundaries becomes necessary for your mental health. We all have the right to make choices for our lives that will maximize our happiness and safety. This can mean telling a family member that you will not be attending this year. Or, insisting that certain conversations don't happen at the party. There are more aspects to boundary setting than can be discussed here but here are a few:

Making a decision: This means YOU see what others expect or want, and you choose a plan or arrangement that is a compromise (even if its 99% your wants). Coming up with an "ideal" plan may be helpful, even if you know you would never do it, at least use it as a base or starting point. But you need to make that decision, perhaps with input from your kids and of course your partner (if applicable). These include where you are going, when, for how long, and also who you bring with you. This also includes what you bring be it gifts or food.

Good communication: This means being clear and sticking to your decision. This can also mean less communication, when others want to hear "why can't you come or stay, or 'squeeze in a visit'". You do not owe an explanation, though it is often a no-lose situation to honestly state why you made that decision if it is unlikely to hurt feelings. If it is merely a matter of time restraints do consider rotating year to year, if YOU don't mind. Ask that topics such as politics are avoided, if rising tensions are likely.

Backup plan: This means having an 'out' if there is a realistic possibility that someone will not treat you with respect or consideration. You should be willing to leave early if uncomfortable conversations are happening, especially if you have already asked for those not to occur. Have a plan if you, your kids, or partner just don't "feel it" and want to go. Don't be overly apologetic. You may be the one needing to set the boundary or you may be the one feeling/hearing the boundary set by another. Be willing to tell others how difficult it is for you to make everyone happy, and you may find that others had no idea you felt that way and will be more likely to forgo guilt trips or pushy behavior. Though some may not be affected by such conversations. You hold the key to make the holidays bright!

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Anger, Taming a Powerful Emotion by Gary Chapman Brian Gold, LCSW

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Anger is a secondary emotion that is typically triggered by something else—usually fear or sadness. By digging deeper into the reason why we feel angry, the more productive our communication regarding it can become. When anger is not processed properly, relationships become a battlefield.

It's important to understand that love and uncontrolled anger can't coexist. Love seeks the well-being of the other, while uncontrolled anger burns relationships and the people in them.

When anger rises, use the steps below to navigate a healthy discussion:

Admit it—anger is real. There's nothing inherently, morally wrong about Anger. It is not wrong; it is simply a clue that something feels unfair or unjust to you. Give yourself permission to feel angry. Don't deny it. Also, give those you love permission to feel angry too.

Say it—express your anger. Don't play "Guess My Mood." When angry, don't be passive-aggressive—throwing icy-cold vibes and expecting others to read your thoughts. If someone has done or said something to upset you, express that you're angry and why. The other person deserves to know why there's distance between you. You can't fix something that is hidden.

Guard it—follow ground rules. Every conflict needs ground rules. Don't resort to extreme exaggeration words like "always" and "never." Be careful to stay focused on the specific action or words that upset you, telling the person how it made you feel.

Attacking the person rather than addressing the behavior is not healthy or acceptable communication.

Ask—don't attack. There are two (or more) sides to every story. You see things from your perspective. Ask questions and give the other person a chance to explain their perspective. Genuine curiosity about other perspectives is an indicator that you are handling anger in a healthy way.

Don't discard the relationship—repair it. Some relationships in life are disposable. But for the people closest to you, it's worth fighting for and repairing those relationships. Nobody is perfect. Not even you. Therefore, relationships are messy, and no relationship survives long-term without forgiveness. Healthy relationships need lots of apologies and forgiveness.

Anyone interested in supporting our testing services may make a designated donation to The Genesis Therapy Center and make clear that the amount donated is to go towards providing an assessment service for a child or adolescent. For further information, please contact our Executive Director, Catherine Fairfield, at 708-535-7320, ext. 11.

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