

Ep #29: The Power of Boundaries in Divorce and Co-parenting



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lauren Fair

[The Sensible Split](#) with Lauren Fair

Ep #29: The Power of Boundaries in Divorce and Co-parenting

You're listening to the Sensible Split Podcast, Episode 29. Today I'm talking about boundaries and why they are so important in managing and reducing conflict and protecting your peace.

The Sensible Split is a podcast for smart but overwhelmed women in search of a roadmap to a successful separation and divorce. If you are looking for guidance in navigating the practical, legal, and emotional aspects of divorce with confidence, this is the show for you. Here's your host, Master Certified Life and Divorce Coach, Divorce Attorney, and Mediator, Lauren Fair.

Hi there. Welcome back. I hope your January is off to a good start. In my house, we just celebrated my middle stepchild's 18th birthday. My stepdaughter, I cannot believe she's 18 already. I have been in her life since she was about five years old, and it really highlighted the cliché for me of kids just grow up so fast. When they're little, you just feel like it's going to be forever before they are 18 and working on getting out of the house. But it just has gone by really fast and I am excited to see her fly. So that's what's going on with me at home this month.

I'm still getting settled in my new office too and I've made a lot of progress there. Unfortunately, I do not have my podcast mic set up still, so you will need to bear with me today with my sort of less than ideal audio setup. I hope to have my normal setup ready to go again soon. But I wanted to get this episode out to you in the meantime.

And I wanna talk to you about boundaries today. Boundaries are so important in marriage and divorce and really just in navigating interactions with other humans. There are two main categories of boundaries that can come into play during divorce. The first one is exterior boundaries. When we talk about exterior boundaries, we're talking about drawing lines with others by making requests and following through on what you will do if that request is not respected.

The second type of boundary is interior boundaries. When we talk about interior boundaries, we're talking about listening to your inner voice and making decisions about how and when to express those internal voices. In this episode, I'm gonna introduce you to the basics of the first category, exterior boundaries.

Ep #29: The Power of Boundaries in Divorce and Co-parenting

In any relationship, boundaries are essential for defining personal space, emotional needs, and acceptable behaviors. Ooh, isn't that especially true in divorce and co-parenting? A lack of these boundaries can lead to a few different undesirable results. The first one being emotional overwhelm. Without clear boundaries, you might feel overwhelmed by the other person's emotional needs or demands leading to burnout or resentment. A lack of boundaries can lead to unclear expectations. When boundaries are not set both parties might have different expectations about various aspects of the relationship, like how they will communicate, for example.

A lack of boundaries can lead to a power imbalance, where one partner is dominating the relationship, where the other partner's needs and desires are neglected and disregarded, for example. And a lack of boundaries can lead to difficulty resolving conflict. Boundaries help guide how conflicts are handled, and without them, disagreements may escalate with no clear resolution or respect for each other's views and needs.

I love this topic because when you learn the skill of setting and enforcing boundaries it can really change your life and increase your relationship satisfaction and overall sense of peace. So even if satisfaction with the relationship doesn't seem possible, when we're talking about particularly like a co-parenting relationship that is challenging, we want to achieve an overall increase though in your own sense of peace and boundaries can help you do that, okay?

So first let's look at what is a boundary to begin with. A boundary is a self-protection mechanism consisting of two simple parts. The first part is a request to change a behavior. The second part is a consequence if that request is not respected. A boundary is something you create for yourself. It's akin to a property boundary. It delineates where one person ends and another begins.

There, I have found, is a bit of a misconception about what a boundary is and so I want to talk about specifically what a boundary is not and what a boundary is. It is not a way to control the other person or manipulate their behavior. I wanna give you some examples. An example such as this, I wish he would not let our son watch so much TV at his house. If you make a request to the other person

Ep #29: The Power of Boundaries in Divorce and Co-parenting

in this scenario as I would prefer, please don't let our son watch so much TV on your time. That's the request. If that request is not honored, this is not appropriate to set a boundary for. It's not appropriate because a violation of that request is not a violation of your personal or physical space. So it's not a boundary issue and it's not appropriate to create a consequence. That's just your opinion that he should not be allowing your child to watch so much TV over there, you might be right. But a violation of that is not something that involves a need to protect yourself, your personal or physical space. Okay, so that's not a boundary. It's also not an ultimatum, okay? Boundaries are not ultimatums.

It's not a way of controlling other people, okay, so we can feel better. So we just want to be very mindful when we're thinking about setting a boundary, is this the appropriate context in which to set a boundary? Is this relating to a need to protect myself in some way? Or is this just like a wish that I had for someone else to behave differently? Those are two very different things, okay?

Boundaries are important in divorce for a number of reasons. Boundaries create realistic expectations for a relationship. Relationships function best when each party knows what to expect. When needs and expectations aren't communicated, resentment and anger grow, even when the other person doesn't know. Maybe they don't know, right? What the needs and expectations are, and they probably don't know that you're getting pissed off that they aren't meeting them.

Healthy boundaries promote self-responsibility and empowerment and lead to better relationships with others. Boundaries should always come from a place of love to promote self-kindness. So by creating boundaries, you're creating a safe space for you to be at your best. It will help you take care of you and give yourself grace and strength as you create your new identity, maybe outside of your marriage, or maybe it's in it inside your marriage and trying to change the course of it.

If you don't set boundaries it can end in an eruption of built-up resentment and hostility and blaming the other person for our lack of boundaries. Weak boundaries can make it more difficult for you to move on and have peace, okay? And so whenever we are going to implement a boundary, it's important that we

Ep #29: The Power of Boundaries in Divorce and Co-parenting

implement strong boundaries. And what I mean by that is, when we communicate a boundary, we want to be prepared to enforce it. And I'll talk more about that in a moment. But the good news is that it is never too late to create boundaries in your relationship.

So let's look at how you can start creating them right now. First, you want to determine where a boundary needs to be set to resolve a problem in the relationship. So when you notice that there's a problem in the relationship that relates to an ability for you to protect yourself, you've got to determine what that boundary should be. Then, once you make that determination, you make the request, a step one, part one of the boundary.

The request is you're going to ask someone to change a certain behavior, whether they comply or not is up to them, but you're making the request. The second part is the consequence. You're going to tell the other person what you will do to self-protect if they do not comply with your request. And then you've got to follow through on the consequences. If the request is not honored, this is sometimes where it gets hard, but failure to follow through and act accordingly sends the message that the boundary doesn't truly exist. And we don't want that.

Because what it does is it reinforces to the other person that you can make requests, they cannot honor them, and that they can continue doing whatever it is without you changing how you interact in that relationship. Kind of like emboldens them. In most relationships, boundaries typically only need to be communicated when someone has violated them.

So once a boundary has been violated, you wanna communicate that they have crossed a boundary and clearly state the consequence that they do not stop. So for example, if you are not willing to be yelled at in a conversation, then after that has happened, like if no one's yelling at that point, you don't need to say, I won't tolerate being yelled at, right? But if that person has already yelled at you, then that would be the time to move forward and make the request that you not be yelled at.

Now I'm gonna give you a specific example about yelling here in just a minute. When a boundary is violated and you are carrying out the consequence, that's

Ep #29: The Power of Boundaries in Divorce and Co-parenting

just what you wanna do. Just carry out the consequences. You have a plan for when the boundary is violated, what that consequence is going to be, and you're just going to carry it out.

There is no need for an emotional response to the boundary violation, because when you allow yourself to get all emotionally upset about the fact that the boundary is violated, what you're doing there is just creating more suffering for yourself. It would be wonderful if everyone just did what we asked. We make a request and it gets followed. Wonderful.

But we know that oftentimes in relationships that doesn't happen. And probably for some of you, you're used to this bad behavior going on consistently. So while you make some requests that will be honored, you'll probably make some that will not be. And it may not be surprising that your request is not honored.

So don't argue with the reality of the fact that this person's continuing to be who they always have been, or at least in recent history have been. And just make peace with that. You have a consequence, carry out the consequence and carry on in your day. Don't give them the additional energy of you getting all upset about the fact that the boundary was violated, okay? This is about taking care of you and not about them.

Other people don't have to understand or agree with our boundaries in order for us to have them. So one of the most common areas boundaries are needed in divorce is in the area of communication.

So I am going to give you that example again. The request, if you're being yelled at, whether it's a conversation at home, maybe it's at an exchange of the kids, whatever it is, and he's yelling at you. The request is, I ask that you please be civil and not yell at me when we talk. The consequence, if you yell at me, I will hang up the phone or if you're in person, I will get in my car and drive away. It's that simple.

What is it that I am asking that they do? If they are not going to comply, here's what I'm going to do. And then you follow through with what that is. If he yells at you again, you get in the car and you drive away.

Ep #29: The Power of Boundaries in Divorce and Co-parenting

Respecting your boundaries may require you to mentally rehearse in order to prepare yourself for circumstances when you are most vulnerable. So that may be when you are at that exchange of the kids, right, and this is happening, and you've gotta be prepared, right, for enforcing that boundary. It might be when you're in the mediation room.

So you want to think about and prepare for how you are going to communicate and enforce a boundary in advance, work through all of the uncomfortable feelings and thoughts that you have about actually enforcing a boundary in advance so that you have a plan and you are prepared to follow through with it when you are in the most vulnerable state, which is when you're actually confronted with this problematic behavior.

You might be worried about how the other person's gonna react. It can be uncomfortable to have that conversation, to stand up for yourself. Let it be uncomfortable and do it anyway. It will be worth it.

It's not your fault If the other person gets upset or hurt so long as you approach this from a calm and positive place for yourself. You're each responsible for your own feelings. And if you're not in a calm and positive space, we want to get you there first. Prepare in advance. Journal about it, get your thoughts and feelings out, approach this from a clean space. If you don't feel like you can do this, I can help you.

I am just thinking about a client that I worked with where we worked on this. We worked on setting boundaries. Here's what she's available for in this relationship. And here's what she's not. She wanted to work on the marriage. She implemented boundaries. And there was change that happened there. Even though she was the only one working on herself, she was the only one taking these steps. She wanted to see if the relationship could improve. And when she started seeing where she was tolerating behavior that was not okay with her and we were able to set and implement boundaries. It caused a shift in the relationship.

You don't know how someone's gonna react until you actually take that step. But again, we're not doing this from the spirit of trying to control what they are doing.

Ep #29: The Power of Boundaries in Divorce and Co-parenting

You have to decide what kind of behavior is acceptable for you and decide where a boundary needs to be implemented in order to increase your level of peace from where it is right now, and good things will happen. Whether it's the other person changes how they're interacting with you, great. If not, you are changing how much energy you are willing to invest in dealing with that behavior, increasing your own level of peace in your life. That's what I want for you, okay?

So here are some questions I want you to ask yourself just to kind of get you going on identifying how boundaries might be able to help you. Number one, where is there conflict in my relationship that a boundary could help resolve? And this truly can be in any relationship. It could be in your marriage. It could be in a co-parenting relationship. It could even be in a relationship with your mother, for example. I know sometimes we have difficult relationships on many fronts, right? And that's different for different people, but this is one of the beauties of understanding how to handle boundaries. It can help you in so many different relationships, okay? So where is there conflict in a relationship that's important to you that a boundary could help resolve.

Second, what might get in the way of me communicating this boundary to the other person?

And third, how could I resolve that obstacle? If there's an obstacle to me communicating this boundary and enforcing it, how can I resolve that obstacle?

And if you need help with any of those parts, I would love to see you for a consultation soon. That's what I have for you today. I hope that this has been informative and you have a better sense of how boundaries could help you and your relationship and how to go about implementing those today.

I will look forward to talking with you again in the next episode. Take care.

If you've enjoyed today's show and don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can follow the show wherever you listen to your podcasts. And if you haven't already, I would really appreciate it if you could share the podcast with others who you think could benefit from it, and leave a rating and review to

Ep #29: The Power of Boundaries in Divorce and Co-parenting

let me know what you think. I would love your honest feedback so I can create an awesome podcast that is helpful to you.

Visit www.TheSensibleSplit.com/podcastlaunch for step-by-step instructions on how to follow, rate, and review.

Thank you so much for tuning in to this episode of *The Sensible Split*. If you're looking for more information and guidance to help you successfully navigate a divorce, please visit www.TheSensibleSplit.com.

Please remember, the information provided in this podcast is for general informational purposes only and is not intended to be, and should not be taken as, legal advice on any particular matter. The content of this podcast is not tailored to your specific, unique circumstances, and its transmission does not create or constitute an attorney-client relationship. Listeners are strongly advised to seek the advice of qualified legal professionals regarding their individual situation.