

SETTING BOUNDARIES WITH AGING PARENTS

When aging parents' needs are few it may be easy for adult children to meet them. Slowly, as elderly parents' needs increase, it can become harder.

Often adult children aren't aware that they're going above and beyond to meet their elderly parents' requests until they start to feel resentment, anger, frustration, etc. With clients who are experiencing these feelings I help them find ways they can set some boundaries with their elderly parents. Some clients find this easier than others.

For some, it's extremely hard to set boundaries with their parents because it has been an issue since they were young. The issue has resurfaced now that they're spending more time with their parents again. It can be difficult to feel comfortable setting boundaries in this situation because it's a long-standing family issue. If this describes you, you may need more support before you're ready to try setting boundaries with your parents.

For those who want to give it a try, here are five steps to setting boundaries with your elderly parents:

1. Figure out what keeps you hooked.

It takes two for a boundary to be violated. If you can figure out why you continue to allow it you have the option to change. Is it guilt? A desire to please? Fear of making your parents mad? If there is another reason you say yes when you really want to say no, it's possible that no amount of saying yes is going to change the way you feel. Once you deal with the underlying reason you'll likely feel more comfortable setting boundaries.

2. Ask yourself what saying no means.

I often find that clients view saying no as rejection. Are you rejecting your parents or simply turning down their request?

3. Determine if the request is something you, and only you, can fulfill.

Could a part-time caregiver meet your parents' needs? Can a housecleaner come in? Are there others in the family who could help?

4. Sit down and discuss with your parents what you can do and what you can't (or won't) do.

If you feel prepared for the emotional reaction you might get, explain why you can no longer meet all their needs: work, stress, health, other family obligations. Let them know what their options are: hire someone, move to assisted living, wait until you have time to handle it, etc.

5. Repeat steps 1-3 until you're more comfortable with saying no.

The upside to setting boundaries with your aging parents is that the time you spend with them, and they with you, has the potential to be more enjoyable.