

The Mother Lode

The definitive guide to setting healthy, mature boundaries with your mother...

(in which I revisit everything I've ever written about boundaries, add some new information, and put it one place...because boundaries are the #1 subject you ask about)

If setting boundaries were simply about the "how" – the mechanics of setting boundaries – we'd all have them.

But setting boundaries is also about acknowledging centuries of conditioning and programming that says women aren't allowed to be in charge of what happens to them AND tending to the very real fear we feel when we challenge that conditioning and programming.

It's about acknowledging and repairing trauma. It's about acknowledging fear of change and tribal shaming.

It's about learning to be clear and direct when we've been taught to be vague and indirect in order to get our needs met.

We are on a leading edge in the history of humanity...a tipping point in the evolution of equity and equality for women.

The first thing to do is become aware of your thoughts and feelings about setting boundaries. This will reveal why you're not setting them.

Here are some of the thoughts my clients have shared with me over the years (and I include myself in this...I am my own client):

I don't know what I am doing. It's not reasonable for me to have a boundary. I'm not worthy of having boundaries. It can't be done. It's impossible. The blowback isn't worth it. It's exhausting. I don't even want to approach it. It's terrifying. I'm being selfish. It's my fault. She's gonna be mad. She's going to be hurt. There's going to be no relationship. She'll kill me. It feels like I might die.

Here are some of the feelings my clients say they experience:

Guilt. Fear. Anxiety. Shame. Anger. Hopelessness. Helplessness. Overwhelm. Confusion. Regret.

Write down all the thoughts and feelings you currently have about setting boundaries with your mother. Get them out of your head and onto paper so you can see them. It's harder to take effective action when you're not aware of the thoughts and feelings driving the action.

You don't have to get rid of your thoughts and feelings (thank goodness, because that would be impossible), but being aware will help you find alternatives. Curiosity engages the creative, problem-solving part of your brain and signals your body that you are safe.

Here are some alternate thoughts:

I'm taking care of myself. I'm not trying to control her. She's allowed to behave however she likes...and I get to decide if I want to be around her. I am allowed to have preferences. My preferences matter. This is exciting! I'm taking responsibility for myself. There's no downside to a healthy, mature boundary. My boundaries serve a greater good. I am worthy of my own regard and respect. Clear is kind. <----- this is one is from Brené Brown

Notice how you feel as you read through those thoughts.

A healthy, mature boundary is about taking care of yourself from a place of kindness, not judging or trying to control your mother or her behavior.

Here's one "how": value + request + action + benefit = healthy boundary

Let's say your mother calls you every day, and you'd prefer to speak to her once a week.

Value: Be clear about what you value and want to cultivate in the relationship.

Example: Quality time

Request: Make a clear request.

Example: Please don't call me every day.

Action: Know what action you will take if she doesn't want to honor your request.

Example: Let's talk on Sundays at 1 p.m. If you call at other times, I won't answer the phone.

Benefit: Communicate the benefit your boundary will have on the relationship.

Example: When we talk on Sundays, I will be able to give you my undivided attention.

Not all boundaries have to be communicated. In the above example, you could simply not answer when your mother calls, and call her on Sundays at 1 p.m.

Nor do boundaries have to "benefit" the relationship, but for some, it's a helpful aspect. Word of caution here: don't let the benefit turn into an explanation or justification. Explaining and justifying come from a belief that it's not okay to have boundaries, and doing so will keep you in permission-seeking, defensive, immature energy.

"But you don't know MY mother, Karen. This won't work with my mother because she...rages, doesn't respect me, is passive-aggressive, has addictions, is narcissistic, has mental illness, etc."

You might equate "working" with your mother smiling and saying, "of course honey, that's fine with me." It's highly unlikely that will happen because she has her own unacknowledged

traumas and stresses, her own unconscious thoughts, and her own unprocessed emotions – and she will be triggered.

So yes, the relationship as it stands now may be at risk.

I'm not going to lie: this can be hard. Oftentimes you have to set the boundary more than once. You may forget or relax your boundaries. Your mother may scream and yell. She may cry. She may give you the silent treatment. She may threaten you. She may tell you she never wants to see you again. You may decide you never want to see her again.

And THAT is when you take care of yourself...re-mother yourself. Tend to the part of you that is disappointed, angry, or grieving. You cultivate a deeper relationship with yourself, a relationship based on respecting yourself.

I have been there and I have done that and I can tell you that is IS hard and it's also THE most important thing I have ever done for myself. It has impacted my life in so many positive ways and in so many areas.

"But I am still afraid."

OF COURSE you are. I am too, sometimes. We have finely tuned nervous systems and years of experience with our mothers.

Fear isn't weakness.

Fear isn't pathetic.

Fear isn't bad.

Fear isn't stupid.

Your amazing body is simply doing its job. Your fear is your ally. And you can tend to it and yourself in support of the boundaries you want to have.

You can be afraid AND have healthy boundaries.

So the final piece is befriending and tending to your nervous system. Understanding how and why it works the way it does.

Notice your own anger (fight), the impulse to run away (flight), "disappearing" or becoming numb when you're standing right there (freeze), or your instinct to want to make it all better for her so she won't be hurt or upset (fawn).

And, most importantly! Not beating yourself up for what is a normal, human bodily function.

Nervous System Regulating Practices (aka ways to send cues and signals of safety to your body)

- Look up and out. Look at the sky or ceiling or horizon.
- Affirm your presence: “I am here. My name is _____. It is [date, time] and I am here in [location].”
- When you breathe, make your exhale longer than your inhale.
- Cross your arms and alternate patting your hands on the opposite upper arm.
- Pat your whole body.
- Shake it out.
- Growl. Bare your teeth.
- Twist. Turn from your waist and then from your neck and peer behind you.
- Hum or chant or sing.
- Rock or sway.
- Dance
- Use your fists to lightly pound your solar plexus (not too hard) and go “ahhhhh.”
- Toss a ball or some other object between your hands.

You now have everything you need to set boundaries with your mother.

If you want direct support from me on this send me an email at karen@kclanderson.com or **[click here to learn more about The Mother Lode 1:1 Mentorship.](#)**

Much, much love,

Karen