

Co-Parenting for Domestic Violence
Class Thirty-
Control, Personal Rights, and Boundaries
By Yvonne Sinclair M.A., LMFT

Within a relationship, each partner possesses personal rights. A healthy relationship allows each partner to remain an individual. The partners are together because they want to be together -- not because they *need* to be together. Each partner has their own personal boundaries and the right to respect and privacy. When parents separate those rights can be blurred or disrespected out of spite. When children are involved the adults need to monitor their treatment of each other. The way you behave will model for your child how to behave in a stressful situation.

In a healthy relationship, trust is automatic. However, sometimes distorted thinking, irrational ideas, or mistaken assumptions hinder our ability to trust and to partake in a healthy relationship. If your relationship together did not look like this, your relationship apart need to change into this sort of respect for each other to assist your child in this new and stressful environment.

Rights;

We may assume we do not have rights. We may think it is selfish to prioritize our needs before the needs of others. We may also think it is selfish to demand that our views should be respected. We may also think it is unacceptable to ever make a mistake. We may feel the pressure to always be flexible, consistent, and logical. We may think our emotions are not as important as our partner's emotions. These are *all* mistaken assumptions.

Each person has rights. Even your children have rights. These rights include the following: the right to make mistakes, the right to have respected and honored feelings, the right to have an active voice in what happens in the relationship, a right to privacy when and where necessary, a right to make mistakes, a right to put yourself first, a right to ask for emotional support, a right to ask for sex, a right to respect the answer, a right to change your mind, and a right to be wrong. In a healthy relationship, these rights are honored and respected.

Irrational Ideas;

Irrational ideas can interfere with the functioning of your relationship. These ideas may hinder good communication. They may restrain you from experiencing the joy and happiness waiting for you.

Irrational ideas are beliefs that are not true. Here are examples of irrational ideas: there is a solution to all problems. Your history determines your present behavior, and you are not in charge of changing that behavior for the future. You can make another person mad. Happiness originates from an outside source such as another person. You do not have the ability to be happy without help. An adult must be loved and respected by *all* other people. If you are *not* completely competent and successful, then you are worthless. If things are not the way you wish, then it is the end of the world. It is easier to avoid facing problems, difficulties, and responsibilities than it is to face them. You are nothing without a partner. These are all irrational ideas, and believing any of these ideas is detrimental to your relationship.

Distorted Thinking;

Distorted thinking patterns will also destroy your ability to have a healthy relationship. These thinking patterns interfere with direct, clear communication. They even completely stop communication and any chance to reaching a resolution to an issue.

“Should” interferes with your ability to be on the same page as your partner or ex-partner. (I hear you saying, “I don’t intend to be on the same page with them anymore.” I would like you to consider changing that thought to include your child’s welfare and changing it to, “I don’t want to be on the same page, however, I will put forth an effort for the sake of the children.”) Saying, “*You* should...” suggests that the speaker knows what you need and does not respect your right to decide.

Taking everything personally is also a form of distorted thinking. Sometimes things are just “not about us.” It may not be in *your* figurate “basket” as much as it belongs in person’s basket. That theory helps you to stop taking things personally when they are not intended in that manner. Believing you have control over anything but yourself is a fallacy. The next section will explain this issue in more depth.

“Fair” is a form of distorted thinking. You have probably heard the saying, “Life is not fair.” Well, that is true, and if you can come to terms with that concept, then you will be much happier. Distorted thinking also exists when you believe other people will change if you complain, yell, and manipulate others. People do not change when they are under attack. Labeling is also a form of distorted thinking. One race of people is not *all* bad or *all* good. People from each religion are not *all* good or *all* bad. Blondes are not *all* airheads, and sometimes people with other hair color can be airheads. Not all women are subservient, and not all men are mean. You get the idea.

Believing someone must be right, and the other person must be wrong is a *huge* fallacy. Two people can disagree and both be right. Oh, yes! You read that correctly. Two people can attend the same event, spend a day in the same place, but still have totally different experiences. The experience for each person is *truth* for that person or his/her reality. As a result, they can both be “right.” If you believe someone must be wrong, then you have adopted a “distorted” thinking pattern. When you are co-parenting a child as separated parents, this concept is especially important. It will prevent arguments and bad feelings.

Here is a good place to address the pattern of black-and-white thinking. Things are usually not all black and all white. There are gray areas, too. This is also true in a relationship. Not only does each partner have his/her own reality, but there are the gray areas to consider as well. It is a distorted thinking form to believe that others automatically know what you want or need just because they care about you. Not many of us are mind readers. If you want your needs met and your wishes fulfilled, then *you* must clearly communicate those needs and wishes.

Control;

If you come from an abusive family of origin, then control may be extremely important to you. Sometimes being abused means the victim lacks control of even their own body. As these abused people become adults, “control” may be a primary focus. Reviewing what we truly have control over is one tool to help us feel more in control of our lives. Ultimately, the only thing we have *true* control of is our self. It is not really possible to control others. We may know the other person’s triggers and buttons, but they are the ones to decide how he/she feels and acts. News flash; you do not have control over your child. You can make it uncomfortable for them to refuse to do what you want, but you cannot “make” them do anything. They have to choose to comply no matter what you do to them. So, with that in mind, use your adult smarts to “make” them behavior the way you prefer, it will be so much easier than “brut force.”

Personal boundaries;

Personal boundaries are sometimes hard to comprehend. Sometimes we have no idea what boundaries we “should” have or what boundaries we want. Only you can make this decision. Personal boundaries are your personal rules about other people being with you or in your personal “world.” For example, one personal boundary may be the following: people in my world do not call others names. Another personal boundary is: I don’t stay in a relationship that is not nurturing for me. Personal boundaries are important as a parent. Showing your child you have a right to privacy, time to

yourself, respectful responses, privacy of belongings, and a right to an adult relationship not shared with the child will model for your child a healthy dynamic.

Non-Nurturing Boundaries;

Let's start with boundaries that are not nurturing. This type of boundary (or way of being in your world), will diminish your personal rights. It may cause the feeling of "being out of control." This way of "being" diminishes your feelings of self-worth. Others direct your life, and they tell you what to feel and do. Emotional, sexual, verbal and/or physical abuse is allowed and tolerated.

Trust is difficult. You may not trust a single person, or you may disclose everything. There are no boundaries about what you talk about, and you tell all. First sexual impulses are acted upon, and you fall "in love" immediately. You don't stay true to yourself, and you please others before yourself. You have sex to please a partner even if you don't want to have sex. Keep in mind that people with poor boundaries don't notice other's poor boundaries.

Nurturing Boundaries;

These boundaries, or way of being in your world, will increase your feeling of control over your world, and they will encourage your feelings of self-worth to grow. Trust is not immediately given to others. Instead, trust is appropriately granted to others as they prove themselves to be trustworthy. You talk about yourself when you know it is safe, and you reveal only what is needed and appropriate.

Falling in love is done in steps and with clear thinking. Self-pleasure is important to you in any sexual activity. "No" is a part of your vocabulary, and you use it when you don't want to participate or accept something. You clearly communicate your needs and desires. You don't expect others to fulfill those needs automatically, but you are clear in your asking. You know your friends and partners are not mind readers. You stay in touch with your values regardless of others' needs. You ask permission before you touch others, and you ask for the same respect. You notice when others are displaying inappropriate and/or poor boundaries. You notice when others are not respecting your personal boundaries.

Relationship Boundaries;

Relationship boundaries may be different than your personal boundaries. They may include boundaries about how your partner treats your children, your social life with your partner, or rights to personal privacy. Even though you are in a relationship, your

personal boundaries are important and necessary. If you give up your personal boundaries, then your relationship becomes less healthy. Your boundaries as co-parents will include respecting each other's rights around visitation and information about your child. Your boundaries may include how flexible you are in changing things.

You are in a relationship with your ex-partner. Sorry to tell you that, but your relationship is parenting a child or children, whether together or apart. The more functional and respectful you can manage that relationship, the more "in your child's best interest" it is.

Copyright 2011. All material contained herein is owned and protected. Any attempts to reproduce this information without the express written consent from the owner will be prosecuted.