
Boundaries in Families



MHA of NJ



Families

- The family is designed to provide a safe, nurturing environment where each individual family member and the family as a whole can grow into their full potential.
- However, there are examples of unhealthy communication where we become too dependent on what other's think and enmeshment or overly close relationships develop
- In situations where enmeshment happens, individual family members can become too dependent on the opinions and feelings of their family member

Parents and families

- Parents have the responsibility for leading and guiding their children, and when children are brought into decision-making discussions it blurs those boundaries and confuses everyone.
- As children get older there can be more negotiation but never should adolescent or teenage children feel like they have as much say in family matters as their parents do.
- Boundaries help ensure that families do not become enmeshed and help create healthy, self-differentiated adults.
- Differentiation is a family therapy term that means you are connected to your family but still have your own sense of self

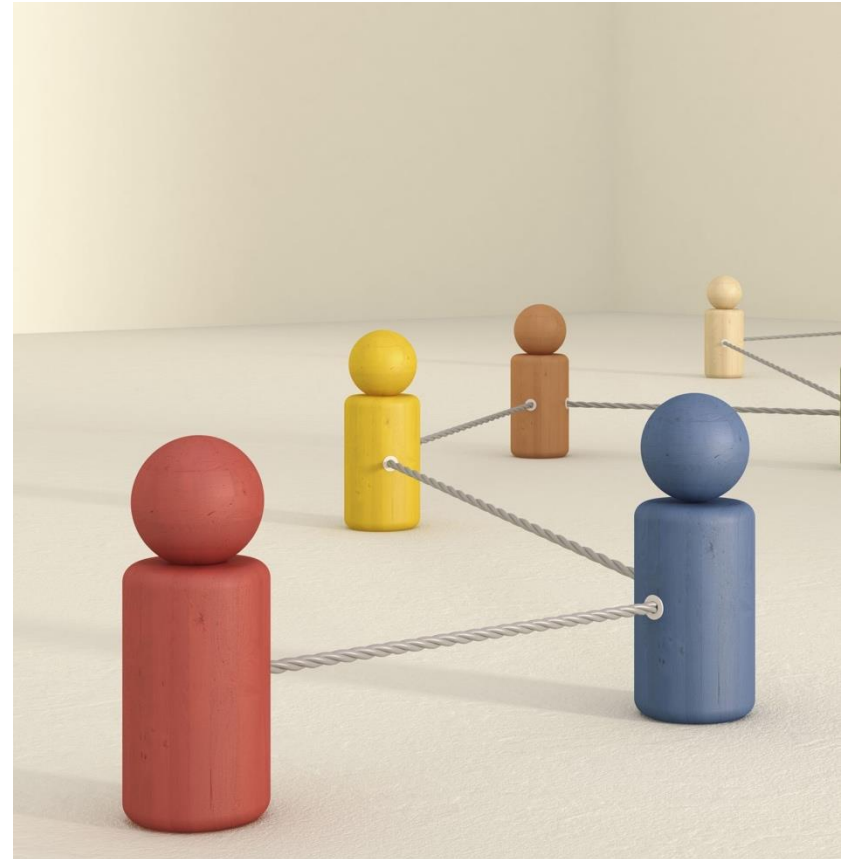
Boundaries

- Boundaries are most important between the parents and children
- Parents are encouraged to lead their children and to keep them physically, mentally and emotionally safe
- It is sometimes referred to parents being on the top floor of the house and children on the lower floor.
- One of the best means of healthy boundaries is clear and effective communication
- When these boundaries are blurred, problems tend to erupt.
- Families need to recognize where boundaries have been blurred and where family members have felt unable to develop as interdependent individuals.



Boundaries

- Boundaries can be viewed on a continuum from open to closed
- Families have a way of including and excluding information so that the line between those within the family or system and those outside the family or system is clear to all
- Permeable and vague boundaries are considered open
- Open boundary systems allow elements and situations outside the family to influence it; It may even welcome external influences
- Closed boundary systems isolate its members from the environment and seem separate and self contained
- No family system is completely open or completely closed




Healthy Boundaries




- Healthy boundaries are the emotional, physical, and psychological limits we set in our relationships to protect our well-being and maintain a sense of self.
- These boundaries are vital for creating an environment where each family member can thrive while respecting each other's individuality.
- Healthy boundaries are the foundation of harmonious family dynamics. They protect individual well-being while fostering open communication and understanding within the family. Recognizing the signs of unhealthy boundaries and seeking help through marriage and family counseling can lead to positive changes that benefit everyone involved.

Types of Boundaries

Emotional boundaries define how much emotional energy and information we share with others. It's crucial to know when to say no to protect your feelings and prevent emotional burnout.



Physical boundaries pertain to personal space and touch. They determine your comfort level with physical contact and personal space invasion.



Psychological boundaries relate to your thoughts and values. They involve respecting each family member's beliefs and opinions, even if they differ from your own.

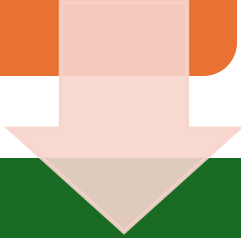
What do boundaries do

Healthy boundaries play a crucial role within family dynamics, enhancing communication, preserving individual identity and autonomy, facilitating conflict resolution, and promoting emotional well-being.

When healthy boundaries are in place, families experience open and honest communication. Each member feels safe expressing themselves, fostering better understanding and empathy among family members.

What do boundaries do (continued)

Healthy boundaries empower individuals to maintain their identities and autonomy within the family. They can pursue personal goals and interests without feeling overwhelmed by external pressures.



Conflicts are inevitable, but healthy boundaries enable constructive resolution. When boundaries are understood and respected, conflicts can be addressed calmly and effectively.

Examples of Unhealthy Boundaries

Recognizing signs of unhealthy boundaries is crucial for improvement:

Lack of privacy and personal space

Feeling responsible for others' emotions

Difficulty saying "no" to unreasonable requests

Constantly seeking approval from family members

Ignoring your own needs to meet others' demands

Spending time with your family

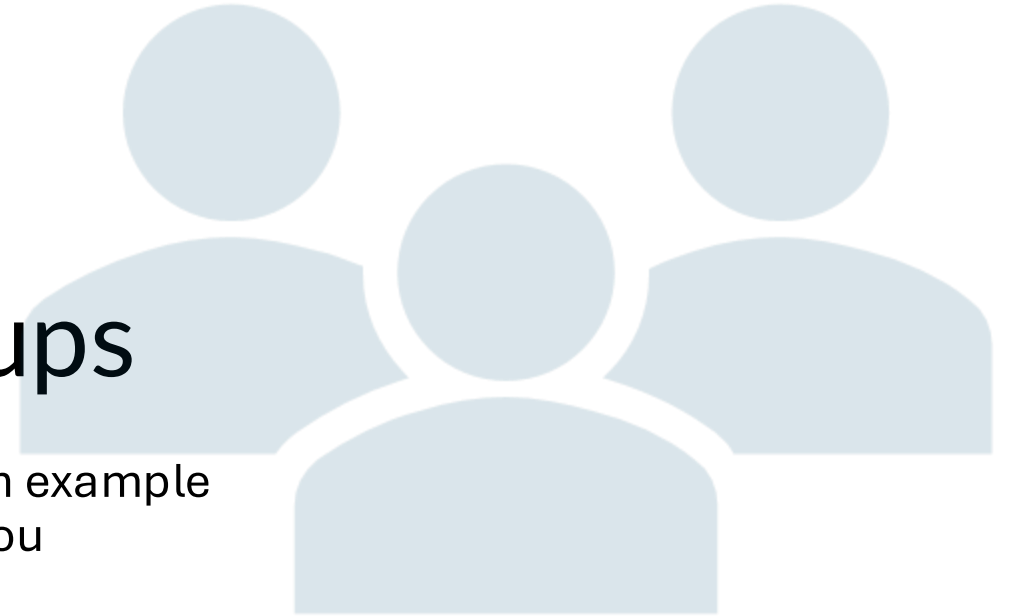
- Sometimes spending extra time with our families helps identify some concerns in regard to your family's communication and behavior
- Who pairs off with whom?
- In the emotional nature of family relationships there is often triangulation, which allows for close communication with one family member and conflict with another. This allows for a special close relationship with one family member at the expense of another family members. This is seen as two insiders and outsider or triangulation





Zoom break out groups

- Pair up into groups of three and discuss an example of each of the three types of boundaries you observe in your family
- 1) Emotional
- 2) Physical
- 3) Psychological

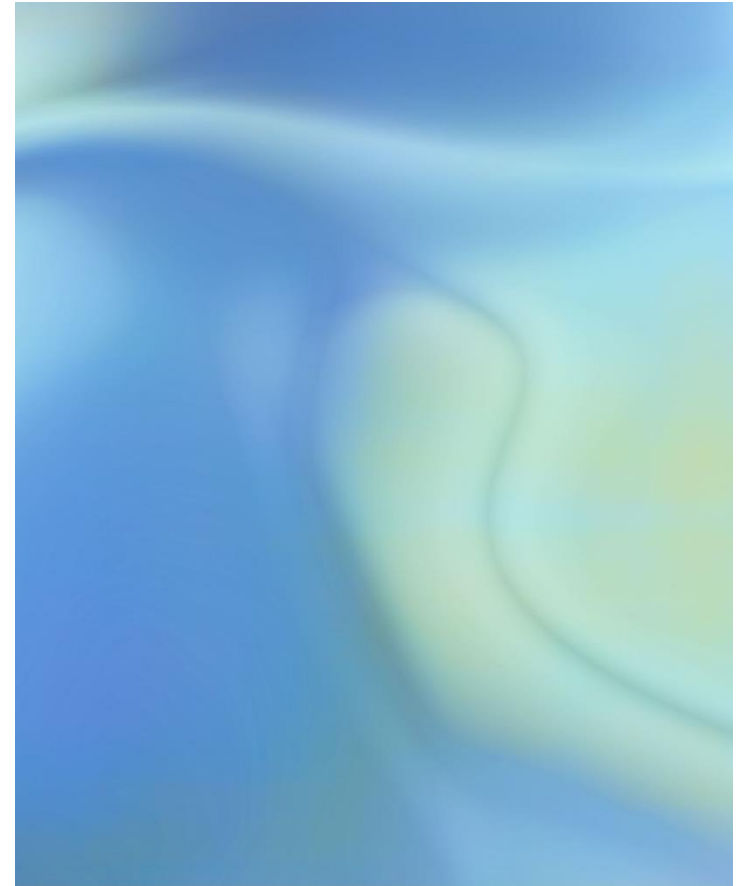


Unhealthy communication patterns

Maybe when you and your spouse are having an argument, you like to get the support of one of your children (or maybe you even call in the support of someone not living in your home, like one of your parents, siblings, or a friend).

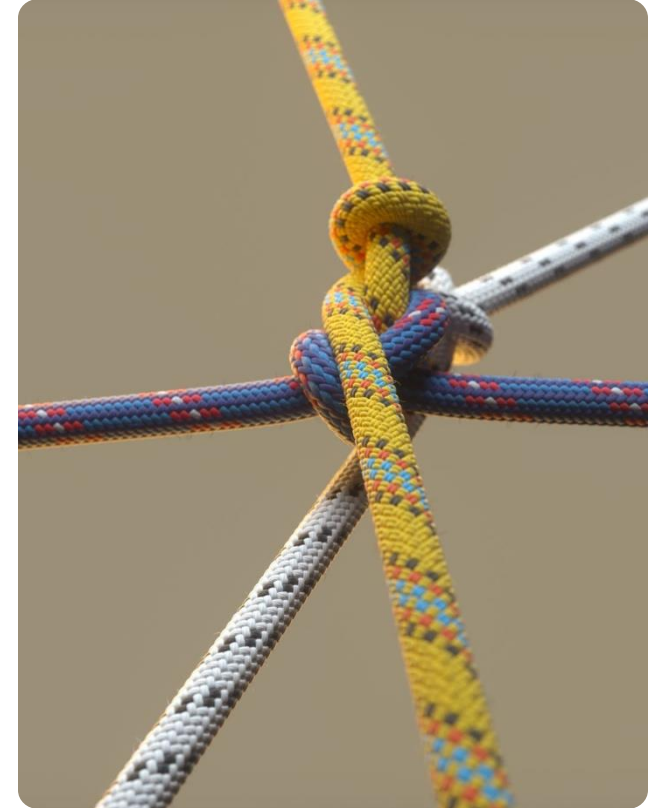
This is especially problematic for a child who is likely to feel conflicted about which “side” to take in an argument between their parents.

Try to keep the support you need inside the family with the decision makers and use resources such as this to support the decisions you have made together.



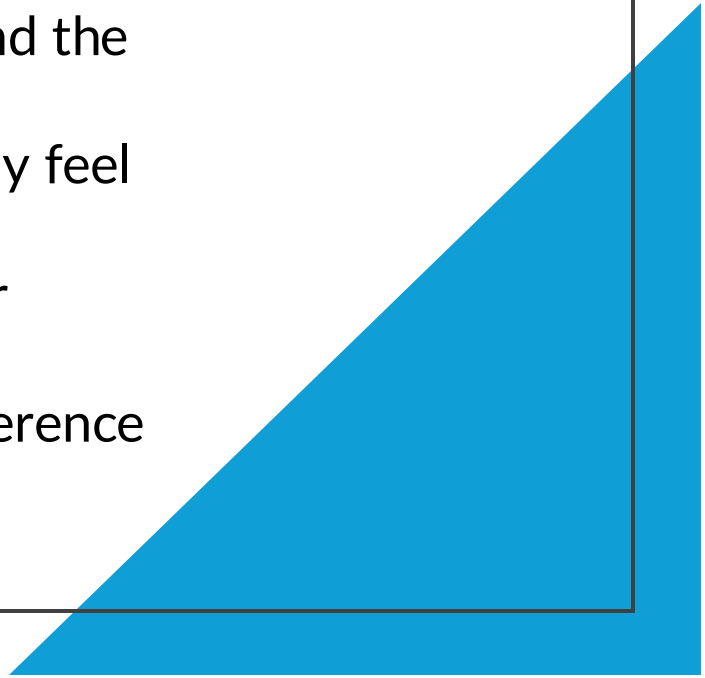
Triangulation

- A basic building block of relationships is a twosome or dyadic pair.
- However, because any two some is inherently unstable we rope in a third person (It is like a two legged barstool, rarely seen)
- The reason a two person system is unstable is because it tolerates little tension before involving a third person
- When we involve a third party the tension decreases because it is re-routed through the third person or thing
- The tension can now shift around the three relationships



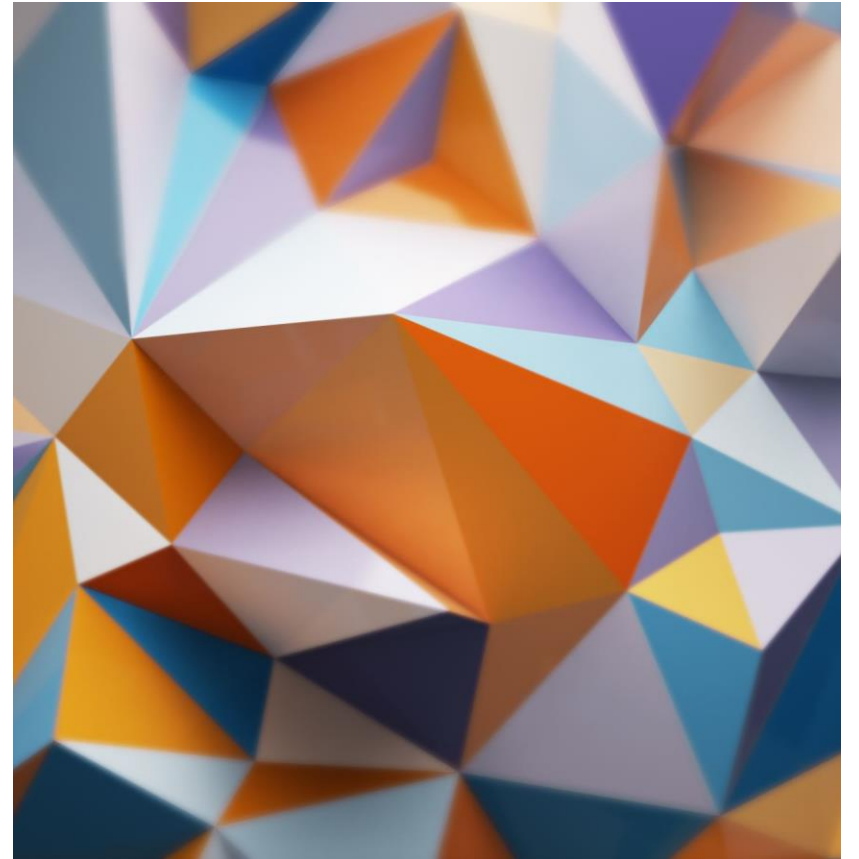
Triangulation

- The patterns in a triangle change with increasing tension.
- In calm periods, two people are comfortably close “insiders” and the third person is an uncomfortable “outsider.”
- The insiders actively exclude the outsider, and the outsider may feel rejected and work to get closer to one of them.
- Someone is always uncomfortable in a triangle and pushing for change.
- The insiders solidify their bond by choosing each other in preference to the less desirable outsider.



Triangulation

- If mild to moderate tension develops between the insiders, the most uncomfortable one will move closer to the outsider.
- One of the original insiders now becomes the new outsider, and the original outsider is now an insider.
- The new outsider will make predictable moves to restore closeness with one of the insiders.
- At moderate tension levels, triangles usually have one side in conflict and two harmonious sides. Conflict is not inherent in the relationship in which it exists, but reflects the overall functioning of the triangle.



Triangulation

- At a high level of tension, the outside position becomes the most desirable.
- If severe conflict erupts between the insiders, one insider opts for the outside position by getting the current outsider fighting with the other insider.
- If the maneuvering insider is successful, he gains the more comfortable position of watching the other two people fight.
- When the tension and conflict subside, the outsider will try to regain an inside position.



Secrets are like unwritten rules

- When unhealthy communication happens, it is often because of these triangles
- Families usually have unspoken rules on what behavior is acceptable and what isn't
- When we break these rules, the family adapts in a healthy way by speaking to the person, but when we withhold it, or involve a third person, this can create a secret
- Unhealthy communication happens as a result and one way this can be avoided is to rebalance the relationships by talking honestly about one's feelings

Examples of unhealthy communication

- Unhealthy communication can sometimes lead to a person deciding that *emotional cutoff* is the best option—this cutoff can range from partial to complete.
- Emotional cutoff often leads to increased importance of the role of other relationships in that person's life.
- For example, if a woman decides to cutoff from her family of origin, she will often look to fulfill some of those needs in her spouse.

Examples of unhealthy communication

- The biggest source of distress in families is a lack of boundaries and a lack of respect for healthy boundaries.
- If a child has parents who cannot emotionally regulate and understand the importance of boundaries, the children do not learn how to set healthy boundaries. Families with unhealthy boundaries are fraught with conflict and drama.
- How to say no with kindness, is key in setting healthy boundaries for your well-being.

How to have healthy communication

- Be clear with your family members about your needs and demonstrate healthy behavior when familiar patterns arise.
- Communicate your needs assertively with kindness and empathy. Some family members will try to trivialize your boundaries by creating conflict or turning defensive. Be aware that these family patterns are used to manipulate you in their favor. Do not take the bait. They want you to play along.
- State your boundaries and stand by them. Do not justify yourself. Healthy family members will respect your boundaries.





Mantra

- Say this out loud everyone
- “I understand that I must first value myself and my experience to create healthy relationships. The only person that can validate my experience is me.”