

Forgiving Family: Setting Healthy Boundaries

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ALTON - The way that family is portrayed in television and films can sometimes paint the picture-perfect family and more often than not it has a dysfunctional family. The one thing they all have in common, says Centerstone Regional CEO John Markley, is that despite the portrayals of perfection or dysfunction, is the common theme that no family is, in fact, perfect.

"Family can be stressful for any person to deal with, but what about the maintenance?" says Markley. "How do we continue to repair and build healthy relationships with family members? One answer to this is learning to set healthy boundaries."

Markley says in order to determine what kind of boundaries to put in place for yourself and your family members, there needs to be a sense of self-reflection. Understand that no family is alike and everyone's experiences are completely different with upbringing and previous trauma. There can be a lot of unlearning to be done and parenting is not always a success. Know that there is always room for growth and change within yourself and your relationships, but understand that without communication there is no moving forward.

"Imagine that you and a family member are arguing," says Markley, "and there does not seem to be any improvement. Forgiveness might be one way to reach a resolution, but this is not as simple as saying I forgive you, there needs to be some work done on yourself and by those other family members."

Below are some tips for forgiving your family and how to begin having those conversations about healthy boundary setting:

- **Reflection.** There needs to be self-reflection. What is your worth? Determine what your needs are from this relationship. Ask yourself: Why do I have these beliefs or values? Why do I use these coping mechanisms? Recognize where it all stems from and you can see that you do have a choice in the matter.
- **Communication.** There needs to be open conversation about feelings to begin setting boundaries. This is a stage where you can acknowledge feelings, really naming and normalizing them. Modeling communication from a therapeutic perspective can help engage your loved one. Try saying something like this: "I just noticed you seem uncomfortable about this—let's talk about it." Creating a safe space to discuss is imperative when articulating your feelings.
- **It takes time.** Know that it is never too late to repair a strained relationship. There is always a chance to try and reconcile with your family. "Sometimes boundaries will be met with resistance and that is normal. If the relationship is that important to you, keep adjusting those boundaries and determining what that they might look like for you," says Ericka Davis, In-Home Therapist for Centerstone's Early Childhood Services.
- **Offer understanding.** "Understanding that for family and parents to give something that they never experienced is hard. Though, likely most parents and family can remember their time as a child and can relate through their own experiences," says Davis. Once there is understanding present there is recognition and acknowledgment that there is a way to work towards a healthier relationship.

Markley continues that family relationships and healing are non-linear. Understand that people can revert back to old behaviors and attitudes, but you can keep setting those boundaries and adjusting to best suit your needs. Setting boundaries is a very brave and personal choice to make but know that you hold the power.

If you or someone you know is struggling with their mental health contact us at Centerstone. Call 1-877-HOPE123 or visit us at centerstone.org.



John Markley serves as Regional CEO in Illinois, serving residents in eastern and southern Illinois through more than 30 locations that provide treatment, support, and educational programs and services to individuals who have mental health and addiction disorders and specialized services for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Centerstone employs over 525 staff in Illinois and serves more than 17,000 individuals annually.

About Centerstone

Centerstone is a not-for-profit health system providing mental health and substance use disorder treatments. Services are available nationally through the operation of outpatient clinics, residential programs, the use of telehealth and an inpatient hospital. Centerstone also features specialized programs for the military community, therapeutic foster care, children's services and employee assistance programs. Centerstone's Research Institute provides guidance through research and technology, leveraging the best practices for use in all our communities. Centerstone's Foundation secures philanthropic resources to support the work and mission of delivering care that changes people's lives.