

Why Boundaries are Important for Healing:

By Ron Petit

THROUGH THE YEARS, many of the clients that I have worked with have had difficulties with interpersonal boundaries as one of the primary concerns for which they seek help. Others often discover that this is one of their issues after a few sessions of the Rolfing work I do. After experiencing a release of tension in their bodies, these individuals were often able to discern that much of the tension had occurred as a result of internalizing their feelings in significant interactions with others or because they had not taken good care of themselves in these relationships and allowed people to mistreat them. Both groups had the same problems with setting limits with other people and effectively enforcing their boundaries when people stepped across them.

Many of the above clients were aware, or became aware, through our work together that they also had had their boundaries violated at an earlier age. Whether the boundary violation was covert or more obvious, they often ended up with confusion about their right to set limits, as well as having residual dependency needs complicate the picture. Often, individuals who were having their boundaries violated at an early age were also being deprived of critical nurturing and support at the same time. Understandably, many of these people adopted a survival strategy involving being more agreeable or perhaps a caretaker of others, in the hope that they would be liked and cared about as a result. Oftentimes, in their adult lives, these same individuals found that these childhood strategies no longer worked and they often felt taken advantage of or mistreated by others or inadequate in relationship to many of their adult responsibilities.

Boundary Problems Show up in Joints

A parallel observation that I noted with these individuals was that many of them also had problems, tensions, and misalignments in the joints of their bodies. If one considers that joints are heavily enwrapped with ample myofascial tissue and ligaments, and these structures are central to movement in the joints, one may begin to intuit why these joint problems occur so often with this group of people.

Intrinsic or autonomous subtle movements that occur in the joints of the body are essentially limited by the amount of tone present in the ligaments as well as their structural arrangement around the joint. If ligaments actually defined and limited the amount of intrinsic movement that could occur in a joint, could it be there was a relationship between this limiting function and the limiting function of setting boundaries with others? As it turned out in my

practice, those people who had difficulty setting limits with people outside of themselves usually were the ones who would ultimately have limits set within themselves in their myofascial network and in the soft tissues that controlled joint movement. Clearly, the energy of repressed emotional responses to boundary issues did not simply disappear, but rather was internalized via the coordination of the autonomic nervous system. Physiologists would tell us that a young child that is being traumatized freezes their response and registers this freezing by elevating the sympathetic branch of this part of the nervous system. Shortened soft tissue that changes structure in the body is also mediated by this same autonomic nervous system.

As I began to work more with the ligamentous structures as well as the larger fascial sheaths in my clients, I noticed that the increased mobility produced in the large muscle groups and the increased motility or subtle movement possibilities produced in the joints dovetailed and had far-reaching results. Overall body tension decreased, fluidity of movement was enhanced, and conscious recall of the origins of much of the tension also increased. Individuals who had their joint movement enhanced often became aware of how and why they had stiffened them to begin with. Individuals so freed also often became more aware of when they were allowing others to disrespect their boundaries. With this increased awareness and a little coaching, many of them also began to become aware of better options such as being assertive and defining their boundaries more clearly as a way of creating emotional safety.

People Can Learn to set Boundaries

As I focused more on teaching clients how to set boundaries more adequately, what I noticed was that they held the changes from the structural work better. They seemed to become better at defining who they were, what their preferences were, and what they would and would not tolerate. The more they persisted along this path, the stronger their self-esteem became and the more focused and energized their sense of self. Their joints fared much better also and the myofascial and joint work involving their ligaments seemed to go much better. Increased grace and coordination of movement was the result.

It is my hope, as bodyworkers, that when we detect the interplay between structural problems and emotional and boundary issues, that we might gently and respectfully explore this relationship. With sensitive and nonjudgmental listening, as well as appropriate coaching, we can encourage our clients to explore claiming and creating healthy boundaries for themselves. This in turn can accelerate the fruition of our hands-on work with them, which will have far-reaching effects throughout their entire beings and assist in the integration

of the physical structure, the emotions, and their skill in relating to others.

Ron Petit, MS, MA, is a Certified Rolfer and a Licensed Professional Counselor practicing at:

Winter Health and Wellness, 5183N Crawford Street, Winter, W 54896, 715-266-2444.

Sunlife, 204 E Linn, Marshalltown, Iowa 50158, 641-752-6255.

The Body Clinic, 303 E Marion St, Knoxville, IA 50138, 641-828-8703.