Boundaries are basic:
When we choose to improve our lives, we often think about the basics of building better health, focusing on nutrition, exercise and rest. While these are excellent aspects of our lives to improve, there is another aspect that we should consider – boundaries. Most of us never even think about them, but the truth is that boundaries are essential to experiencing wellness, because when we live a life with no boundaries, we can feel overwhelmed and stressed. Feeling stressed can cause us to make unhealthy choices that make us feel worse.

Who are you?
The simplest way to think about boundaries is to consider that they define what “is” us, and also what “is not” us. Boundaries let us understand our roles and our responsibilities and they set expectations for behavior within our relationships. Most of us have relationships with other people – including family, friends, coworkers and neighbors – and we need to make our boundaries visible and understood, so they will know what is appropriate behavior. Our boundaries help them to know what's important to us.

Beyond this point there be dragons!
The standard definition for boundaries will often include the words limit, dividing line or border. Establishing boundaries lets us know what is important to us, acceptable, or what feels comfortable for us. Think about them like a property line. To go beyond a boundary or to push the limits of a boundary usually results in creating stress or creating something different than what it was. The dictionary talks about a limit being the point at which something ends, or beyond which it becomes something else. Becomes something else – unhappy, stressed, overwhelmed, distressed … you get the picture. When someone crosses or trespasses our personal boundaries we feel bad.

Talking to yourself lately?
Have you ever heard yourself say “I can't keep doing this much longer?” If you’ve said this, then there's a good chance that you have been doing something that goes against your personal boundaries that you are either ignoring or afraid to discuss. Or, perhaps you’ve wondered why someone treated you badly, or took advantage of you. These are situations where boundaries have either been ignored or not set in the first place. Many of us are afraid to set boundaries because we don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings, make them angry, or we don’t want to be abandoned or avoided. If we don’t set boundaries, we end up hurting ourselves.

We should set personal boundaries for every part of our lives: our relationships with family members, friends, co-workers and especially with ourselves. The easiest boundary to recognize is distance. We can separate ourselves from other people by either moving across the country or across the room. A more difficult boundary to set is to establish guidelines for your personal relationships or for yourself.

You first:
Although it may be easiest to start reviewing boundaries with regards to other people in your life, the best place to start reviewing boundaries is with yourself. You know you have a boundary issue with yourself if you feel like your behavior is out of control in any area. Overeating, spending too much money, not being able to say “no,” failing to manage your time,
and failing to complete projects are just a few areas where boundary issues can arise.

The first step in setting boundaries is to understand what’s important to you. You may need to make a list. Armed with this knowledge, you can start thinking about what situations in your life made you feel like you were doing something that you didn’t agree with. Then you should try to understand the symptoms, causes and end results. When we understand the end result of our behavior we often get inspired to make any necessary changes.

What to do this week:

- Think of some areas or events in your life where you feel like you have inadequate or no boundaries. Write them down.
- Think about the final outcome of these events and how you felt or feel about them.
- Think about how establishing boundaries could result in different outcomes.
- Think about how you will communicate your new boundaries to others, or how you will motivate yourself to honor your own boundaries.
- Think about the reactions of your family and friends, and plan how to “defend” your boundaries.

At next week’s meeting, share with other members your experience and your overall observations about how boundaries impact your life. Discuss strategies for communicating boundaries to family and friends.

Tip:
The reality is that we all have boundaries – and they influence our lives whether or not they are visible for others to see. It makes sense to take some time to reflect on them and to make sure they are being honored. Please remember the usual outcome, when we are in a situation where we feel like we have had our boundaries crossed, is feeling miserable and drained. We all have a right to enjoy our lives, so please let others know what’s of value to you. Your life will be more enjoyable! You deserve it!