We in Co-Anon, have a tendency to spend a lot of time taking care of others. When we do this for a loved one who has the disease of addiction, it is usually motivated out of fear that if we don't, they will suffer or even die.
In Co-Anon we learn that when we rescue others from the consequences of their actions, it really just prolongs their problems. Many of the things we do are seeded in emotional responses to the manipulations of the addict.
Because we are often too close to the situation to have objectivity, we need perspective of others to help us learn this invaluable tool. We learn to let others who have recovery and solutions help the addict, while we help ourselves.
One of the ways we help ourselves is by setting healthy boundaries. Boundaries are not selfish, but self-care that teaches others what our personal limits are.
Setting boundaries is not a way to get the addict in our lives to change. Rather, it is a way of teaching others how we want to be treated, protecting ourselves from feeling victimized, and avoiding suffering from the symptoms of the disease of addiction in another person.
Without boundaries, the addict will come to us for help, instead of relying on their Higher Power or going to other recovered addicts.

Co-Anon Family Groups are for friends and family members affected by the disease of addiction.

Find a meeting near you

www.co-anon.org

Why we suggest **boundaries**?

In Co-Anon we learn that setting healthy boundaries is an important part of our recovery process. A boundary is defined as something that indicates a border or limit. Healthy boundaries allow us to take better care of ourselves.

www.co-anon.org

The "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous says "It is not the matter of giving that is in question, but when and how to give. That often makes the difference between failure and success. The minute we put our work on a service plan, the alcoholic commences to rely upon our assistance rather than upon God. He clamors for this and that, claiming he cannot master alcohol until his material needs are cared for. Nonsense. Some of us have taken very hard knocks to learn this truth: Job or no job - wife or no wife - we simply do not stop drinking so long as we place dependence upon other people ahead of being dependent on God." (p. 98)

Many times the addicts not only will ask for things we shouldn't give them, but will do or say things that hurt or anger us in order to get their way. Setting boundaries helps us when these things happen. Rather than retaliating, criticizing, being judgmental, or silently suffering, we can choose to set a boundary instead.

When our interaction with the addict causes us anxiety or pain, we should see it as an area for setting a boundary. When we set a boundary, we never tell someone else what we think they should do; we only say what we will do. We are only responsible for ourselves, our thoughts, our actions, and our words. We are not responsible for other people, or for how they react.

A boundary sets the line of action down and says: "this is how far I intend to go." Speaking the truth in love, without discounting ourselves or another person, is also a way to set a healthy boundary.

Many times in the past, the actions we took did not give us the outcome we wanted. In trying to help the addict in our lives, things just seemed to get worse. The help we gave was on a material level; when what the addict needed was help on a spiritual level. Sometimes the things we did by preventing a crisis, removed the consequences of their choices, thus postponing their recovery. Feeling too comfortable may prevent the addict from reaching out to those who could help, other recovered addicts!

Setting healthy boundaries is one of the positive actions we can do daily that helps us, and in turn, helps the addict. Always remembering that we cannot control the choices the addict makes, or take responsibility for their recovery, we can begin to take responsibility for our own decisions.

Setting boundaries allows us to distance ourselves from the disease of addiction without distancing ourselves from the person we care about. Making the addict aware of our personal limits, i.e. what behaviors we will or won't accept, may prevent unpleasant predicaments later.

Addicts usually will resist our boundaries. At first, they may react with anger and hostility. We must learn to allow them to do this without reacting. The actions and attitudes of the addict do not have to control us any longer, nor must we give so much attention to them. We are responsible for our own personal recovery...not theirs.

Here are some examples of boundary setting that we have found helpful and you could consider:

- I will not answer the phone after 10pm
- I will not give money for bail
- I will not accept phone calls from jails or correctional institutions
- I will not lend you our car nor provide you with transportation, unless it is to a meeting, or to work
- I will not let you use my cell phone nor pay for one for you
- I will not let you use my address nor allow you a key to our home
- I will not let you in our house if you are using, or are in possession of alcohol or drugs
- I will leave the room if I feel uncomfortable
- I will not lie for you about anything, including something on your job application
- I will not loan you money for rent nor food or pay your bills
- I will honor myself and not be placed in the middle by covering for you, when someone asks me about your affairs
- I love you, and I will only support your actions in sobriety, not participating in covering up or enabling actions related to this disease

Setting boundaries takes practice and support. You can do this with the help of the Co-Anon fellowship, a good sponsor and reading Co-Anon literature.

Remember, you are not alone! Rely on the people who have been through what you are experiencing now to help you reach a place of peace, purpose and power over your own life!