

COVID19 Blog 2: BOUNDARIES

Keeping our boundaries and structure in place during these uncertain times will certainly help us keep calm and help keep everyone safe. Since lockdown I've been acutely aware of boundaries and rules, how they have changed, what it feels like to have them, and how they can make me feel both agitated and safe.

Having a refuge can help us feel calmer

My partner's cat moved in after the restrictions came in. We kept her in for the first 2 weeks to get used to her new home. The smaller the space she was enclosed in at first, the better she seemed to feel. Something about knowing the limits of her safe space seemed to calm her. We've all been defining our spaces, where we feel safe.

I read about the need to have a refuge at the moment – to have at least one place that you know you can completely relax, and not have to be vigilant; where the boundary is clear, you can shut the door. Have you got that for yourself? Your kids? Your residents? Their rooms might feel like that, but it will be especially important that it really does feel like a refuge at the moment, more than ever.

Social distancing is something we are all getting used to but managing the rules to stay safe is a constant struggle. Tiny the cat (she's huge) is peering out of the window, checking for danger, scanning the environment. She sees the neighbour's cat, they're breaking the rules, invading HER territory; she's agitated, mewling like a fox. I know how she feels- at the supermarket people don't seem to think the 2-metre rule applies if they walk quickly! or smile and apologise! In the dairy aisle they're stacking



If others are breaking the rules and pushing the boundaries, try to be curious rather than judge; why is it hard for them, and why is it hard for me?

shelves. It seems like an impossible puzzle to work out how to get yoghurt and milk whilst keeping my distance. I smile...I apologise...I quickly grab 2 litres of semi-skimmed... Managing boundaries at the moment is STRESSFUL for us all; let's give ourselves and everyone else a break! Be kind.

The rules in all our worlds have completely changed, and how we understand these new rules is really important. The New Zealand PM has had a lot of praise for her leadership through this crisis. How she has communicated boundaries and expectations has really worked. Every decision and restriction are "delivered with kindness but also very decisive"

It seems "direction-giving", "meaning-making" and "empathy" are the three things that motivate people to follow instruction and give their best. We usually hear the first, the instructions, but not always the rest – the meaning making and the empathy. As humans we need meaning and purpose to what we are being asked to do – it needs to make sense to us, but also empathy for what we are being asked to do - acknowledging the challenges we face in complying.

If you are setting or maintaining boundaries for others at the moment, as far as possible, be really clear about what you are asking them to do, and why – how it will benefit them and others, and show you understand and care about how hard this will be for them. It's been harder with Tiny the cat, who only understands that we care, but there are some people you are looking after who may be the same!

A collective response to managing these new rules is necessary when we are so dependent on others for our wellbeing. Collaborating as much as possible helps. I've

heard some great reports of residents and staff working together for their own and everyone else's benefit – agreeing not to go out, or to stagger mealtimes, or have a rota for using games so everyone has a turn.

Some of the rules are fixed and clear, but many are open to negotiation and involving everyone will improve compliance.

Boundaries in the way we work has changed too. I've never worked from home so much. Tiny the cat is loving it – I'm not sure how she'll cope once things change. That may be the case for many of us – coming out of this may be as hard (or harder) than going into it.

The way boundaries are challenged depends a lot on your situation. Those consigned to 'working from home' have a massive blurring of boundaries. I'm in the same room all day, staring at the same screen, whether I'm in a work meeting, attending a webinar, chatting to my friends or doing the weekly zoom quiz. I've found changing clothes helps and moving the computer; physical changes make each situation a bit different. There are loads of online tips about working from home – I recommend using them, it really helps! Especially the one about getting fully dressed for work.

I've heard other stories of how people have managed – kids wearing their school uniform during lesson time, colleagues getting ready for work as usual before heading to the spare room with work bag in hand. Having a clear distinction between work and home as far as possible can help keep a sense of order at a time when things feel so uncertain and new.

If you are at home, create and follow a routine, take regular breaks, if possible limit emails and separate work and rest time. Get dressed!

Limit your intake of coronavirus news and disaster scenarios in the future – think instead about what you can actually achieve today

Managing boundaries around social media and constant news is especially important at the moment. A constant drip feed of statistics and horror stories, political fighting and procurement blunders does not help. Managing the things we can control, rather than those we can't, will help though. The place we have some control is in our workplace and our home, working things out with others, with the best facts available from reputable news.

At the end of the day, we adapt, and we do so more easily if we understand, if we have a shared experience and if we know that people care.

Focus on managing the things you can control, it's more effective and much kinder to yourself!



(Adapted from **The Conversation** -a network of not-for-profit media outlets by academics and researchers, + my own observations. Special thanks to Tiny x) April 2020