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## Finding the Right Words – *how to make requests, state boundaries and design alliances*

(from the EQUUS Assertiveness Training for Empaths Course)

When being proactive with our boundaries, our preferences, desires and dealbreakers, it can be hard to find the right words. Often this is because those words were not modeled to you in childhood. The truth is, you don't need the perfect words or to execute it perfectly. It's okay to do it messily, badly, or bumblingly. When people care about you, they want to know how to better support you. They'll want to hear through the messiness so that they can succeed as your friend, colleague, direct report, partner or lover. Remember that boundaries are made in the spirit of 'taking care of you' and are not focused on 'targeting' the other.

Having a basic script can assist you to be clearer, more succinct and say what you want to say, and inform someone of an issue or desire. Do the steps below in the order listed.

**Start with SDD (Stop. Drop. Deal.):** about the situation and what you want. If you are prone to auto-accommodating and over-functioning, buy yourself some time to self-regulate, metabolize feelings and figure out specifically what you want. "I need a minute to regroup. Can we pick this up in an hour?"

**Embody the felt sense of healthy self-entitlement and self-agency:** This helps your body to line up with your brain and give you the neuropathways towards actionable success. Refer to your 'Building Traits from States' handout to do this (it takes 2 minutes as an exercise).

THEN, GO DO IT:

**State the issue:** Start by alerting them to your issue, "I would like to talk to you about how you use my spare key to my house to borrow my things without asking." Or "I need to share my experience with you so you know where I am coming from."

**State your feelings:** Then, move into your feeling state (body awareness). "I've been looking for my favorite shawl for weeks and I'm frustrated that you've waited until now to tell me you took it for your trip without asking me first."

**Make a simple request:** Keep it simple, clear and nonconfrontational. “I’d like to request that if you want to borrow something of mine, you ask me first. That way we can continue to share our clothes and avoid ruining our weekly sister time arguing.” Or “Would you be willing to \_\_\_\_\_ ?”

**Suggest agreement to the request:** Next, suggest an agreement. “Can we agree that if you are interested in borrowing something of mine in the future, you will ask me first?”

**Be consistent:** Being consistent with your behavior and requests and keeping people accountable to your agreements is imperative. Boundaries that are enforced inconsistently don’t work. And do not expect people to listen the first time. Your consistency is key.

**Consequences:** Some people are ‘chronic repeat offenders’ – folks who, no matter how many times you make an agreement or set boundaries for, choose to ignore repeated requests. Creating and clearly stating consequences can motivate the other person to respect your boundaries which in turn protects you. “I have made the simple request that you ask me first before borrowing my clothes and you continue to take things without asking. I would really appreciate you keeping your word. If this happens again, I’ll have to take back my key.”

**Follow through:** Consequences only work if you stick to your follow through.

**Some boundaries are just simple one liners:** “That’s not okay with me.” “I’m not available for that.” “What I’d like from you right now is\_\_\_\_\_.” “Thanks for your concern; I’ll take it from here.” “I don’t see it that way.”

**You get to have do-overs:** Some request / boundary / designing-alliance conversations don’t go so well. Sometimes you may leave feeling like you weren’t heard, or you didn’t get your point across clearly, or you feel you did not get what you needed or wanted. Guess what?! You get to have a do-over. Instead of just swallowing the bitter pill of not having your needs met, circle around and request another conversation. Before that conversation, spend some time getting super clear on what you want to say, and how you want to say it. Grab a friend and do some role-play so you nail it. And then start your conversation with something like this: “Last week’s conversation together didn’t go well for me and here’s why....” (I didn’t really say what I wanted; I didn’t feel heard; I was too busy looking after your feelings and didn’t clearly articulate my requests...etc).

### Resources

Jayson Gaddis of the Relationship School – How to Set Boundaries

<http://www.jaysongaddis.com/sc40-boundaries-with-lisa-dion/>

“Boundary Boss – The Essential Guide to Talk True, Be Seen, and (Finally) Live Free” by Terri Cole