

Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church
Pastoral Counseling & Psychotherapy Services
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Cultivating Compassion in Difficult Relationships

When faced with a difficult or challenging relationship it is healthy to establish firm boundaries. This is part of our own, necessary self-care. Focus on our own care should not be confused with being self-centered. Self-centeredness is about putting ourselves in the center of relationships and interactions with others. Self-centeredness prevents the development of healthy relationships with others as well as with ourselves.

Self-care and the establishment of healthy boundaries are about finding ways to meet others in the center. They are about finding ways to be in relationship. Others may resist this. In fact, the more another person may resist this setting of boundaries or push against them you may experience the need to be firmer. You might find yourself taking a firm, hard stand regarding the challenge you are experiencing. This being “hard on the problem” may translate to being “hard on the person.”

Another unintended consequence of setting hard, firm boundaries is that our inner self may also become hardened. We may begin to experience an “attitude of grievance” at having to deal with problems that others seem to create. We can find ourselves being fashioned into a person we do not want to become.

Cultivating compassion is about finding a way to keep this interior hardness from developing. Cultivating compassion is about hoping that others find ways to have their basic needs met. It is about recognizing that they also may be suffering. It is about doing this from the safety of your own heart.

Begin your practice by bringing to mind someone you care about – a family member or friend. Or, think of a neighbor or even the person by the side of the road holding up a cardboard sign asking for help. When you bring the person to mind, repeat each of these phrases thinking of them with a pause between each one.

- Just like me, _____ is seeking happiness in his / her life.
- Just like me, _____ is trying to avoid suffering in his / her life.
- Just like me, _____ has known sadness, loneliness and despair.
- Just like me, _____ is seeking to fill his / her needs.
- Just like me, _____ is doing the best they can as he / she learns about life.