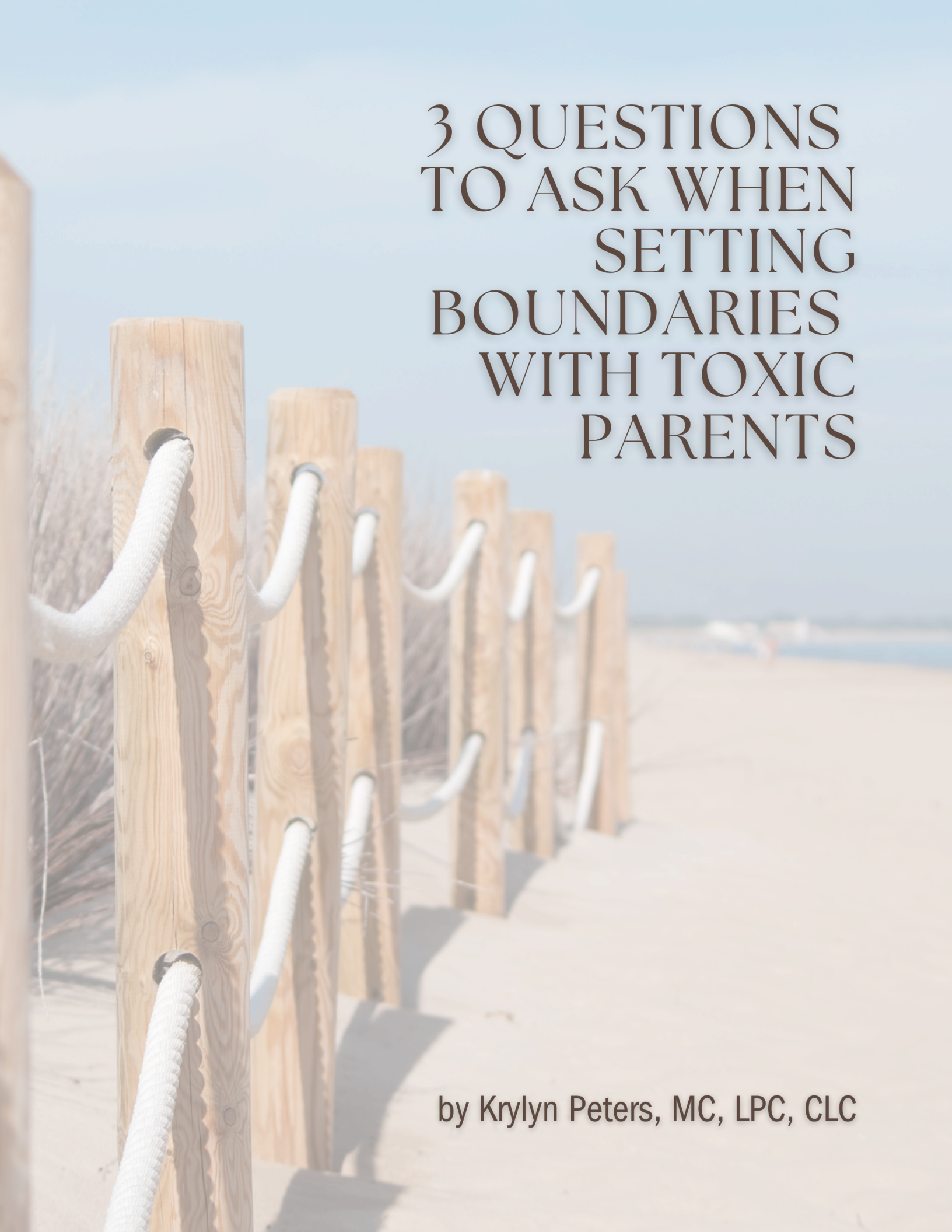


A wooden post-and-rope fence runs diagonally across the frame from the bottom left towards the middle right. The fence is made of light-colored wooden posts connected by thick, white, braided rope. The background shows a sandy beach, some dry grass, and the ocean under a clear blue sky.

3 QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN SETTING BOUNDARIES WITH TOXIC PARENTS

by Krylyn Peters, MC, LPC, CLC



3 Questions to Ask When Setting Boundaries with Toxic Parents

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Published in the United States of America by:
Finding Your Voice Institute LLC
2942 N. 24th St., Suite 114-372
Phoenix, AZ 85016

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Every effort has been made to make this book as complete and as accurate as possible. However, there may be mistakes, both typographical and in content. Therefore, this text should be used only as a general guide and not as an ultimate source of information.

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Setting boundaries with toxic parents can be emotionally taxing, but vital for preserving your well-being.

In this e-book, we'll explore:

- Differences between Healthy vs. Toxic Relationships
- Boundaries in Healthy Relationships
- Boundaries in Toxic Relationships
- What to Consider When Setting Boundaries with Toxic Parents
- 3 Question to Ask Yourself as You Set Boundaries with Toxic Parents

Boundaries in Healthy Vs. Toxic Relationships

Before we dive into strategies, let's talk about boundaries in general. Boundaries are what separate us from other people. They define the limits of our comfort, our emotional well-being, and the space we need to maintain our sense of self.

When dealing with toxic family members, establishing and maintaining boundaries is like creating a shield that safeguards your emotional health and preserves your personal integrity. Think of it as drawing a clear line that separates what is acceptable from what is not.

Boundaries in Healthy Relationships

In the context of healthy relationships, boundaries are a way for us to communicate our needs, and ultimately strengthen our relationships. We say what's not working, we share how we feel, and we discuss how things could be different. This often leads to deeper understanding, trust, and closeness. But when it comes to unhealthy, toxic relationships, setting boundaries in this way can be unsafe emotionally and sometime dangerous physically.

Boundaries in Toxic Relationships

Setting boundaries with a person who has toxic traits can be like fueling a fire, where what you share might be used against you. Therefore, boundaries become a whole different thing with the toxic person. The goal here is to protect yourself.

Many adult children of parents with toxic or narcissistic traits often struggle between being authentic and true to themselves and holding back from their toxic parent. We were trained to give the toxic parent what they want in the form of praise, attention, doing what is expected, anticipating their needs, and pleasing them at the expense of ourselves. So when we start taking our own needs into consideration, it can feel like a betrayal.

Managing the feelings and thoughts that arise as a result of this war in ourselves between wanting and needing to assert ourselves and not wanting to upset our parent is where the work of setting boundaries with a toxic parent begins.

What to Consider When Setting Boundaries with Toxic Parents

The decision to set boundaries with a parent with toxic or narcissistic traits is typically not an easy one. And certainly not one that you make only once. It's an ongoing process of evaluating what's most important to you and what you need in order to be healthy. Then balancing that with what is likely to yield the best outcome. But first, it involves recognizing what the boundaries are and when they've been crossed.

Next are three questions to consider as you explore setting boundaries with a toxic parent.

Question #1: What are my boundaries?

This is a BIG question. It may be hard to answer because you may have never been asked it before. Let's explore some common boundaries that I'd venture to say most humans strive for – and most adult children identify as violations from their toxic or narcissistic parents:

- Being treated with respect
- Being validated
- Being seen and heard

Now that you have a list started, are there any other boundaries you'd like to add to this list? Take your time and write them down.

Question #2: What does your parent say and do that feels like a boundary violation?

Because people with toxic and narcissistic traits are so skilled at getting what they want, their behaviors are often only detectable to those closest to them. You may notice subtleties that others don't, such as specific words or phrases, a tone of voice, a glance, or a movement. These are important for you to pay attention to. Make a list of the things your parent says and does that feel like a boundary violation.

Once you have a list of your boundaries, it's time to identify how you know when the boundary has been honored and when it has been violated. Be as specific as you can. Here's an example of how this might look.

Let's say your boundary is: being treated with respect

How I Know My Boundary Been Honored

- I'm clear on how they feel about me.
- Their words and actions are aligned.
- I feel good about myself.
- I feel like they understand me.

How I Know My Boundary Has Been Violated

- I'm confused.
- They said words that showed respect but I still don't feel respected.
- I feel bad about myself.
- I'm wondering what I said or did to upset them.

You can use the next page to map out one of your boundaries, how you know it has been honored, and how you now it has been violated.

My boundary is: _____

How I Know My Boundary Has Been Honored

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

How I Know My Boundary Has Been Violated

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Question #3: How do you respond to your parent's toxic behavior?

Paying attention to how you respond to your parent's toxic behaviors is crucial in recovery. Often your responses are on auto-pilot. Start paying closer attention so you can uncover more about the immediate impact their behavior has on you. What are your automatic responses, things you do without even thinking about it? What thoughts come up? What feelings arise? What do you notice in your body? Start making a list of what you notice.

Spending time answering these three questions is a good foundation for your boundary setting journey.

Other key ingredients for setting boundaries include:

- Managing Triggers
- Managing Expectations
- Preparing to Interact with Your Parent
- Planning What to Say (and Not Say) to Your Parent
- Managing the Aftermath of Setting Boundaries

Remember, the journey of recovering from parental emotional abuse is a life-long one. You'll likely notice ebbs and flows in your progress. This is normal. Setting boundaries is a big part of the journey, and one that is needed to protect your emotional well-being.



About the Author

Hi, I'm Krylyn! I'm a psychotherapist, coach, educator, and consultant with a passion for helping people heal. Over my 20+ year career in mental health, I've worked with thousands of people. One of my absolute favorite things is teaching people information and strategies for personal growth and success. I've been blessed to provide education and training at local, state, regional, and national levels to individuals, mental health professionals, and organizations in various industries. My expertise covers mental wellness, creativity and wellness, stress management, parental emotional abuse recovery, grief, burnout, and compassion fatigue. For further information about my work with adult children of emotionally abusive parents, visit aconcon.com.

Support for Adult Children of Narcissists



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