

Host: In our last program we discussed a situation where a dad caused a scene every time he was in the same place as your mother and step-dad. Today, we want to revisit this scenario. Each time after he'd act up, your father apologized and promised never to do it again, but he'd still do it again.

The problem is your upcoming award dinner. Since your mom and stepdad will attend, you must decide whether to invite your father and risk a big scene. Question: should you invite him? Do you have an *obligation* to invite him?

Welcome to Champions Arise. I'm your host_____.

Thankfully, our coach, Kent Darcie, the founder of Adult Children of Divorce Ministries, will answer these questions and not me. During this series, we've learned that this type of dilemma is not unusual for adults with divorced parents. But how do we handle these situations? We'll find out when we return.

Music Theme out

Host: Coach, we've looked at some challenging issues in this series; anger, unforgiveness, lack of trust, and father hunger, but this could be the toughest yet. How does one decide if the father, in our example, can attend? It almost seems like you have to choose which parent you like better. To be put in that position seems unfair

Coach: I agree. Unfortunately, many of our listeners have been forced to make decisions like this—some since they were kids. They must think through the pros and cons. Think through who is going to be hurt and why. Think through who is going to be upset, upset with *them*, and for how long. They seem like no-win situations, but by setting up healthy boundaries the adult child of divorce can gain control and lower their anxiety and worry.

Host: What do you mean by boundaries?

Coach: A boundary is a divider between things. A fence is a boundary between my property and your property. The boundaries of a discussion set a divider between what is acceptable to say and what is not. Physical boundaries divide my personal space and your personal space. In the context of our topic, the boundary is between the life of the adult, and the life of their divorced parents and/or step-parents.

To start, healthy boundaries are applied with love. We waited until after our sessions on anger, forgiveness, and trust to discuss boundaries, because adults with divorced parents should work through these *other issues* before they attempt to set boundaries. When we don't take the time to work through the issues, we are more likely to create boundaries out of anger or capriciousness. These type of boundaries usually don't last, probably won't work, and may not make sense.

An analogy of this would be, when our kids are provoking each other and being annoying in the process, we may be tempted to shout "I don't want any children to touch any other children in this house *ever again!*" That is one way to create a boundary.

Host: I've been there.

Coach: Every parent has. Doesn't work well, does it?

Host: Not at all.

Coach: But as adult children of divorce, we will do the same thing to our parents. We get frustrated with them and say something like, "You will never be invited to another birthday party ever again!" But that boundary is placed out of anger, not love. It usually doesn't last and everyone's feelings get hurt.

After we have begun to take constructive steps to deal with the ways our parent's divorce is affecting us, we are better equipped to create healthy boundaries with our parents and step-parents.

Healthy boundaries have four qualities:

- Healthy boundaries are planned
- Healthy boundaries are communicated
- Healthy boundaries are enforced.
- And healthy boundaries are reviewed.

Healthy boundaries are planned, communicated, enforced, and reviewed. Now let's look at these individually.

The first quality of healthy boundaries is that they are planned.

To plan something, you assess the situation, account for variables, identify what resources you have, and look for potential problems.

Going back to our example of the father who creates a scene whenever your mom and your step-father are around,

The award dinner is approaching. You know he would want to be there. If you weren't afraid that he'd cause a scene, you'd want him to attend. But instead of fretting and worrying, you make a plan.

First, you will talk to your dad and explain to him how you feel when he acts the way he does. In a lot of cases they don't know how we feel, because we are afraid to share our feeling with them. So you will tell him how you feel. You'll also make sure he is aware that your boss is going to attend the event and you need him to behave. And then you'll ask him to commit *to you* that he won't make a scene. Finally you'll make it clear that if doesn't honor his word, you won't invite him to any events that include your mom and stepdad. This will be for a designated period; six months, a year, or whatever seems appropriate. There must be a consequence if the behavior continues.

Host: That sounds like it would be hard.

Coach: It could be, but you'd be surprised how often people comply when boundaries are placed. I can remember speaking with my mother and telling her that she was not to act poorly around my dad or there would be consequences. And she acted properly, mostly. But also remember that this is an example. Don't use this as a blueprint. Every situation is different, but these principals can be broadly applied under the guidance of Godly advice and lots of prayer.

So first, you talk to your dad

Because your plan takes into account past performance, your plan must allow for the possibility that your dad will break his promise. Hopefully he won't, but a plan takes the worst case into consideration.

So the next step is; you talk to your mom, stepdad, or both – whoever is the most reasonable. Share with them what you told your dad. Ask your mom or stepdad not to respond or get into an argument if your dad breaks his agreement with you.

Tell them how much it means to you for the night to go well.

In the majority of cases the parents love you more than they dislike their ex. If you look them in the eye *in love*, they'll behave, even if it's just for the evening.

Third, try to affect the logistics to avoid potential problems. For this award dinner, there's probably assigned seating. Find the person who is in charge of seating and see if you can arrange for your parents to be separated. Taking care of the logistical issues can really help. Fourth, have a personal boundary, a plan for how you will respond if dad shows up and makes a scene in front of your boss. Talking it through with your spouse, friend, or a religious leader of your church will help you keep your perspective.

Remember, planning reduces the unknowns. Unknowns produce fear, worry, and anxiety. Fear, worry, and anxiety steal our joy. And this award dinner, or wedding, or birthday party or Christmas gathering should be a joyous occasion.

So the first quality of a healthy boundary is that it is planned.
The second is that it is communicated.

Whoever the boundary affects must know what the boundary is and what the penalty is if they violate the boundary.

Host: Basically, you can't set up the boundary and not tell the dad.

Coach: That wouldn't be a *healthy* boundary. A healthy boundary is communicated. None of us likes breaking a rule we didn't know was there, particularly if there are severe consequences. In this case, the penalty would result in the dad missing the birth of his first grandchild. So yes, in this example, the dad should be told. And again, Godly counsel is advised before steps like these are taken.

Communication should also include the individual who is going to the dinner with you. Your spouse or your friend should know the plan. Ideally they helped make the plan. But they must know the possible problems and responses, so they can plan ahead and act as your buffer or protector. The goal is to eliminate your need to worry so you can enjoy the event.

Host: I hope our listeners, who are *not* from broken homes, are listening carefully, because it sounds like this is a team effort.

Coach: It is. Help like this is so important and a blessing to the adult who is trying to deal with the divorced parents. We see this principal in the Bible. Jesus sent His disciples out in twos. And in Ecclesiastes chapter 4 verses 9 and 10, King Solomon wrote,

“Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.”¹

It is important to have a helper when creating a boundary plan. Each step should be discussed and prayed over before it is implemented.

So healthy boundaries are planned, and communicated. The third quality is healthy boundaries are enforced.

Parents know that enforcing discipline is not always easy. If this dad makes a scene at the dinner, the consequences must be enforced. But, enforcement may result in a conversation like this:

“What do you mean I can’t see my new grandson!”

“Dad, I didn’t say you couldn’t see your new grandson. You agreed not to make a scene at the award dinner. You didn’t keep your word”

“Your mother provoked me.”

“You promised me that you wouldn’t make a scene and you did. We discussed that if you didn’t honor your word, you could not be at any family function for six months if mom and Fred were there. You can see your grandson, but not until after they leave.”

“That’s not fair.”

“That was your choice Dad. If 6 months pass without an incident, we’ll try again. If you fail, *you* would be responsible for missing your grandson’s first birthday.”

With a healthy boundary, the burden is on the father. Without boundaries, the burden is on you.

Host: What if your parents don’t cooperate? What if the dad continues to create scenes?

Coach: Apply the penalty and exclude him where you can. Where this is not possible, set up boundaries for yourself.

Decide if you *need* to attend the occasion. Missing the event may be less stressful at this point. If you want or need to be present at the event, set up boundaries for how *you* will respond.

- Follow Ephesians 4 verse 29 and don’t say anything bad, regardless of how much you’re provoked.
- Pray for the problem individual. It’s a wounded, bitter person that will not yield to you, out of love.
- And debrief afterward. – share with someone how the event went and how you felt. Get it out. Don’t let it build up inside.

That’s a quick look at healthy boundaries. These can be applied in a variety of situations. It may be tough at first, but perseverance will produce more control over situations and less worry and anxiety.

Music Theme in

Host: Thank you for listening to Champions Arise where men are equipped and strengthened to meet their God-given potential. We hope this program on boundaries was helpful. You can obtain more information on this series online at www.championsarise.org. Click on the “Breaking

the Cycle of Divorce” link. Boundaries are important for all of us, but particularly for our brothers and sisters from broken homes. Next in this series, I’ll have a question and answer time with the coach.

I’m _____, for _____. Thank you for listening to Champions Arise.
May God mold you into the man He knows you can be.

¹New Living Translation (NLT)