



POST-OP VIDEO THREE HOMEWORK

Changes in Personal Relationships

In Post-Op Video Three I described how most of the relationships in your life change after you have weight loss surgery. It's important to learn what healthy boundaries are and how to set them. A person with healthy boundaries (like having a fence with gates) opens and shut the “gates” appropriately, according to the situation. It's important to learn and use healthy communication skills as your life and your relationships change after surgery. Knowing how to find balance in your life, particularly as so many aspects are changing at one time is helpful.

The following exercises will help you evaluate your current relationships, how to think positively about yourself in relationships, and how to set healthy boundaries in relationships. These are all important aspects of being able to follow through with the promises you made to get the weight off and keep it off after surgery.

Homework:

- 1. Make a list of your current social activities. For each activity, note your reason(s) for participating in it (is it something I participate in because I want to or because I feel I “should”; do I participate because someone asked me to and I worry what they would think/say if I didn't, etc.). Also, note if you get as much from the experience of being with this group of people as you put into it. The same with the activity – do you get as much out of participating in the activity as you put into it?**
 - a. If your life is currently too busy to participate in all of the activities you are engaging in, decide on a couple of those activities that you are going to withdraw from:**
_____.
 - b. If your life has too few social activities, make a list of five things you are interested in possibly becoming a part of: _____.**
- 2. Write about how you feel in social situations: Am I preoccupied with how I look? Do I think others are looking at me? Do I fear others are judging me? Am I looking at/judging others? Do I enjoy social situations? Which ones do I like most/least? How does my weight influence the way I feel in social situations?**
- 3. In what ways have I been negatively self-involved when it comes to my social life? Have I ignored family to be socially involved as a way to overcompensate for my obesity? Have I neglected friends and family in social ways by hiding at home because of my obesity?**

Below are some thoughts, feelings and behaviors that can be detrimental to your improved health and happiness. If you improve your awareness about how you think and feel, and if you learn to think more positively, you will be inspired to make healthy choices. **For each of the negative thought statements that follow, write down a positive statement you can replace it with.**

For example: Negative statement: "I hate feeling like people are judging me when I'm in a social setting" Replaced by this positive statement: "I will choose to remember that most people are not spending any amount of time thinking about me in public settings."

- 1. Negative statement: "My family is embarrassed by me when we go to public places together."
Positive statement: _____.**
- 2. Negative statement: "I would rather stay home alone than expose myself to ridicule in public."
Positive statement: _____.**

As soon as you become aware that you are saying something negative to yourself, think or say out loud, "Stop It!" Or imagine a huge, red STOP sign in your mind. Then change the thought as discussed earlier in the chapter. Say something more positive about yourself. Do this diligently, even when you feel too tired or defeated. Say something positive about yourself. Remember to talk to yourself as kindly as you would talk to your best friend.

A healthier body will result from your having a healthier mindset. It's true! As you tune out negative thoughts and practice choosing positive thoughts, your attitude will improve. Your more optimistic attitude will lead to healthy behavioral choices, which will result in better physical health.

Setting Healthy Boundaries

- 1. When you are asked to be on a committee, participate on a parents' team or be part of a charity organization, respond with, "Let me give this some thought, look over my calendar and get back to you." This way, you can take time to decide if you actually want to participate in the activity before automatically responding "yes" out of habit and wishing later that you hadn't. Before you decide if you want to be a part of the activity, ask yourself the following questions: "Is this an activity I would enjoy?", "Is this an activity important to me or someone in my family?", "Do I have time to do this?", and "Will I have time to take care of my health and my priorities if I add this activity to my life?"**

2. **If you have avoided social activities because of your weight, then make a chart with the following information:**
- Group/Social Activity**
 - Date/Time of meeting or activity**
 - Contact information to learn more about the activity**
 - Date by which I will obtain information on this activity, and**
 - Date by which I will participate in this activity.**
3. **Write three statements to use as part of your daily self-talk. Design these statements to remind yourself that participating in healthy social activities is essential to your long term goal of sustained weight loss.**

For example: I will participate in social activities that I enjoy, that are beneficial to me, and that fit into my schedule.

Setting Health Boundaries in Difficult Situations

Some of the most common problematic situations for post-bariatric patients include:

- holiday eating
- restaurant eating
- family, office and social eating situations
- grocery shopping
- cooking
- shopping for clothes
- the clothing store dressing room

The list could go on and on. Fortunately, we do not have to address each of these issues individually, as you deal with them all in the same way: Plan your work and work your plan.

1. **First, as you anticipate each of the situations above (and other potentially difficult situations), reflect on: 1) how you thought of each situation in the past, 2) how you felt about each situation in the past, and 3) how you behaved in each situation in the past.**

For example, Natalie shared her reflections about the holidays, a time of year she was concerned about after having gastric bypass surgery. “I used to love November and December. It meant two months of wonderful eating,” Natalie recalled. “I was excited just thinking about mom’s pies, Aunt Cecelia’s Christmas cookies, and the office holiday party with every fancy hors d’oeuvres I could imagine. I always gained 10 or 20 pounds. I worked hard to ignore the weight gain and refused to spend any time alone during those months so I wouldn’t think about how I was harming my health.”

2. Second, consider the realities of how you handled each situation in the past. What were the consequences to you?

Natalie said, “I used to eat as a way to keep myself from feeling any emotions for two solid months during the holidays. If I had let myself feel, I would have been ashamed of how I focused so much on the food and less on the holidays themselves and the people I got to see. I would have felt embarrassed and angry about how much I ate. I can clearly see that I chose to remain emotionally numb so I wouldn’t have to take responsibility for my behavior. It took a lot of help from the others at the support group to deal directly and honestly with the reality of my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors about holiday eating.”

3. Third, consider each upcoming situation. Choose how you want to think about each situation and how you want to prepare for it.

“Since having surgery three years ago, I have learned to think about November and December differently,” Natalie continued. “This year, I am choosing to focus on my relationships with family and friends at holiday gatherings. I know there will be a lot of tempting food there. I will give myself permission to sample two of my favorites after I have eaten a meal of healthy foods in healthy portions. When I am finished eating, I will brush my teeth to have the taste and thought of food out of my mind. I will drink water as I talk with people so my hands are holding something. When I think about the holidays now, I think about them with confidence. I feel excited about seeing my cousins and other out-of-town relatives. I feel optimistic because I have a plan in place to help me deal with this extraordinary eating situation.”

4. Fourth, have support measures planned in advance. Sometimes a person or situation will trigger subconscious thoughts or memories that lead to unexpected intense emotions, followed by reactive behavior, which may involve overeating. It is important to have a plan of action to obtain support in vulnerable situations.

“For me,” Natalie said, “My plan for support included informing two of the members from my support group that I was attending a family get-together. I obtained their permission to call them if I needed support while at the gathering. I also plan to keep a note card in my purse on which I have written five affirmations to help me stay committed to my plan. Finally, I have given myself permission to leave the event if I feel overwhelmed. These things work for me.”

5. Fifth, process the situation afterward. This may mean writing about it in a journal, talking with a friend, or discussing it in therapy. Be honest about what you were thinking, how you were feeling, and what your behavior was in the situation. If you didn’t do as well as you hoped, talk about what happened.

Review the plan you had made and discuss where you got off track. Learn from every situation. Find what works best for you and utilize those tools in each potentially difficult situation.

Inspirational Quotes on Friendship

The following are some great quotes that you can read when you need to remind yourself that you are worth setting healthy boundaries for. To be a good friend to someone else, you need to be a good friend to yourself (which means learning to set healthy boundaries)!

- “Don’t walk in front of me, I may not follow.
Don’t walk behind me, I may not lead.
Just walk beside me and be my friend.” - Albert Camus
- “The only way to have a friend is to be one.” - Ralph Waldo Emerson
- “A friend is one who knows us, but loves us anyway.” - Fr. Jerome Cummings
- “Remember, the greatest gift is not found in a store nor under a tree, but in the hearts of true friends.”- Cindy Lew
- “Hold a true friend with both your hands.” - Nigerian Proverb
- “A faithful friend is the medicine of life.” - Apocrypha