

Phone 334-262-8321

alabamannurses.org



Alabama Nurse



March, April, May 2018 • Volume 45 • Issue 1

Provided to Alabama's Nursing Community and Funded by the Alabama State Nurses Association.

Quarterly publication direct mailed to more than 84,000 Registered Nurses and Licensed Practical Nurses in Alabama
Alabama State Nurses Association • 360 North Hull Street • Montgomery, AL 36104



Self – Care for the New Year

K.C. Vick, MPH

Director of Capacity Building, Medical Advocacy and Outreach

At the close of 2017, we saw many national figures coming forward to share their experiences of harassment and abuse. This wave of public awareness surely reached you on social media, or perhaps in emotional moments with your loved ones.

As a wellness educator, I'm compelled in this New Year to initiate deeper conversations around mutually respectful and affirming relationships, including romantic and sexual ones. As nursing professionals, you likely find yourself engaged in education and prevention work with the individuals and communities you serve. There are opportunities for you to support your clients' ability to build positive relationships that contribute to good health and quality of life.

Historically, much of our health education on relationships has focused on the prevention of sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancy. While these are important topics to address with audiences of all ages, they are secondary to core themes affecting all dimensions of health, primarily self-awareness and boundary-setting. As we resolve ourselves to a year of healthy relationships and public discourse, it might be helpful to briefly explore these core themes:

Self-awareness: Our most important relationship is the one we have with ourselves. Across our lifespan, we will continuously learn how to healthfully relate to other people. As we learn, we must remember to check in with ourselves, nurturing our own self-awareness and health. It is good practice to regularly ask the following:

- Are my relationships mutually respectful and functional? Do I need to revisit, revise, or renew any agreements or boundaries I have declared with a family member, spouse, partner, friend, or colleague?
- Do I feel violated or pressured by anyone in my life? Have I felt emotionally or physically unsafe with anyone in my work, home, faith community, social group, romantic or sexual life?
- Where am I feeling new needs or desires? What might I shift to fill those new needs or desires?
- Do I need to seek outside support around my responses to the above questions? If so, who am I able to safely discuss and explore these matters with? Should I talk with my therapist, sponsor, or health provider? Will journaling or praying help?

Boundaries: Boundaries are typically figurative barriers we use to protect ourselves, our time, our emotional and mental bandwidth, and our general health.

For instance, it is important for many of us to set a boundary between our personal and professional lives. To protect our personal or social time, we might choose to communicate to our work colleagues that we are unavailable for non-emergency matters on the weekends.

In romantic and sexual relationships, boundary-setting might include a conversation about exclusivity or commitment level, or maybe a discussion about what birth control methods or safer sex strategies might be used.

In a friendship or familial relationships, you might intentionally limit the length and regularity of visits with someone you find emotionally taxing.

You may also need to communicate to people in your life the discomfort you feel with a particular topic. For example, some people who have survived a traumatic event need to avoid discussing or viewing media showing similar experiences.

Most of us intuitively set boundaries such as these, but it can be good to deliberately cultivate them as our needs and desires shift.

If we do the hard work of respecting ourselves and our needs, setting good boundaries with others, respecting other people, and communication clearly around these topics, we might foster healthier relationships in 2018 and beyond.