

# SexSense<sup>©</sup>

BY DEBORAH CAUST, PH.D.

## SETTING PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

**Q:** When I am doing yoga naked or stir-frying vegetables or stuck trying to get my arm into an inside-out sleeve, etc., my boyfriends will do some bold, sexy thing to which I obviously can't respond. It's very annoying for two reasons -- it can be dangerous, wrong or irritating; and if I do get turned on, I'm frustrated because I can't proceed. If I [approach] them later, they are no longer interested. Over the years, I have told lovers not to do these things...but they don't follow through. How can I get guys to stop - or is it some "guy thing" that won't ever stop?

**A:** An informal poll among my male friends reveals that this cannot be a "guy thing" or all men would be doing it! What's important is that it is happening to you and you don't like it. (I don't blame you!)

These men are touching you without permission. One of two things is going on. Either you are choosing men who are rude and insensitive; or you are not clearly specifying your "boundaries." Let's explore each possibility further. Are there other ways in which these men are rude and insensitive? Do you find yourself uncomfortable at other times? If so, you might want to question why you continue to date them. You deserve to be treated in a kind and civil manner.

It's possible that your partner can make a mistake - he may playfully touch you at a time when he thinks it would be okay. If it's not okay with you and you ask him to stop...that should be it. The next time he does it, it's no longer playful, it's disrespectful.

This brings me to the second possibility - that you are not clearly stating your boundaries. "Boundaries" are the invisible, intangible lines that separate us from others. These lines are personally drawn, ie., whatever makes you feel most comfortable. Boundaries can vary between the same two people at any one moment depending on a variety of factors: emotional closeness, physical proximity, individual expectations, interest, focus, etc. When you are otherwise occupied, it is necessary for others to "check-in" with you to see whether contact (emotional or physical) can be made. Your task is to clearly state how you feel ("I appreciate your wanting to get close, but right now I'm busy stir-frying"). If those boundaries are not respected, then you have any number of significant issues to consider: trust, power, anger, etc. Since this happens to you on a regular basis, you may want to explore your pattern further with a therapist.