



Healthy Boundaries

What are boundaries?

Boundaries are the limits we set in relationships that allow us to protect ourselves. They define who is “me” and who is “not me” – who I am and what my responsibilities are.

In the physical world, boundaries define who owns or has responsibility for property (ie, fences, walls, doors, signs, hedges). We know that to abuse these boundaries breaks the law or has consequences.

Relationships are based on boundaries, on underlying assumptions about what is ok to do and what is not ok. Also they clarify who is allowed to determine what is ok.

Some basic principles about boundaries

- Boundaries can be both physical and psychological
- They are essential to keep you safe – your invisible fences
- They evolve
- They are related to trust
- You are responsible to know, guard, and communicate your boundaries and limits
- You are responsible to respect the boundaries of other people

Facts Regarding Boundaries

- Everyone struggles to establish and maintain healthy boundaries sometimes throughout their life
- Boundaries often protect us from people who might control us, hurt us, abuse us, manipulate us or use us
- It is important to set boundaries within your self as well as with others

Boundaries can be too close (letting people in too much – enmeshed)

Do you:

- Have difficulty saying “no” in relationships?
- Give too much?
- Get involved too quickly?
- Trust too easily?
- Intrude on others (i.e., violate other people's boundaries)?
- Stay in relationships too long?
- Go against your own values to please someone else?
- Let other people tell you what is important or what to think/feel?

Boundaries can be too distant (not letting people in enough – detached)

Do you:

- Have difficulty saying “yes” in relationships?
- Isolate?
- Distrust too easily?
- Feel lonely?
- Stay in relationships too briefly?
- Don't ask for or offer help?

In what ways do you demonstrate healthy boundaries?

Do you:

- Say no to requests in a nice way?
- Feel okay when others say no to you?
- Have self respect?
- Expect give and take in a relationship – what I would do for them, they would do for me?
- Share responsibility and control?
- Share personal information as you get to know someone, and they share information with me?
- Know what you need and want and express yourself assertively?
- Value your own opinions and are open to and value other people's opinions?
- Ask for help when you need it?
- Refuse to push my own values aside to avoid being rejected?

Building a Support Network

Recovery is hard work and it is important to have people around you who can help you along the way. Using substances or behaviours such as problem gambling or sex addiction may have caused problems in your relationships and you may feel that you are not getting much help from other people. You may have the most contact with people who are still using or who are not very supportive. It's a good idea to think about where you can get the help you need. Professionals, such as counsellors, can be supportive but it is helpful to think about getting support from a variety of places.

What Kinds of Social Support Are There?

- ✓ ***EMOTIONAL*** – Someone who will listen to you and who you can talk to about feelings
- ✓ ***MORAL*** – Someone who will encourage you
- ✓ ***PRACTICAL*** – Someone you can ask for help with everyday tasks such as transportation
- ✓ ***MENTORSHIP*** – Someone you can look to for guidance and instruction
- ✓ ***RECREATIONAL*** – Someone you can have fun with

Building a Support Network Continued...

Answer the following question. Think about some of your unmet support needs. For example, if you'd like to start playing baseball again and have no one to take you, write that down. Think of someone who could take you there and perhaps even play with. Then, plan how you would contact that person. You can use your sheet on healthy boundaries to think about who you could contact and who would not be supportive of you.

What do I need support with?

Who can I ask?

What is my plan?

Some Questions about my relationships

Work through these questions and you can learn some important information about yourself and your relationships.

What is important to me in my relationships with friends?

What is important to me in my relationships with family?

What is important to me in my relationship with my partner?

How has my substance use/problematic behaviour changed these relationships?

What do I need to change in my relationships to help me in my recovery?

What steps do I need to take to change or improve my relationships?
