

BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are limits we set for ourselves and how others may interact with us. As members of ISA, we have been deeply harmed in our relationships with others. One of the first steps we take on the road to personal recovery is establishing safety by creating personal boundaries. Our goal is not to control others, but to protect ourselves so that healing can begin.

Types of Boundaries:

Physical Boundaries:

- Our physical body and our personal space (at home, at work, etc.)
- Choosing how others may greet us (handshake, hug or no contact)
- Protecting ourselves from loud sounds, physical violence or aggressive behavior
- Privacy needs (dressing or showering alone); private time to read, journal or reach out

Sexual Boundaries:

- Protecting my personal safety and comfort level (deciding if I need an STI test or if I require one of someone before I am sexual with them)
- Making my own decisions about abstinence and sexual activity, including who, what and where
- No is a complete answer

Emotional Boundaries:

- Separating my feelings from another's (being genuine about how I feel, regardless of how another feels about that)
- Separating my identity from another's (dropping façades to make another person feel better)
- Choosing my own emotional well-being (doing the self-care I need)

Material Boundaries:

- Personal belongings (money, clothing, food, toothbrush, etc.)
- Giving and Lending (to family, friends or strangers)

Intellectual Boundaries:

- Thoughts, values, opinions, perceptions
- What I believe (about politics, food, childrearing, etc.)

Spiritual Boundaries:

- Beliefs about my connection with God/Higher Power
- My behaviors regarding that connection (prayer, meditation, worship, books, etc.)

Talking & Listening Boundaries:

- Talking-keeping things in (containing my thoughts or words when it is inappropriate or unsafe to express them)
- Listening-keeping things out (protecting myself from someone else's ideas, judgement, or toxicity)

Healthy people have healthy needs. We create safety in unsafe situations by defining our needs and creating boundaries to protect ourselves. As we determine our needs, we gain clarity about how to get those needs met. We learn how to express feelings, state our needs and make requests of others.

Examples of basic or common needs include:

Safety and security	Loyalty, fidelity & transparency in a primary relationship
Honesty	Limiting time or exposure to unhealthy people or situations
To be listened to when speaking	
To have space and time for adequate rest	

There are many different types of boundaries we can set for ourselves that may or may not include making requests of others. Some may be **non-negotiable**, while others are **negotiable**. It is often helpful to ask a sponsor, recovery partner or trusted friend to listen to a potential boundary/request and offer feedback about potential wording so that we can clearly communicate our feelings, needs and requests.

EXAMPLE of non-negotiable boundary "If you have sex (skin-to-skin contact) with another person, I will leave the relationship."

BOUNDARY SETTING DIALOG:

- "When I saw (or heard) you do (or say) _____,"
- "I made up that _____."
or
"because I believe _____."
(Express what you think their motivation might have been for their behavior.)
- "About that, I felt _____." (Use feeling words, e.g. sad, hurt, angry, etc.)
- "Going forward, I would like you to (make a request) _____".
or
"From now on, would you be willing to _____" ?
(Let them know exactly what type of behavior is acceptable when interacting with you.)

EXAMPLE: "When I saw you come home late for dinner, I made up that you don't value our time together. About that I feel lonely and nervous. Going forward I would like you to be home for dinner by 6:30pm and call if you are not going to make it. Would you be willing to do this?"

Many of us have had trouble setting boundaries in the past and boundary setting may not come naturally. Sometimes, our partners, families, friends, co-workers and others violate boundaries in a way that we must take definitive action to protect ourselves.

Examples of Boundary Violation:

- Being lied to/gaslighted
- Being cheated on
- Being told "you shouldn't feel that way"
- Any unwanted touch
- Being exposed to raging
- Having someone read a private journal
- Having affection withheld
- Given unsolicited advice
- Not allowed privacy or quiet space

Some members have found it helpful to verbalize their boundary requests. What we choose to do in response to a boundary violation is a consequence. Consequences are not punishments; they are simply the actions we determine are needed to protect ourselves from those who are not willing to respect our boundaries. Figuring out the "next right thing" can take time but will become easier as we practice and gain clarity about how we choose to live in recovery.