Understanding Boundaries

Family Guide · The Recovery Files

In the app only: the self-assessments Family Assessment, Individual Assessment (scored, so they stay in the app).

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Understanding Boundaries in Recovery

A Comprehensive Guide for Families Supporting Recovery Through Healthy Boundaries

Welcome

Boundaries are invisible lines that define where one person ends and another begins. In the context of substance use disorder (SUD) recovery, healthy boundaries are not just helpful—they're essential for both the person in recovery and the entire family system.

This comprehensive worksheet will help your family:

- Understand the different types of boundaries and why each matters
- Recognize why boundaries are critical for successful recovery
- Identify boundary violations and understand how to address them
- Assess your family's and your own boundary skills through detailed self-assessments
- Practice establishing, communicating, and maintaining healthy boundaries
- Create a comprehensive family boundary plan

What Are Boundaries?

Boundaries are limits or rules that individuals create to identify reasonable, safe, and permissible ways for others to behave towards them. They protect physical and emotional well-being, define personal responsibility, and create clarity in relationships.

Understanding Boundaries

The Foundation of Healthy Relationships in Recovery

What Are Boundaries?

Boundaries are the invisible lines that define where one person ends and another begins. They are the limits and rules we set for ourselves within relationships. Healthy boundaries allow us to separate who we are, what we think, and what we feel from the thoughts and feelings of others.

Healthy Boundaries Include:

- Being able to say "no" without guilt
- Respecting others' rights to say "no"
- Having a strong sense of personal identity
- Taking responsibility for your own actions
- Not taking responsibility for others' actions
- Sharing personal information appropriately
- Protecting physical and emotional space

Poor Boundaries Include:

- Saying "yes" when you want to say "no"
- Feeling responsible for others' emotions

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- Allowing others to make decisions for you
- Accepting behavior that violates your values
- Sharing too much too soon
- Taking as much as you can for yourself
- Letting others define who you are

Types of Boundaries

Understanding Different Domains

Physical Boundaries

Personal space, physical touch, bodily autonomy

Emotional Boundaries

Separating your feelings from others' feelings

Financial Boundaries

Money and its role in relationships

Time Boundaries

How individuals allocate their time and energy

The Role of Boundaries in Recovery

Why Boundaries Are Essential for Healing

10 Benefits of Healthy Boundaries

1.Promoting personal responsibility

2.Reducing codependency

3.Enhancing self-esteem

4.Managing triggers

5.Facilitating healthy communication

6.Protecting mental health

7.Rebuilding trust

8.Structuring the recovery environment

9.Encouraging self-care

10.Supporting long-term recovery

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Recognizing Boundary Violations

Identifying When Limits Are Crossed

Signs of Violations

Emotional Signs

- Feeling resentful or angry
- Experiencing anxiety
- Guilt when saying "no"
- Feeling taken advantage of

Physical Signs

- Tension in your body
- Stomach discomfort
- Headaches
- Difficulty sleeping

What are your typical signs of a boundary violation?

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Establishing Clear Boundaries

The Three-Step Process

Step 1: Identify Your Limits

- What situations cause me discomfort?
- What are my non-negotiable needs?
- What behaviors am I willing to accept?
- What triggers threaten my wellbeing?

Step 2: Communicate Effectively

- Be specific: "I need you to call before visiting"
- Use "I" statements: Focus on your needs
- Choose good timing: Calm moments, private settings
- Stay calm: Emotional escalation undermines your message

Step 3: Enforce Consistency

- Establish clear consequences in advance
- Follow through every time
- Avoid enabling through exceptions
- Balance firmness with compassion

Worksheet: Physical & Emotional Boundaries

Defining These Foundational Boundaries

Physical Boundaries

List three physical boundaries important in your family:

_____ _____ _____

What physical boundaries specifically support recovery in your home?

Emotional Boundaries

Describe a situation where emotional boundaries were unclear, and how clearer ones would have helped:

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Emotional Boundary Checklist

☐ I take responsibility for my own emotions, not others'

☐ I allow others to feel their feelings without trying to fix them

☐ I can say 'no' without excessive guilt

☐ I don't take on others' moods as my own

☐ I express my feelings without dumping on others

Worksheet: Financial & Time Boundaries

Protecting Resources and Energy

Financial Boundaries

What financial boundaries are currently in place, and where do they need to be clarified?

Common Financial Boundaries in Recovery

- No lending money that might be used for substances
- Not paying debts incurred during active addiction
- Transparency about shared expenses
- Clear expectations about contributing to household costs

Time Boundaries

How do you protect time for recovery activities (meetings, therapy, self-care)?

What time boundaries would help your family function better?

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Worksheet: Communicating Boundaries

Expressing Your Limits Effectively

Rewrite Using "I" Language

"You always invade my privacy!"

"Stop enabling their addiction!"

"You never respect my time!"

"You're so controlling!"

Addressing Resistance

What pushback might you receive when you set a boundary?

How will you hold the boundary anyway?

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Worksheet: Boundary Enforcement

Consistency, Consequences, and Follow-Through

Establishing Consequences

For each boundary, identify clear, realistic consequences for violations.

Boundary 1

_____ _____ _____

Boundary 2

_____ _____ _____

Boundary 3

_____ _____ _____

Staying Consistent

Where might staying consistent be difficult, and how will you handle it?

Who can support you in maintaining boundaries?

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Family Boundary Plan

Your Comprehensive Agreement for Healthy Boundaries

Our Family Boundaries

Based on your work throughout this guide, list your family's agreed-upon boundaries.

Communication & Enforcement

We will communicate about boundaries by:

Our process for addressing violations will be:

We will review our boundaries on:

Resources & Next Steps

Continue Your Boundary Journey

Crisis Resources

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text 988 (24/7, free, confidential)

SAMHSA National Helpline

1-800-662-4357 (24/7 treatment referral)

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Harbor of Grace

443-502-8606

Family Support Groups

Al-Anon (www.al-anon.org) · Nar-Anon (www.nar-anon.org) · SMART Recovery Family & Friends (www.smartrecovery.org/family)

Recommended Reading

Boundaries by Henry Cloud & John Townsend

Codependent No More by Melody Beattie

Set Boundaries, Find Peace by Nedra Glover Tawwab

Beyond Addiction by Jeffrey Foote et al.

Remember

- ✓ Boundaries are acts of love for yourself AND the person in recovery
- ✓ Consistency is key, even when uncomfortable
- ✓ Seek professional support when needed
- ✓ Celebrate progress, no matter how small

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