

Boundaries

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Presentation for Community Residential Facilities

Vancouver, Prince George, Kelowna

2006

What are Boundaries?

- Webster's dictionary: **something that indicates a border or a limit**
- With effective boundaries, this limit is flexible and changeable, responding moment to moment to both inner and outer conditions
- Boundaries allow us to screen input from the world, to know what input to let in, and what input to protect ourselves against

What are Boundaries?

- Boundaries protect us from harm, whether physical (e.g., unwanted touch) or psychological (e.g., preserving the right to have opinions that are different from others; the right to have private thoughts and keep them to ourselves, e.g., a diary)
- With boundaries, we create a holding environment for our individual sense of self **and** we also can be sensitive to and respect the rights and boundaries of others
- We can maintain both differentiation and connection

Types of Boundaries

- *Physical boundaries* – pertain to the body, to physical contact and proximity
- With effective boundaries, we decide how close or distant to be physically
- We decide if, when and how we are touched
- We are aware of and respect the physical boundaries of others

Boundary Exercise

- Follow the instructions on the handout
 - One person sets a boundary; one person crosses it; one person observes and takes notes
- We will re-group once everyone is finished

Types of Boundaries

- *Psychological boundaries* pertain to internal processes: thoughts, feelings, and the resultant behavior
- They enable us to separate our thoughts, feelings and behavior from those of other people
- Allow us to not blame others for our feelings, thoughts or behavior (e.g., “You made me feel....”)
- Ensure that we do not take responsibility for the feelings, thoughts or behavior of others (“I made her mad...”)

Types of Boundaries

- *Professional boundaries* pertain to our roles as professionals and define what behaviours are appropriate in our role as professionals
- We are **not** on equal footing with offenders: all CSC staff, including CRF staff, are in positions of power in relation to offenders. We can also be vulnerable to exploitation by offenders
- Professional boundaries also extend to other staff we work with
- More on professional boundaries later.....

Boundary Styles

- What is your boundary style – questionnaire



Boundary Styles

- **Overbounded Style (rigid, dense, walled)**
- The boundary is inflexible. It can:
 - Protect what sense of self there is
 - Reduce the influence of others and the impact of other people's feelings

Overbounded – Rigid, Dense, Walled

- Perceives others as a threat; difficulty with trust, intimacy, vulnerability; can't let down guard
- Does not take in much of anything; receives little nourishment
- Difficulty saying “yes”
- When the overbounded style is habitual, it leads to isolation and separation; no one can really get close to the person, who may become insensitive and abrasive to others

Underbounded - Enmeshed, Merged, Diffused, Vague

- This stems from having relatively little sense of one's true self or personal identity
- Boundary is mushy
- This style can:
 - Sensitize and strengthen awareness of the external environment
 - Increase the ability to feel other people's feelings

Underbounded - Enmeshed, Merged, Diffused, Vague

- Difficulty saying “no” or identifying feelings and wants
- Easily overwhelmed by emotions (of self and others)
- Being in a constant state of trying to recover or attain a sense of boundary
- Lacking awareness of social space

Underbounded - Enmeshed, Merged, Diffused, Vague

- Gives too much in relationship, desires to merge, and has difficulty with differentiation and distance
- When habitual, loss of sense of separation and identity; allows emotional, physical, sexual or intellectual abuse, and may tend to be abusive of others

Pendulum Style

- Person swings back and forth from underbounded to overbounded
- The person may risk vulnerability and open up, perhaps too much, and then experience pain or being overwhelmed and then reacts by closing down
- The only perceived options are swinging from one polarity to the other

Incomplete Style

- This boundary has “holes” in it
- With this style, it is possible to have healthy or effective boundaries much of the time
- Boundary dysfunction (either overbounded or underbounded) comes up in certain situations, such as being in a love relationship, with authority figures, parents or children, men or women
- A loss of healthy boundary may also occur when a person is in a certain emotional, mental, or physical state: being tired, sick, needy, angry, etc.

Effective Style

- Flexible and changeable
- Responds moment to moment to both inner and outer experiences
- Range from open and receptive to closed and protective
- Can fully say “yes” or “no” and can access all variations between yes and no

Where Does Our Style Come From?

- We initially learn boundaries in our families of origin:
 - Observations of parents
 - How our parents interacted with us and our sibs, and each other
 - Extended family

Where Does Our Style Come From?

Examples:

- Interpersonal Trauma (abuse, assault, witnessing):
boundaries are **violated**
 - May lead to an overbounded style. *How might that happen?*
 - With childhood sexual abuse, may lead to underbounded style
 - A pendulum style is also possible

Where Does Our Style Come From?

- Examples:
- Substance Abuse in Families:
 - Often underbounded (enmeshed; little distinction between self and other; sense of overresponsibility for substance abuser; substance abuser tends to be irresponsible)
- Painful medical procedures during childhood.
- Etc.

Where Does Our Style Come From?

- Boundary styles may change based on subsequent events (e.g., traumas) or significant relationships (e.g., teachers, life partners, therapy)
- May go from more healthy to less healthy or from less healthy to more healthy

Professional Boundaries and Boundary Styles

- Some staff view themselves as advocates for offenders. They stand up for them, empathize with their difficulties, want to help them. **Which boundary style could this relate to?**
- Some staff view themselves as enemies of offenders. They may perceive offenders as needing to be controlled or punished. **Which boundary style could this relate to?**

Professional Boundaries and Boundary Styles

- What do you think the “ideal” stance is with offenders? If we think of a healthy boundary style, how could that translate into interactions with offenders?
- Work in your small groups for 10 minutes or so and discuss these questions. Record your ideas, which will be shared with the larger group

Professional Boundaries

Examples of boundary crossings:

- Verbal abuse
- Emotional or physical abuse
- Being too much of an advocate for certain offenders (favoritism)
- Mutually advantageous but illegal relationships (bringing in drugs)
- Friendships; disclosing personal information
- Sex

Professional Boundaries

More examples:

- Being extra nice to the “heavies” in the CRF to have a smooth shift.
- Not intending to be sexually attractive, but wearing clothing that is revealing
- Not enforcing rules, or not reporting offenders for reasons such as the hassle, losing popularity
- Not dealing with personal problems outside of the work place

Professional Boundaries

Hypothetical examples of verbal or emotional abuse:

- *“Sign this so we can assess you”*
- *“PO office wants Smith to report now. Get your ass in gear. Yes, you, the buggy one”*
- *“Sex offender in the house!”*
- *“Sorry to ruin your day, but I’ve got a piece of shit here in X House who wants to see you”.*
- *“Wait your f.....g turn”*
- *“Here, read this report – look what he did - that new guy we heard about this morning is a complete bastard”*

Professional Boundaries

- Being too friendly with offenders can put you at risk for exploitation:
- *Joe had been working at the CRF for one month when a new inmate, Peter, was released. Joe really liked Peter – there was something about him that just drew people in – he was a great listener. Joe and Peter would talk over coffee in the mornings, and Joe found himself telling Peter certain things about his personal life – things that Joe's boss did not know. A couple of months later, Joe found a large quantity of cocaine in Peter's room. When he approached Peter, Peter told him that if Joe ratted him out, Peter would tell everyone about Joe's secrets. Joe stayed quiet.*

Professional Boundaries

- Sometimes the boundary crossings are sexual or romantic in nature
- *Karen had been working in the CRF for a few years and generally had very good boundaries with the offenders. Recently, her husband told her he wanted a divorce. Karen was devastated and started to have doubts about her attractiveness. When an attractive inmate, John, started to pay Karen compliments about her appearance, she found herself taking it in. When she didn't object, John's comments became increasingly inappropriate (e.g., commenting on how sexy she was). She was vulnerable and needy at this time in her life, and she and John began a sexual relationship*

Knowing Your Vulnerabilities

- It is reasonable to ASSUME that all staff members are at risk, from time to time, to exploitation or some sort of involvement with certain offenders
- This includes managerial staff, who have their own supervisors and need to talk about their own attitudes and biases from time to time
- No one can be completely objective about their own attitudes, biases, or vulnerabilities
- *Always be vigilant for yourself and others*

Knowing Your Vulnerabilities

- Personal problems and work do not mix well
- Remember that your job is a dangerous one
- Safeguard your personal information
- If you have relationship problems, be aware that other persons become more attractive
- Have limits and be consistent as to what personal information you are willing to share
- If an offender wants to give you a gift, say no, or ask your supervisor if it is o.k. to accept it
- ***NEVER HAVE SEX WITH AN OFFENDER***

Self-Care

- Talk to someone when your are having problems in your personal life
- Maintain healthy relationships outside of work
- Physical Exercise: a great stress reliever!
- Relaxation (see handouts)
- Abdominal breathing (see handouts)
- Pleasurable Activities

Small Groups

- Does your spouse or partner or best friend or supervisor listen to your work concerns?
- Have you ever been asked or manipulated for a favor by an offender? What did you do? What happened? How was it resolved?
- Has anyone you know ever seemed a little too friendly with an offender? What did you do?
- How many staff members who were dismissed from their jobs for a liaison with an offender would have admitted to being involved before they were forced to quit? How many of these do you think ever thought they were vulnerable?

Physical Boundary Exercise

- Find the sheets from the exercise earlier this morning on physical boundaries
- When your boundary was crossed, what did you notice in your body? Your mind?
- **Remember this!** These are your own individual cues or signals that something is not right. When you notice yourself feeling/thinking that way, pay attention to what is happening and set limits.

Limit Setting

- Setting limits with others, including offenders, requires that you **first know your own limits** (and the limits of your job at the CRF)
- Take a few minutes to write down what kind of behaviours on the part of others are **NOT** okay with you
- If you are not sure if a certain behaviour on the part of others is okay or not, write that down and put a question mark beside it
- Discussion

Asserting Limits

- Once you know what your limits are and what the limits of your job are, you need to **assert them** if someone tries to cross them
- Use “I” statements. **Keep your focus on the message**, not on the other person’s character. This will reduce the other person’s defensiveness.
- E.g., *“I am not okay with the comments you are making about _____ I need those comments to stop”* is more effective than *“What’s wrong with you? Only idiots say things like that. Knock it off!”*

Asserting Limits

- Ensure the limits are enforceable.
- For example, saying, “*If you continue with those comments, I will not extend your curfew*” is enforceable by you.
- On the other hand, saying, “*If you continue with those comments, you are going back to jail!*” is not enforceable by you.

Asserting Limits

- Use **consistent limits** among all offenders you supervise. If you have a limit for one offender, it should apply to all offenders who engage in the same behaviour
- **State the limits clearly, calmly and concisely.** Be straightforward in your statements. Short, clear, and to the point

Asserting Limits

- **Set the limits immediately** – right after the offensive behaviour. Do not wait until later to set limits
- Do not humiliate the offender in front of others. **Isolate** him or her and do not play to an audience.

Summary of Steps

1. Know the limits (yours and those of the job)
2. Keep your focus on the message, not on the character of the other person
3. Set only enforceable limits
4. Use consistent limits for everyone
5. Communicate in a clear, calm, & concise manner
6. Set limits immediately, right after the inappropriate behaviour occurs
7. Isolate the offender, avoid an audience

Skills when Setting Limits

1. Use a positive approach. Focus on positive outcomes/gains for the offender
2. Give as many choices as possible
3. Timing
4. Be direct and specific
5. Deliver in a non-threatening manner (relaxed body language, moderated tone of voice, respectful, non-threatening language)
6. Identify what the consequences are and the conditions under which they will be implemented

Small Group Role Play

- Groups of 2-3
- Use scenarios (supplied) to practice limit-setting.
- One will play the staff member, one the offender, one an observer
- Rotate – each person should have an opportunity to play the staff member who is setting limits

**Thanks for your time and
attention!**

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