

SEX AND BOUNDARIES

REFLECTION GROUP MATERIALS

How to use this booklet

These materials were put together in order to minimize the effort required to run a reflection group meeting. Ideally, any group of people in any context can pick up this booklet and, with no further preparation, begin to run meetings regularly.

We encourage anyone to make edits to this document as they see fit, adding and removing as their needs progress. The authors of this booklet do not belong to any one organization and no organization claims ownership over the materials inside. No trained facilitators are needed to support our peers in the ways covered by this booklet.

How to use these meetings

As an analogy, I like to think about the daily practice of brushing teeth. When we get a cavity, dental hygiene becomes very important aftercare. However, if we only ever brushed our teeth after getting cavities then brushing our teeth would feel far less effective and helpful. Instead, we promote a culture of everyone brushing their teeth - regardless of what they eat or how often they have sugar or how young or old they are.

Similarly, if we only have tools for reflecting on crossing boundaries during sex right after a moment of crisis - a rape or assault, a public allegation, a slew of unwanted advances - then these tools tend to feel “too little too late”. At best they feel ineffective and at worst they begin to only serve the purpose of punishment.

The reality is that we all have the capability to hurt someone else during sex. And of course! Sex is a vulnerable experience with its own complex assortment of languages to communicate boundaries in. Most of us aren’t even taught how to communicate about sex in plain english. No matter how often they have sex, no matter what their history is when it comes to respecting and communicating boundaries, everyone who has sex can and should benefit from regular practice of reflecting on these topics.

Sex and Boundaries Reflection Meeting Script

Welcome everyone to this sex and boundaries reflection meeting. My name is [your name]. Starting on my left and continuing around the circle, please say your name. As a group we respond to someone introducing themselves by simply saying “Hi” and then their name.

I have asked a friend to read the intentions of this meeting.

Read Intentions (page 5)

I’ve asked a friend to read the our reflection group principles.

Read Principles (page 6)

Thank you. There are many different roads that lead us to reflecting on these topics. I have asked a friend to read a list of some characteristics behavior that might lead someone to this room. If you see your story in one or many of these characteristics know you are not alone.

Read Characteristics of Why We’re Here (page 7)

Thank you. There are also many ways that people need to process while reflecting on these topics. I have asked another friend to read a list of difficult feelings you might feel moving forward through these topics.

Read Difficult Feelings (page 8)

Thank you.

This meeting’s focus is on crossing someone else’s boundaries during sex, although any sex or boundary related topic is welcome.

We are now entering the group sharing portion of this meeting. When sharing feel free to address the room, although ultimately your share is in dialogue with yourself. Please do not directly respond to the shares of other participants during your share. While the topics discussed in this room might be important topics to have a group dialogue on, this is not the space for doing so.

We encourage anyone sharing to speak through any thoughts, no matter how

raw, inarticulate, and questionable they may be. Likewise we ask anyone listening to help make the space safe for working through such thoughts. We also ask that shares avoid gratuitous descriptions of harmful behavior. If anyone feels triggered by a portion of a members share we ask that you raise your hand and the secretary will ask the speaker to move on from their current thought. Everyone is welcome to exit and re-enter the room whenever they need.

If you are attending today's meeting because you have a loved one, or know someone, who habitually crosses boundaries during sex we commend you for trying to better understand their context. However, while in this room we ask you to reflect only on your own relationship to boundaries, consent, and communication during sex. Even if you don't have any recognized history with crossing boundaries, reflection on how we communicate during sex is something everyone can benefit from. Developing your own practice of reflecting on how you communicate during sex will help you both in supporting others and navigating complicated sexual encounters going forward.

Because there are [*# of people*] people here today, each person will have [*# per person*] minutes to share. You may end your share early but we ask that you not go over your time out of respect for others. The timer will signal to the person speaking when they only have a minute left and then again when their time is up. Would anyone like to volunteer to be our timer?

Timer volunteers

Thank you.

We will now begin sharing. No one is required to share. We will pick a first volunteer to start and that person will pick a next volunteer and so on. Who would like to speak first?

Sharing portion

That's all the time we have to share. Thank you to everyone who shared and to everyone who listened. Before we close I want to open the floor to any related announcements.

Related announcements; could include any kind of group post-meeting gathering at a nearby cafe, etc.

Does anyone have any general announcements?

General announcements

Thank you.

Problems surrounding sex and boundaries affect everyone involved and then some. Let's take a moment of silence for the people trying to rebuild trust with regard to sex and communication; trust both in themselves and with others, in and out of this room.

Moment of silence

Thank you all for coming. Let's close out with a reminder that everything you heard in this room, every person you met here, let their anonymity be protected so we can all feel safe processing in a dedicated space. Take from this room the values of each share, not the details. Here, here.

Intentions

This reflection group is for anyone who struggles with or has at some point struggled with crossing boundaries during sex. You are invited to join regardless of the context or severity of those actions or how certain you are that a boundary was crossed. This meeting prioritizes a shared agreement of anonymity and trust as everyone works through the complicated questions that come out while unpacking this topic.

This is not a discussion group and is not a forum to directly critique the reflections of any other participant. Instead this meeting is meant for participants to practice self reflection among others who are also seeking critical support. Shares may contain raw, unprocessed, and sometimes problematic reflections. That's all part of the non-linear process of growth. This reflection group should not be the only source of community when working through these problems and whenever possible participants should seek out people in their own communities and contexts who can provide both critical feedback and care.

We hope that in providing a much needed space for open reflection - all who need it will have somewhere to anchor whenever they feel lost navigating the often difficult challenge of reflecting on our most vulnerable hurtful behaviors. We are all here because we wish to better understand ourselves, our circumstances, and how to work on the parts of those subjects we think need to change.

Principles

1. Not everyone experiences sex the same. We all exist in overlapping social and political realities that inform how we are each emotionally affected during sex. Considering these factors when trying to understand someone else's experience is an important part of reflection.
2. No one is incapable of change. No matter what any of us have done in the past, all of us are capable of changing our behavior going forward - no matter how hard it may be.
3. Change is hard and must be self motivated. Changing our behaviors and habits is difficult. It's a test of endurance, not a sprint. The motivation for change must come from within if it can sustain itself for a long time. While many might find themselves here because of external factors, ultimately you must carve out your own reasons for participating.
4. Both intention and impact inform how we move on from harm. Unintentional harm doesn't erase the impact it has or the acknowledgment that needs to be given to our actions. And also, to effectively understand what we have done and begin to move forward we must consider the full context of how and why we ended up crossing someone else's boundary. This room welcomes the tension of untangling how we hurt without intending to hurt.
5. Anonymity and respect are critical for trust. We are all here because we are working through problems that are hard to work through alone or in other settings. In order for this room to be effective we must all assume the anonymity of those in attendance and not repeat the shares said during a meeting.
6. No identity is required to need reflection on this topic. You do not need to be identify as an addict or have any psychological label to communally reflect on communication during sex. While these things may contribute to some people's patterns of behavior, they are not necessary for us to cross boundaries during sex. The acknowledgment that anyone is capable of crossing someone else's boundaries is foundational to this space.

Characteristics of Why We Are Here

1. Loved ones and friends confronted us about our harmful behavior.
2. We felt guilt or anxiety about actions that nobody knows about yet.
3. We felt powerless over changing behavior we recognized in ourselves.
4. We know our actions harmed someone, but we didn't intend to hurt them in the moment. We're struggling to reconcile those facts.
5. We have community in substance abuse recovery programs but worry that community won't understand the parts of our behavior that involve crossing boundaries during sex.
6. We hurt people during sex intentionally and we don't understand why.
7. We hurt people during sex intentionally, we know why but don't know how to stop going forward.
8. We have been hurt sexually in the past and can not reconcile how we might have harmed someone else.
9. To our knowledge, we haven't hurt someone during sex. We just want to know more about sex, boundaries, and how to communicate about the topic to ourselves and others.

Difficult Feelings While Working Through These Topics

1. Hate and/or fear from both friends and strangers.
2. Inability to be close to people and have close meaningful relationships.
3. Inability to trust and be trusted.
4. Fear that this will be the first thing new people in our life know about us.
5. Fear that loved ones will leave us.
6. Fear that we will be alone.
7. Fear that we are becoming like others who were violent against us or our loved ones.
8. Guilt or shame for harming others.
9. Loss of self-respect, self-esteem, belief in oneself.
10. Loss of a sense of identity.
11. Feelings of hopelessness and despair.

