Maintaining Healthy Boundaries

Session Aims and Objectives

Aims

This session aims to explore what are boundaries and how to set healthy boundaries in the workplace.

Objectives

By the end of the session you will develop an understanding of:

- What are healthy boundaries and why they are important in the workplace

- How to identify blocks to boundary setting

- Recognise the importance of professional identity and prioritising

- Importance of developing skills in transparency and communication

What are Boundaries

Boundaries can be defined as the limits we set with other people, which indicate what we find acceptable and unacceptable in their behavior towards us.
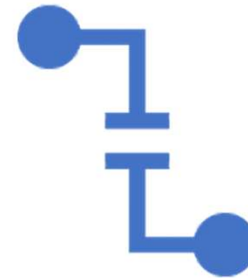
Boundaries can be physical or emotional, and they can range from being loose to rigid, with healthy boundaries often falling somewhere in between.

Setting Boundaries

- **Boundaries** are basic guidelines that people create to establish how others are able to behave around them.

- **For example**, they may involve what behaviour is okay and what is not and how to respond if someone passes those limits. Setting boundaries can ensure that relationships can be mutually respectful, appropriate, and caring.

- **Healthy boundaries** can serve to establish one's identity. Specifically, healthy boundaries can help people define their individuality and can help people indicate what they will and will not hold themselves responsible for.

- **Boundaries** help you feel safe and comfortable in your relationships. They are a way for you to share your expectations and set limitations with yourself and others. Boundaries are a healthy way to show up for yourself.

- Personal boundaries are the limits and rules we set for ourselves within relationships.

- A person with healthy boundaries can say "no" to others when they want to, but they are also comfortable opening themselves up to intimacy and close relationships.

- **Healthy Personal Boundaries = Taking responsibility for your own actions and emotions, while NOT taking responsibility for the actions or emotions of others**

Healthy Personal Boundaries

Setting healthy personal boundaries

- **Healthy boundaries** are flexible boundaries. When we don't set limits for ourselves, we leave ourselves open to be taken advantage of – personally and professionally.

- Equally, if we are too rigid with our boundaries, we risk disconnection from those around us and therefore isolation from the support of closeness of family, friends, and colleagues.

- Setting healthy boundaries and aiming for balance enables us to put ourselves first when we need to, which in turn enables relationships to stay safe and our emotional energy to be protected.

- In this way, different situations and relationships require different boundaries to be set and maintained – you might still want to be involved in a friend's situation, but it doesn't mean you have to take the emotional burden.

- Likewise, it's ok to say 'no' when demands placed on you at work or anywhere else are too high.

Characteristics:

Unhealthy boundaries – Types and characteristics :

A person who always keeps others at a distance (whether emotionally, physically, or otherwise) is said to have *rigid boundaries*. Alternatively, someone who tends to get too involved with others has *porous boundaries*

Rigid Boundaries	Porous Boundaries
Avoids intimacy and close relationships.	Overshares personal information.
Unlikely to ask for help.	Difficulty saying "no" to the requests of others.
Has few close relationships.	Overinvolved with others' problems.
Very protective of personal information.	Dependent on the opinions of others.
May seem detached, even with romantic partners.	Accepting of abuse or disrespect.
Keeps others at a distance to avoid the possibility of rejection.	Fears rejection if they do not comply with others.

Characteristics and traits of healthy Boundaries :

- Values own opinions.

- Doesn't compromise values for others.

- Shares personal information in an appropriate way (does not over or under share).

- Knows personal wants and needs, and can communicate them.

- Accepting when others say "no" to them and knows how to say "no" to others

  without hurting someone's feelings or emotions.

Most people have a mix of different boundary types. For example, someone could have healthy boundaries at work, porous boundaries in romantic relationships, and a mix of all three types with their family.

The appropriateness of boundaries depends heavily on setting. What's appropriate to say when you're out with friends might not be appropriate when you're at work.

Some cultures have very different expectations when it comes to boundaries. For example, in some cultures it's considered wildly inappropriate to express emotions publicly. In other cultures, emotional expression is encouraged.

Why do we need to establish Healthy Boundaries?

- Setting clear personal boundaries is the key to ensuring relationships are mutually respectful, supportive and caring.

- **Boundaries** are a measure of self-esteem. They set the limits for acceptable behavior from those around you, determining whether they feel able to put you down, make fun, or take advantage of your good nature.

- If you often are made uncomfortable by others' treatment of you, it may be time to reset these boundaries to a more secure level. Weak boundaries leave you vulnerable and likely to be taken for granted or even damaged by others.

- On the other hand, a healthy self-respect will produce boundaries which show you deserve to be treated well. They also will protect you from exploitative relationships and help you avoid getting too close to people who don't have your best interests at heart.

In short we need healthy boundaries for :

- For protection and personal security

- To create order

- To define ourselves clearly

- To gain a clearer sense of ourselves in relation to others

- To empower us to determine how we will be treated by others

How to set Healthy boundaries?

- Define your boundaries and be honest.
- Know your limits.
- Be assertive.
- Learn to Say NO.
- Practice/Be consistent.

Identify blocks to boundary-setting

- Identify what might stop you from setting boundaries with others. We may have had a sense recently or over a long period of time that we're being taken advantage of, and that demands upon us are too high or unmanageable.

- Nonetheless, it keeps happening. Before we do anything, it's important to know what might stop us from setting healthy boundaries.

- Asking ourselves why we might not be setting the correct limits in different situations is crucial to understanding the blocks underneath – whether this is born from a sense of fear, or from a sense of low self-esteem, and so on.

- Fears and perceived threats will hold us back – it might be that we're imagining conflict with a friend if we say no, or being fired from our job.

- Hence, we can play a game of 'true or false' with ourselves – what's the evidence that our worst fears will come true?

- Writing this down helps to stay with what comes up for us, and also provides a reference tool.

Prioritising and Professional Identity

- Surviving and thriving especially in the workplace, where we spend a great deal of our lives, is very important.

- Establish priorities at work.

- Do not take on too much of work as this can lead to burnout.

Always check:

- Why am I doing this?

- Am I taking on too much?

- Does this have meaning for me?

- If we take on too many tasks without prioritising, we can end up not meeting targets and this could reflect poorly on our overall performance at work.

Prioritising in our Personal Lives

- As healthcare professionals and individuals, we can easily become a sponge for everybody else's problems when all we want to do is help.

- This can result in depletion of our emotional energy if we don't invest in self care, self-compassion, and self-respect.

- We can never fully be present and help others without first helping ourselves, and before we become involved in being there for other people in our network, it's important to check out why we want or need to do this.

- Sometimes, we have no choice – but if we know there is going to be a great cost to our emotional energy, we usually need to find ways to recover and regenerate as well.

You might need boundaries with

- Family
- Friends
- Romantic Partner
- Co-workers
- Social Media
- Yourself
- Work
- Neighbors
- Relatives
- Your time

What can boundaries sound like?

boundaries can sound like..

Sara Kuburic, CCC; @millennial.therapist

- I am not okay with you making racist jokes. If you continue to do so, I will leave.
- I don't feel comfortable gossiping about other family members.
- I only offer meetings during my business hours.
- I appreciate your support, but I want to make this decision on my own.
- I am feeling really triggered right now, and I don't feel like I am in a place where I can offer you the support you need.
- I like you as a friend, and I want to be clear about the fact I am not looking for anything more.
- No thanks, one glass of wine is my limit.
- I need you to stop making comments about my weight.
- Thank you for the invite, but tonight I am need some alone time.

Boundaries at work sound like:
@NEDRATAWWAB

- "I'm honored that you would ask me to help, but I'm unable to add anything else to my workload."
- "I can't lower my price, and I hope that you find someone within your budget."
- "I know I'm working from home, but I'm still maintaining normal business hours."
- "I can't offer my services for free."
- "I need help with my workload because I can't manage everything on my plate."
- "I'm not able to chat right now; I need to stay focused on my work assignment."
- "I'd rather talk by phone instead of emailing about this topic."
- "I don't feel comfortable talking about politics at work."

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social media boundaries:
Sara Kuburic, CCC; @millennial.therapist

- I will only spend two hours per day on social media
- I won't scroll while in bed
- I will unfollow accounts that don't promote my well-being
- I will block accounts that post rude or hurtful comments
- I will not use social media to stalk my former partners
- I will post things that bring me joy, rather than seek approval
- I will take detox breaks every 3 months
- I will not post pictures or videos of others without their permission
- I will not write anything that I wouldn't say to someone's face
- I will not look at my phone first thing in the morning
- If social media begins to negatively impact my mental health, I will close down/suspend my accounts

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Communication and Transparency

- When it comes to setting professional and personal boundaries, effective communication is very important.

- Identify your own support resources – who can you talk to and go to for advice.

- Establish whether you can meet goals or complete tasks before agreeing to do them. Be upfront and honest, especially to managers and colleagues.

- Protect your sense of wellbeing at home or in your relationships outside of work by being honest about ourselves and what we can or can't do for others.

- Once you have crossed your boundaries once, the likelihood is that the demand will continue to present as other people may not understand that you have other competing demands on your time unless you tell them.

- Saying *no* doesn't have to mean conflict, and assertiveness doesn't have to mean aggression.
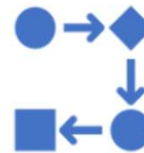
Golden Rules

As we practice more and more, we can start to define our golden rules.

Definition is key to making things concrete.

Remember that this is a work in progress and not a final destination – it's important to define, check, and re-define our boundaries to suit our needs as we grow both professionally and personally.

In order to define our golden rules, we can use our past experiences to try to understand what we will and will not accept from others, and what is tolerable or intolerable for ourselves.

And Finally

- Ultimately, establishing boundaries keeps us safe and protected at a level that keeps us interacting with others and the world around us.

- With time and practise, we can arrive at a healthy, robust place of being able to maintain balance – and if we are able to maintain balance, we are able to prevent becoming stressed and overwhelmed.

- Giving ourselves permission to not only be well, but also stay well, gives us a good chance at healthy progression at a suitable pace.

- Sometimes, *it's okay to say no.*

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