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# Practicing Boundaries

While building healthy connections is a key part of healing, equally important is identifying, maintaining, and communicating your boundaries. Everything you embrace, initiate, and seek out to build connections can be done at your own pace and in a way that honors these boundaries.



Each Saprea Support Group meeting begins with 'Group Leader A' reading the script while participants follow along. The script will be the same for every group meeting. **To find the script, visit [supportgroups.saprea.org](https://supportgroups.saprea.org).** Below are the additional meeting materials for this course.



To watch the intro video for this lesson, scan the QR code or go to <https://vimeo.com/showcase/10293739>.

## Group Activity

### PRACTICING BOUNDARIES

**A boundary is a line or limit that separates what you're okay with from what you're not.** It can be helpful to think back to the visual of the fence. Everything inside the fence is what you like and want to embrace in your life. Everything outside the fence is what you don't like and don't want to be part of your life. While rigid fencing can lead to isolation, weak fencing can lead to trespassing. The best kinds of fences have gates that allow flexibility in who can come in and go out to honor changing relationships, circumstances, and healing. A healthy boundary allows you to open the gate to new people, friendships, and support systems while still holding firm to the limits that will help you feel secure. For more examples of what rigid, weak, and healthy boundaries look like, you can refer to the chart below.

#### Those with Rigid Boundaries

- Use boundaries to push people away.
- Use boundaries to try controlling other people.
- Are not open to hearing others' viewpoints.
- Are overprotective of personal information.
- Aren't willing to appropriately adapt boundaries to different contexts.
- Say no to things simply because they are outside of their comfort zone.
- Seem detached.
- Believe their own boundaries are more important than others' boundaries.

### Those with Weak Boundaries

- Don't set boundaries for fear that others won't approve.
- Are controlled by other people's behaviors and opinions.
- Accept abuse or disrespect from others because they feel it's what they deserve.
- Overshare details of past trauma with others, even new acquaintances.
- Feel it's their job to fix everyone else's problems.
- Don't say no to others, even when feeling uncomfortable or emotionally overwhelmed.
- Believe others' boundaries are important but hesitate to establish their own.
- Reinforce boundaries inconsistently or don't reinforce boundaries at all.

### Those with Healthy Boundaries

- Stand up for personal values and don't compromise out of fear or doubt.
- Consistently communicate and reinforce boundaries.
- Are firm, but not rigid, in reinforcing personal boundaries.
- Respect their own boundaries and the boundaries of others.
- Develop emotional closeness at a pace that is comfortable and best suits their healing journey.
- Share personal information appropriately with others.
- Willing to try new things as long as values aren't compromised.
- Place trust in those who have earned it.

Setting a healthy boundary generally involves:

- Identifying a relationship or situation in your life where you may have a boundary that is currently too weak or too rigid.
- Determining how you'd like to change that boundary into something healthier.
- Planning an action to communicate that change.


#### **LET'S LOOK AT AN EXAMPLE:**

Over the past year you have been attending therapy and practicing strategies to help manage the trauma of child sexual abuse. Your partner is very supportive and has been doing all they can to help you along your healing journey and be the supporter you need.

However, over the past few months you have started refusing to go to any social engagements, family events, or work functions with your partner because you are worried about becoming triggered. Each time your partner asks if you'll go with them to one of these social settings, you say no. While your partner has been patient and empathetic, you feel that your boundary may be too rigid and is putting a strain on the relationship. So you decide to adjust the boundary by laying out the details (see example to the side).

Now, it's your turn!

**RELATIONSHIP:** *Significant Other* **AREA:** *Social*



**NEW BOUNDARY:** *While I am still hesitant to attend social gatherings because I'm scared of being triggered, I understand that it's important for my partner that I make the effort to attend certain events, even if it's just for a short amount of time.*

**ACTION:** *Have a conversation with my partner to discuss my willingness to go to a select number of social events each month, as long as we have a *kup* plan in case I become triggered. For instance, before each event we can come up with an excuse to leave early if needed.*

## ACTIVITY STEPS

**01** Think of a specific relationship in your life and write it down.


**02** Next, think about an area of the relationship (or of your life in general) that you'd like to focus on, and write that area down next to the relationship. Here are a few examples:

- Physical
- Intellectual
- Emotional
- Spiritual
- Professional
- Sexual


**03** Draw a spectrum similar to the one in the example. Determine where on the spectrum you feel your boundary is regarding that relationship or situation.

**04** Next, write down a new, healthier boundary that you would like to set.

**05** And finally, write down one thing you can do or say to set that boundary.

 **Note:** This exercise may also help you recognize a healthy boundary that you already have in place and would like to continue maintaining or modeling other boundaries after.

**RELATIONSHIP:** **AREA:**



**NEW BOUNDARY:**

**ACTION:**

# Grounding Exercise

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## PACED BREATHING

Think of your breath as an anchor that holds you to the present. Your breathing serves you right now, in this moment. You cannot take breaths for the past or for the future—only for your present needs.

So let's begin.

### ACTIVITY STEPS

- 01** Take a moment to get comfortable. Close your eyes or soften your gaze.
- 02** Rest a hand on your chest or stomach if it helps you feel calm.
- 03** Focus on the image of a breathing heart, one that swells with each inhale and compresses with each exhale.
- 04** Inhale through your nose, envisioning your heart expanding. Count four heartbeats. 1, 2, 3, 4.
- 05** Hold your breath, counting two heartbeats. 1, 2.
- 06** Exhale through your nose, envisioning your heart compressing. Count six heartbeats. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. The key is to try making the exhale longer than the inhale to help calm the body.
- 07** Repeat this for 2–5 minutes, or if you are using the exercise to help manage a trigger, repeat these steps as many times as necessary to feel grounded in the present moment. You may also choose to place both hands over your heart as you envision it expanding and contracting. As your heartbeats slow, your breathing will get deeper, continuing to calm you.

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### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

If you are interested in learning more, we invite you to explore the following articles in the Online Healing Resources section of our website at [saprea.org](https://saprea.org).

- **NAVIGATING YOUR RELATIONSHIPS**
- **ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION**
- **PRACTICING BOUNDARIES**

### NEXT TOPIC:

**#24**



#### **SELF-COMPASSION**

The antidote to shame is self-compassion, one of the most powerful tools we can use to reduce the effects of trauma and strengthen our emotional, mental, and physical well-being.