

# SETTING BOUNDARIES

## GOALS:

- To look at roles and relationships and to examine the types of boundaries that exist in special relationships.
- To discuss comfort levels regarding boundaries in relationships.
- To affirm individuals' rights to set boundaries within comfortable limits.

## RATIONALE:

This lesson looks at the underlying assumptions behind roles that persons take on. It is particularly difficult in a society based on power to understand the importance of giving everyone the right to set their own boundaries and to avoid victimization.

This lesson can be useful in assessing one's own values and relationships in the workplace.

## MATERIALS NEEDED:

Flipchart, markers, for each participant a copy of ***Setting Boundaries Worksheet***

## METHOD:

### Warm up: Advancing Boundaries

Divide participants into dyads. Make sure that you have a large room with uninterrupted space. Ask each dyad to stand about 20 feet apart. Tell participant **A** to begin walking slowly towards Participant **B**, without making any noise. When Participant **B** feels that Participant **A** has come as close as his/her boundaries allow, s/he must put up his/her hand firmly in front of them and say "Stop!" loudly, at which point Participant **A** will freeze and stand still. Then they switch roles.

It is easier to model this than to explain. It is often surprising how quickly hands go up to say "Stop!"

### Questions to consider:

- Did you say "Stop!" at the time that you thought you would?
- How did it feel to actually create your own boundary with someone?
- How did it feel to respect someone else's boundary?
- How are boundaries established in the workplace?

## **Theory:**

Relationships are based on underlying assumptions about what is okay to do and what is not okay in a given relationship, and also who is allowed to determine this. When relationships are based on equality, there is less chance of exploitation. But there are many persons with whom we have contact, who we have been taught to believe have more power in the relationship. This may include those people who are in professional areas, or in authority (eg. employers).

Before one discusses setting boundaries, it is important to make several acknowledgements:

- All relationships have assumptions behind them, based on societal values.
- These assumptions are rarely discussed openly in everyday conversation.
- Individuals may have different assumptions about certain relationships and their boundaries.
- Boundaries may be either physical and /or psychological boundaries.
- Boundaries are related to trust.
- There can be both negative or positive consequences when persons try to change boundaries.
- There will often be resistance to changing boundaries from persons who have previously established the boundaries.

## **Exercise 1: Brainstorm Roles/Relationships**

In the large group, brainstorm a list of different roles and relationships in which participants are involved. Flipchart answers. Examples include best friend, sister/brother, mother/father, employee, doctor, spouse/partner, child, co-worker, supervisor. These roles/relationships should describe persons with whom they have significant contact. Ask group which roles do they have the most/ the least control over?

## **Exercise 2: Setting Boundaries**

Ask participants to get into dyads again with the same person as in the warm up. Tell them to choose 3 roles/relationships that they have in common. Distribute the ***Setting Boundaries Worksheet***. Ask them to fill in the worksheet with respect to one of these roles/relationships and to discuss it together with their partner.

When everyone is finished, ask the participants to return to the large group and discuss anything they learned from the exercise.

## **EVALUATION:**

## **CREDIT:**

Linda Hochstetler, Program Worker, YWCA of Greater Toronto.

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1. What type of relationship is this?
2. Who initiates contact?
3. What is the time frame for this relationship?
4. Is sharing equal in this relationship?
5. Are there things that you would like to say in this relationship, but don't or can't?  
What are they?
6. Do you feel that your own boundaries are respected in this relationship?  
Explain:
7. What changes would you like to make in this relationship?