CREATING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

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Objectives

- Participants will identify characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships.

- Participants will understand how people establish and maintain clear boundaries and why boundaries are an important part of a healthy relationship.

- Participants will understand and be able to practice setting clear boundaries.

What is a Boundary?

A boundary is a clear place where you begin and the other person ends. Think of it as a fence in your backyard. You are the gatekeeper and you decide who you let in and who you keep out. Who you let in the whole back yard and who you let just inside the gate.

"Boundaries are a life enhancing system of "yes" and "no's". They are stop signs and borders you install to protect yourself so that it is clear that you own your life, make good choices, and pursue the authentic expression of who you are in the way you live, love, give and relate."

"Boundaries are a limit you set between yourself and people due to thoughts, activities and things that aren't in your best interest."

Professional boundaries are complex because they involve personal values, culture and ethics.

Activity:

- In your group, what do boundaries mean to you and your life? Indicate these responses on the chart paper and be willing to share with the whole group.

Why is it important to set boundaries?

- To practice self-care and self-respect.

- To communicate your needs in a relationship.

- To make time and space for positive interactions.

- To set limits in a relationship in a way that is healthy.

Ineffective boundaries can lead to:

- Loss of respect from self and others.

- Loss of control of the direction of your life.

- Increased chaos, distractions, and guilt.

- Loss of interest in life.

- Unmet goals and the stress of chaos can lead to hopelessness, depression or anxiety.

- Without personal boundaries, "You will act, sleep, work, groan, feel used and fulfill basic responsibilities rather than make choices to live and love fully, to work hard and nobly, to fulfill your purpose and to contribute passionately to your world."

Black, J. & Enns, G. (1997) Better Boundaries: Owning and Treasuring Your Life. Oakland, CA. Raincoast Books)

Challenges to Boundary Setting

- FEAR of rejection and, ultimately, abandonment.

- FEAR of confrontation.

- GUILT.

- We were not taught healthy boundaries.

- Safety Concerns.

Note: If you are dealing with someone who is physically dangerous, it may not be safe to set boundaries with them. If you are in this situation, it can be helpful to work with a counselor/therapist to create a safety plan.

Activity

- With your group, brainstorm other ways that your boundaries may have been challenged. Indicate these responses on the paper provided.

Examples:

- Not wanting to hurt others' feelings

- Don't want to upset your coworker

- Rather say "yes" than "no"

Healthy boundaries allow you to:

- Have high self-esteem and self-respect.

- Share personal information gradually, in a mutually sharing and trusting relationship.

- Protect physical and emotional space from intrusion.

- Have an equal partnership where responsibility and power are shared.

- Be assertive. Confidently and truthfully say "yes" or "no" and be okay when others say "no" to you.

- Separate your needs, thoughts, feelings, and desires from others. Recognize that your boundaries and needs are different from others.

- Empower yourself to make healthy choices and take responsibility for yourself.

Unhealthy boundaries are characterized by:

- Sharing too much too soon, or at the end of the spectrum, closing yourself off and not expressing your need and wants.

- Feeling responsible for others' happiness.

- Inability to say "no" for fear of rejection or abandonment.

- Weak sense of your own identity. You base how you feel about yourself on how others treat you.

- Disempowerment. You allow others to make decisions for you; consequently, you feel powerless and do not take responsibility for your own life.

Activity

- In your group, list some examples of unhealthy boundaries that exist in your work, home or personal life.
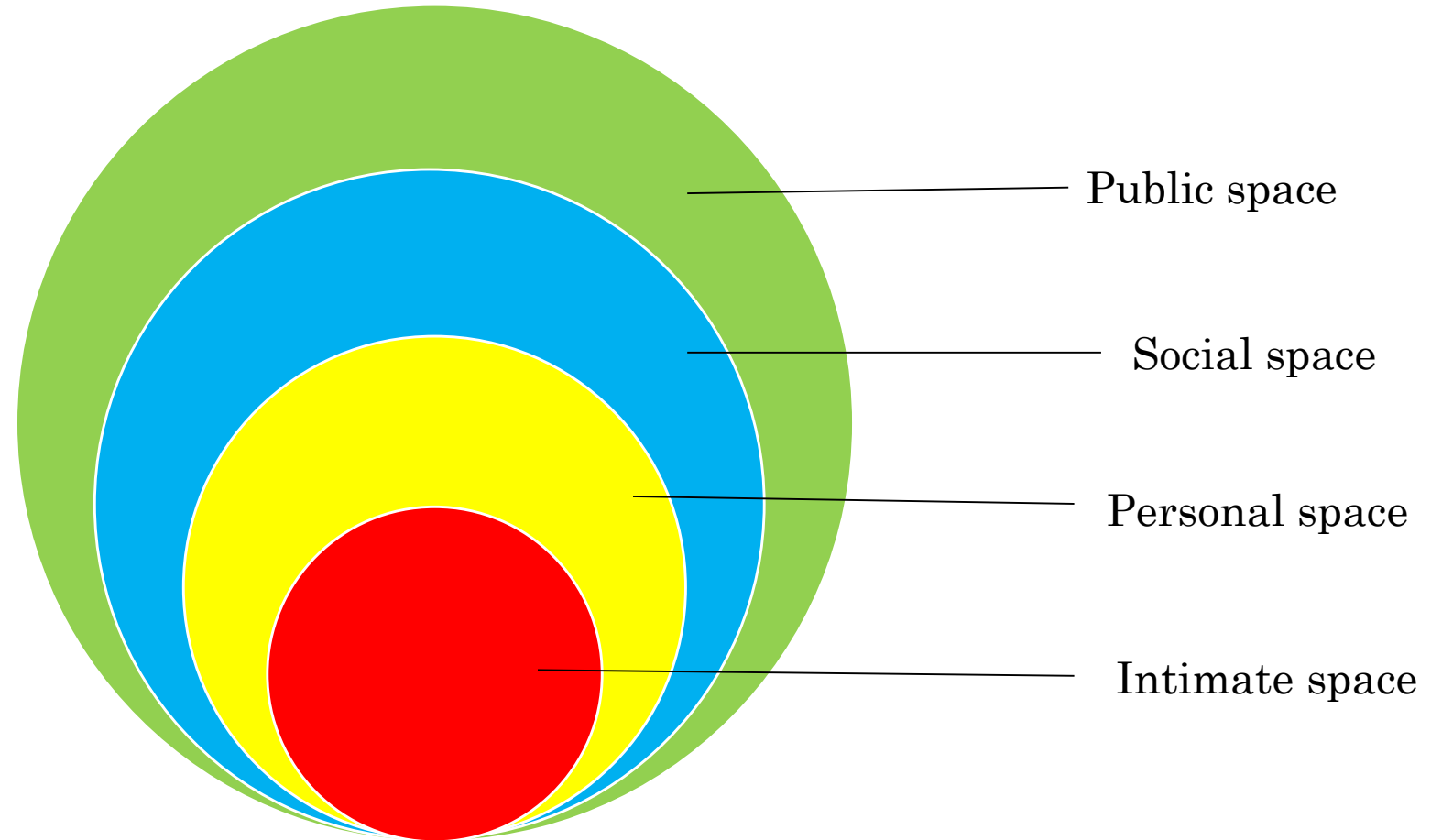
Activity

- In your group, identify types of boundaries and describe what they are. Indicate your responses on the paper provided. Chose a spokesperson and be ready to share with the whole group.

Boundary Types

- **Physical**

- **Sexual**

- **Spiritual**

- **Relational**

- **Emotional**

- **Mental**

- **Legal**

Types of Physical space

Public space

Social space

Personal space

Intimate space

Personal Space Activity

- 1. Get into groups of 2-try to choose someone you do not know well.

- 2. Each pair stands facing each other, about 5 feet apart.

- 3. Have person A close their eyes and stand still, while person B walks slowly and quietly towards him/her.

- 4. Have person A say 'Stop' when he/she feels that person B has gotten too close. Person A can open his/her eyes.

- 5. Switch roles and repeat.

Activity

In your group discuss the following:

- What did you notice about the differences in personal space?

- Did you learn anything about your own or others' personal space range?

- Some people may have much smaller areas of personal space that our own, for example, "a close talker." What are some ways we can clearly set our physical space boundary in a respectful way?

Setting Limits

- In all relationships, we set limits, a key issue for support staff is recognizing when to set a limit.

- As early as possible establish clear agreements with others regarding your role as support staff, your availability and the best ways to communicate with you.

- We can burn out very quickly if we don't recognize where the work ends and where personal life begins.

Setting healthier

boundaries protect:

Your time

Your emotions

Your energy

Your personal values or other areas of importance to you.

Boundaries help you to:

- **Define Your Identity-** you become clear and confident with yourself, and others know what to expect from you.

- **Protect Yourself from Violators-**boundaries let in what is good and keep out what is bad, so you remain safe and able to express your true self.

- **Bring Order**- without them, you are able to regulate demands, ideas, dreams, responsibilities, opportunities, pleasures and activities.

- **Promote You**-leaders and employers with good boundaries, you can be trusted to state clearly what you can and cannot do, welcome input, work passionately without burnout.

Boundaries help you to: (cont.)

- **Protect Yourself from the Control of Others**-having clear boundaries makes it difficult for others to control you, and makes it easier for you to say no when you need to.

- **Preserve Your Purpose and Mission**-once these are identified, boundaries save you for the relationships and opportunities that best fit who you are.

- **Protect Your Finest Personal Assets**-which includes knowledge, body, skills, abilities, purpose and mission.

- **Satisfy Your Need for Self-Confirmation**-by defining you and your personality.

Ways to set healthier boundaries

- Back up a boundary setting with action.

- Be direct, firm and respectful.

- Don't debate, defend or over-explain.

- Have support easily available.

- Stay strong, don't give in.

- Practice makes perfect.

Activity

- In your group, discuss some other ways to set healthier boundaries that will help you become a better employee, coworker, friend, etc.

What are ethics and why are they important?

- Ethics reflect beliefs about what is right and what is wrong.

- Ethical behavior is based on written and unwritten codes of principles and values held in society.

- Ethical principles and values serve as a guide to behavior on a personal level.

- Having strong ethical conduct is critical to protecting the rights of our students.

- Ethical guidelines are important in providing a safe and clear working environment for school personnel in order to provide effect support for our students.

Ethical considerations

- Engage only in non-instructional and instructional activities for which you have been qualified or trained to do.

- Do not communicate progress or concerns about students to parents.

- Should you have concerns about a student, refer to the teacher/administrator.

- Discuss school problems and confidential matters only with appropriate personnel, and remember only when students are not present.

- Present yourself as a positive adult role model.

- Respect the dignity, privacy and individuality of all students, parents, and staff members of the school.

- Avoid inappropriate disclosure.

Ethical considerations (cont.)

- Be aware of your personal limits.

- Use supervisory support.

- Keep social and emotional needs from work.

- Reflect on how other staff members will interpret your behavior.

- Do not engage in inappropriate relationships (romantic/sexual).

- Do not communicate with students using personal social media, email, text, Facebook, etc.

- Avoid cursing in front of students.

- Do not engage in peer-like behavior, keep it professional.

- Use appropriate touch- high fives, hand shakes, fist bumps, open-handed pats on the back.

Ethical considerations (cont.)

- Any appropriate touching should be done in public. Appropriate in front of principal or student's parents.

- Avoid allowing a particular student to violate a school rue or get away with inappropriate behavior even with dual relationships.

- Do not give gifts or loan money to students.

- Do not invite students to your home.

- Make the well-being of students the fundamental value of all decision making and actions.

- Maintain just, courteous and proper relationships with students.

- Avoid yelling at students. Do not take personal issues out on students.

Conclusion

- Learning to set healthy boundaries takes time. It is a process. Set them in your own time frame, not when someone else tells you.

- Be true to yourself above all else.

- Take care of your personal well-being so that you can best serve our students.

Have a great new school year!

References

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