THE BOUNDARY CHALLENGE

Facilitator Guide | 60-minute group session | Professional Resource Library

Purpose. Help participants recognize personal boundaries, distinguish requests from demands and controlling behavior, communicate limits assertively, and respond respectfully to another person's "no."

Suitable settings. Psychoeducational groups addressing relationships, emotional regulation, anxiety, recovery, interpersonal effectiveness, and related topics. Adapt language to participant needs and professional scope.

Learning objectives

By the end of the session, participants should be able to (1) identify at least two types of boundaries; (2) distinguish a boundary from an attempt to control someone else; (3) draft an assertive boundary statement; and (4) describe one respectful response to another person's boundary.

Materials and preparation

Print the separate participant packet, including "A Friend in Need," four scenario cards, team worksheet, "Boundary or Control?" exercise, and communication-practice page. Provide pens. Arrange participants in pairs or small teams. Review local policies on privacy, disclosure, and safety.

60-minute facilitation schedule

Minutes	Segment	Facilitator action
0–5	Welcome	Introduce objectives; establish voluntary participation and respectful discussion.
5–15	Completed example	Read Jamie and Chris; identify needs, guilt, assertive wording, and resistance.
15–25	Boundary or Control?	Classify six statements; ask why wording and context matter.
25–40	Scenario challenge	Teams analyze one of four cards and complete the team worksheet.
40–55	Communication practice	Invite written or optional role-play responses; compare alternatives.
55–60	Close	Each participant names one boundary skill and where to practice it.

Facilitator opening script

"A boundary is a limit we communicate about our own time, body, resources, privacy, or participation. We can make requests of others, but we cannot require them to agree. Today we will practice communicating clearly and respecting limits—even when we feel disappointed."

TEACHING NOTES & COMPLETED EXAMPLE

Four concepts to clarify

Boundary: A statement about what I will or will not do, allow, share, or participate in. Example: “I will end the call if yelling continues.”

Request: An invitation for another person to do something. Example: “Could we talk tomorrow?” Requests allow refusal.

Rule or agreement: A shared expectation within a relationship, program, or setting. Agreements require clarity and appropriate consent or authority.

Controlling behavior: Pressure, threats, guilt, or coercion used to override another person’s autonomy. Context matters; a single sentence may not reveal the whole pattern.

Completed example: Jamie and Chris

Boundary involved: Jamie’s sleep, time, emotional availability, and ability to work safely the next morning.

Barrier: Guilt and fear that Chris will interpret a limit as rejection.

Suggested assertive response: “I care about you. I need to sleep before work, so I can’t talk tonight. I can talk tomorrow afternoon.”

If Chris protests: “I hear that you’re disappointed. I’m still ending the call now, and we can speak tomorrow.” Jamie may then follow through without debating the limit.

Discussion: What is within Jamie’s control? What is within Chris’s control? How could Chris express disappointment without pressuring Jamie?

Boundary or Control? — facilitator answer key

#	Suggested classification	Teaching point
1	Boundary	Leaving a shouting conversation describes the speaker’s own action.
2	Control	Prohibiting another person from seeing friends restricts autonomy.
3	Request	Asking someone to call before visiting is a request; repeated disregard may prompt a boundary.
4	Boundary	Withholding future loans of personal belongings is within the speaker’s control.
5	Control	Demanding immediate replies through guilt pressures another person.
6	Boundary	Declining to lend money states a personal financial limit.

Facilitator note: Classifications are teaching examples, not diagnostic judgments. Invite participants to consider tone, context, repetition, power differences, and whether refusal is respected.

SCENARIO DISCUSSION GUIDE

A. The Financial Request

Boundary: Avery decides whether to lend money. Possible statement: “I’m not able to lend money. I need to meet my own expenses.” If pressured: Repeat the decision without excessive justification. Explore: Guilt, financial responsibility, and alternatives to monetary support that are genuinely voluntary.

B. The Unanswered Message

Boundary: The friend may choose when to respond; Taylor may manage expectations and decide what communication patterns work for them. Possible statement: “I understand you cannot reply immediately. I’ll give you space and we can talk when we’re both available.” Explore: Reassurance-seeking, uncertainty, consent, and why repeated messages do not create an obligation to respond.

C. Pressure to Participate

Boundary: Morgan’s privacy and choice about personal disclosure. Possible statement: “I’d prefer to use a hypothetical example today.” Explore: Options to pass, observe, or write privately; distinguish supportive encouragement from coercion. Follow program participation requirements without forcing sensitive disclosures.

D. Workplace Expectations

Boundary: Riley’s availability and workload, within actual job requirements. Possible statement: “I can help for fifteen minutes today, but I cannot take on the whole assignment.” Explore: Workplace roles, supervisory authority, practical consequences, and when to clarify priorities with a supervisor.

Discussion prompts

Ask teams: “What does the person need? What can they control? What is a respectful request? What could they say if the other person refuses? How might they follow through without threats or retaliation?”

Optional communication practice

Invite pairs to practice a 30–60 second boundary statement and one respectful reply. Offer writing or observing as equal alternatives. Avoid requiring participants to reenact distressing personal conflicts. Encourage concise language, calm repetition, and realistic follow-through.

Common facilitation pitfalls

Avoid implying that every refusal is healthy or every request is controlling. Avoid suggesting that boundaries guarantee safety or agreement. Do not ask participants to disclose identifying relationship details. If a participant raises intimidation, abuse, threats, or coercion, shift from assertiveness practice to appropriate safety planning and support.

IMPLEMENTATION & CLOSING

Adaptations by group topic

Substance-use recovery: Practice declining invitations involving substances and identifying safe exits. Emotional regulation / BPD: Practice tolerating disappointment and urges to seek repeated reassurance while respecting autonomy. Anxiety: Rehearse clear requests without overexplaining. Depression: Explore balancing social connection with energy and self-care. General wellness: Focus on time, money, privacy, and digital communication.

Supportive group safeguards

Participation in role-play and personal disclosure should be voluntary wherever program requirements permit. Participants may use fictional characters. Avoid diagnosing the people in scenarios. Encourage “I” statements and prohibit ridicule or pressure to reveal personal information. Follow organizational procedures if imminent safety concerns arise.

Closing reflection — final five minutes

Ask: “What is one boundary you understand more clearly now? What is one sentence you could use to communicate it? How will you respond if someone sets a boundary you do not like?” Participants may share aloud or write privately.

Facilitator quick checklist

☐ Objectives introduced ☐ Example reviewed ☐ Classifications discussed
☐ Team scenarios completed ☐ Communication practiced ☐ Closing reflection offered

Scope and educational disclaimer

This activity is intended for psychoeducation and facilitated skills practice. It is not a diagnostic instrument, a substitute for individualized treatment, or a safety intervention for abusive situations. Facilitators should apply professional judgment and applicable organizational policies.

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