

# Setting & Respecting Boundaries

A lesson plan from Healthy Connections: A Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center Sexual Health Education Curriculum for high school students

**Grade:** 10-12

**Time:** 50 minutes

## Materials Needed:

- Computer/projector to display PowerPoint
- Setting & Respecting Boundaries Activity Sheet (printed)
- Setting & Respecting Boundaries Activity Key (printed)
- Tape

## Washington State Health Standards:

Standard 4: Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.

- Demonstrate effective ways to communicate with a partner about healthy sexual decisions and consent. **H4.Se5.HS**

## OVERVIEW

Students learn how to set and respect personal and physical boundaries with partners, friends, family members, and other people in their lives. This lesson offers students the opportunity to learn about their own boundaries, while understanding that everyone has different boundaries.

## OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Be able to define personal and physical boundaries
- Demonstrate how to set a boundary
- Demonstrate how to respect other people's boundaries

## TEACHER PREPARATION

- Print copies of Setting & Respecting Boundaries Activity Sheet for each student
- Print "Comfortable" and "Not Comfortable" sheets (one of each)
- Tape the "Comfortable" sheet to one side of the room, and the "Not Comfortable" sheet to the other side of the room

## A NOTE ON INCLUSIVITY

This curriculum is inclusive of all gender identities and expressions. You are encouraged to use gender-neutral language when presenting this lesson. That means using "they/them" pronouns rather than "he/him" or "she/her" pronouns, unless otherwise specified.

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### AGENDA

#### Introduction - 3 minutes

**Slide 1:** *Hello everyone, welcome to today's presentation on setting and respecting boundaries. [Introduce self if needed]*

**Slide 2:** *Before we get started, here are some gentle reminders as we go through the presentation. First, everyone should be respectful of others. That means try not to speak over each other and instead speak one at a time. Second, be mindful of what you share. I am what's called a mandated reporter. Does anyone know what that means? [Pause for responses]. A mandated reporter is someone who cares about the safety of students and has a legal obligation to report if a student has been assaulted or abused to the police or Child Protective Services. Please keep that in mind as we go through the lesson. If anyone wants to report anything, find a mandated reporter you trust, so a teacher, coach, or counselor, and they will help you. Lastly, no shaming others. Everyone should feel safe here. Let's get started!*

**Slide 3:** *This is today's agenda. We'll start with a discussion question, then define different types of boundaries, discuss the ways we can both set and respect boundaries, and then we'll end with an activity.*

#### Discussion - 25 minutes

**Slide 4:** *Is anyone willing to share what they think boundaries are? [Pause for response]*

**Slide 5:** *A lot of you had good ideas about what boundaries are. To recap, boundaries are limits we set for ourselves. Boundaries are about telling others how we want to be treated, not controlling how someone else behaves. Boundaries are generally "I" statements; so saying "I feel," "I want," or "I don't want," rather than "You can't," or "You have to." Boundaries are also expectations that help us feel safe in relationships. They're important in all kinds of relationships, whether it be friends, family, romantic partners, bosses, coaches, or teachers.*

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**Slide 6:** *There are many types of boundaries, but today we're going to focus on personal boundaries and physical boundaries.*

*Personal boundaries include what information we share with other people, the energy we have to listen to and support others, the time we spend doing certain things, and the words and phrases we use. Some examples include, "I can hang out until 6 PM tonight," "I can't talk right now, but let's talk tomorrow," "I'm not ready to share that yet," and "I'm not comfortable sharing my work with you."*

*Physical boundaries include where we feel comfortable being touched, the amount of space we like around our bodies, and deciding when we're active and when we're resting. Some examples of physical boundaries include, "I'm not a hugger," "I don't want to hold hands right now," "I'm tired and need to rest before we go out tonight," and "I'd prefer if we didn't go in my room right now, it's messy."*

**Slide 7:** *Let's practice to see if we can distinguish between a boundary and a controlling behavior. #1 says, "Please ask before giving me advice." Is #1 a boundary? Why or why not? [Pause for response] Thank you for sharing. #1 is in fact a boundary because the person is sharing how they would like to be treated.*

*#2 says, "Let me go through your phone." Is #2 a boundary? Why or why not? [Pause for response] #2 is not a boundary because the person is trying to control someone else's behavior.*

*#3 says, "I need you to give me a ride home." Is that a boundary? Why or why not? [Pause for response] #3 is not a boundary because the person is trying to control someone else's behavior. Is there a way #3 could be reworded to express a boundary? [Pause for response] #3 could be reworded to, "I'm uncomfortable walking by myself at night, I would appreciate a ride home. But if you can't I can take the bus."*

*#4 says "I need some alone time right now." Is #4 a boundary? Why or why not? [Pause for response] Thank you all for sharing. #4 is a boundary because the person is telling others what they need.*

*Any questions about these examples?*

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**Slide 8:** *Before you learn to set boundaries, you need to figure out what your boundaries are. Sometimes we learn about our boundaries after someone has already crossed them. Sometimes we think about a situation and assume what our boundary would be. Either way, it's important to think about what our boundaries are, so we can let other people know.*

*One way to figure out our boundaries is through a yes, no, maybe list. These can be mental lists, or physical lists that you write out. Essentially, a yes, no, maybe list helps you figure out things that you're comfortable with, not comfortable with, or sometimes comfortable with. These lists can change and fluctuate over time. Non-negotiables, on the other hand, are clear lines that other people shouldn't cross. These are typically things that don't change or fluctuate, and may not be dependent on the person.*

*Any questions about this slide? [Pause for response]*

**Slide 9:** *Setting boundaries is an important skill. When you set a boundary, it's important to be clear. Tell the person/people what your boundary is directly. Don't assume people can read your mind or always understand subtle cues. This can be uncomfortable to do, but the more you do it, the easier it'll become.*

*When needed, you can also tell the person how you will respond if the boundary is crossed. For example, "If you keep texting me, I will have to silence your notifications."*

**Slide 10:** *With the person sitting closest to you, think of 2 other examples of boundaries using this format: "If you do \_\_\_\_\_, I will \_\_\_\_\_." You have 2-3 minutes.*

*Is anyone willing to share an example of a boundary in this format? [Pause for responses]*

*[Possible responses: If you don't pay me back, I won't lend you money anymore; If you don't stop touching my hair, I won't want to spend time with you; If you keep talking to me while I'm trying to study, I will start studying by myself]*

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**Slide 11:** *It's common for people to feel guilty after setting a boundary, especially if they don't have a lot of practice. Feeling guilty doesn't mean that the boundary you are setting is wrong. Sometimes someone's reaction might make us feel guilty or like we're being unreasonable. Someone might be dismissive of your boundary. We are not responsible for other people's reactions; we can hold compassion for others and still maintain our boundaries. Setting boundaries is also a form of self-care. It shows others that we care about our own safety and comfort.*

**Slide 12:** *As a quick reminder, having boundaries does not mean we can do what we want all of the time. Most people have to do things they may not want to do. And for young people, it's even more difficult to have certain boundaries because your families and your school have a certain amount of control over your time. But boundaries can still be incorporated into tasks that we may not want to be doing. For example, some people may not like getting shots because they're afraid of needles or because they hurt. Obviously, most people have to get shots at some point. While that may not be something a lot of people want to do, boundaries can still be established while getting the shot. For instance, someone could ask the doctor or nurse to count to three first. Or maybe they could ask to have a moment to take a few deep breaths. Having boundaries means that we are in control of ourselves.*

**Slide 13:** *Everyone has different boundaries. If someone has a boundary that you don't have, that doesn't mean it's okay to cross their boundary.*

*People also have different boundaries with different people. Someone may have different boundaries with their family than with their friends.*

*You'll also want to watch for non-verbal cues and changes in body language; sometimes when you ask if something is okay with someone, they might agree because it'd be awkward or uncomfortable to say no. Think about the tone of voice the person had; did they sound shaky or unsure? Did the person hesitate? Did the person look around as if they were trying to find help from someone else? For some people, looking for non-verbal cues or changes in body language can be difficult. It's always okay to ask again, as long as you're not pestering or harassing the other person.*

*Lastly, don't push back or diminish the boundary. Let the other person know that their boundaries are important and you will respect them.*

*Any questions about this slide? [Pause for response]*

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**Slide 14:** *It's possible that someone else's boundaries could hurt our feelings. For example, if someone asked their friend for a hug and the friend said no, it's understandable for someone to feel a little hurt by that. That doesn't mean it's okay to cross that person's boundary and hug them anyway. A lot of the time someone isn't establishing a boundary to hurt you, but to protect themselves. So although some people's boundaries could hurt our feelings sometimes, it's usually not personal.*

*Sometimes we may not agree with or appreciate someone's boundaries. That may be because we have different boundaries, or for multiple other reasons. Regardless, other people's boundaries should always be respected, even if we disagree.*

**Slide 15:** *Everyone has crossed someone else's boundaries, probably without even knowing it. It's okay to make a mistake, as long as you apologize and let the other person know that you'll do better next time. It's okay to say, "I'm sorry, it won't happen again."*

*It's not okay to purposefully cross someone's boundaries. A lot of people don't take other people's boundaries seriously, especially if the boundaries are different from their own. Someone might think, "I don't care if someone touches my hair, so that means it's okay to touch other people's hair." But like I mentioned earlier, everyone has different boundaries. We cannot assume people have the same boundaries we do. We should treat people the way they want to be treated, not the way we want to be treated.*

**Slide 16:** *There are consequences to not respecting other people's boundaries. People won't want to spend time with you if you continuously cross their boundaries. It's also possible that certain behaviors could be considered harassment or sexual harassment. For instance, if someone kept making sexually suggestive remarks to someone, especially after they said to stop, that would be considered sexual harassment, which is never okay.*

*Boundaries also help us determine what is okay or not okay in a relationship; and that could be with friends, romantic partners, co-workers, bosses, teachers, or family members. Boundaries also help build trust in a relationship; when you respect someone's boundaries it shows the other person that you care about them.*



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### Activity - 20 minutes

**Slide 17:** *Now we're going to do an activity! I'm going to pass around an anonymous survey for everyone to fill out independently. Once everyone has finished, please wait for further instructions. [Pass out surveys - give students 3 minutes to fill out the survey]*

**Slide 18:** *Please crumple up your papers and throw them to the front of the class.*

*Now please pick up a random paper. You will ideally get someone else's survey. If you picked up your survey, you can switch with someone near you if you're comfortable with them knowing it's your survey. Otherwise, keep your own survey.*

*The right side of the room will be "I'm comfortable with that" and the left side of the room will be "I'm not comfortable with that," and everything in the middle is a spectrum. Move based on the responses on the paper you picked up. If someone left a question blank, you may sit down or remain still.*

[Instructions]

- Read each situation listed in the survey.
- Wait for students to move around before reading the next situation.
  - If a student is unable to stand, they may point instead.
- Continue until each situation has been read. Instruct the students to return to their seats
- Once students are seated, read the following script: *"What did you notice about this activity? How did it feel to be moving based on someone else's responses? [Pause for responses] The goal of this activity was to show you all how everyone has different boundaries. On the other hand, a lot of you had similar boundaries about certain things. This is why it's always important to ask what other people's boundaries are, and not to assume based on our own comfort with certain things."*

### Conclusion - 2 minutes

**Slide 19:** *Thank you all for listening and participating in today's lesson. Does anyone have any last-minute questions about boundaries before we wrap up? [Pause for responses]*

## HANDOUTS

- Activity Sheet: Setting & Respecting Boundaries

# Activity Sheet: Setting & Respecting Boundaries

Instructions: Please fill out this survey anonymously (do not write your name). Mark how comfortable you would be with each situation. Keep in mind that someone else will see your responses. Each question is optional. Once done with the survey, please wait for further instructions from your instructor(s).

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	Comfortable	Sometimes Comfortable	Neutral	Sometimes Not Comfortable	Not Comfortable
1. A family member gives you a hug	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. A stranger wants to follow you on social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. A friend wants to borrow your clothes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. A friend drinks from your water bottle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. A romantic partner wants to hold your hand in public	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. An online friend wants to meet with you in person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. A parent/guardian wants the passcode to your phone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. A parent/guardian goes into your room/space without knocking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. A stranger wants to greet you by shaking your hand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. A friend wants you to respond to texts immediately	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Comfortable	Sometimes Comfortable	Neutral	Sometimes Not Comfortable	Not Comfortable
11. A classmate asks to see your homework	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. A romantic partner wants to track the location on your phone	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
13. A friend regularly vents to you about their problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. A friend asks to borrow \$20	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
15. A teacher volunteers you to share in front of the class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**COMFORTABLE**

**NOT**

**COMFORTABLE**