

# Facilitator Guide: Setting Healthy Boundaries

## Introduction: Why Boundaries Matter

### You Say:

"In SMART Recovery, we focus on self-empowerment. One important skill is setting healthy boundaries—clear, respectful limits that protect our well-being. Boundaries help us manage relationships, avoid burnout, and stay true to our values."

### Key points to highlight:

- Boundaries are about **your** needs, not controlling others.
- They help reduce stress, prevent resentment, and support long-term change.
- Boundaries can be **physical, emotional, or behavioral** (e.g., saying no, limiting time with certain people, communicating expectations).

## Step 1: Group Brainstorming – What Makes Boundaries Hard?

### You Say:

"Before we practice setting boundaries, let's explore what makes them challenging. What situations have made it difficult for you to set or maintain boundaries?"

Encourage participants to share general experiences. Examples:

- Fear of conflict or rejection
- Feeling guilty or selfish
- Not knowing how to say no
- Unclear expectations in relationships

### Facilitator's Role:

- **Normalize** the struggle. ("It's common to feel this way.")
- **Reflect & summarize** without offering solutions. ("So it sounds like fear of hurting others can make it tough.")
- **Encourage self-exploration** rather than "fixing."

## Step 2: The Formula for Setting Boundaries

Introduce the "I feel... when... can I ask you to..." model:

### Formula:

**I feel** (*emotion*)

**When** (*specific behavior*)

**Can I ask you to** (*reasonable request*)

### Example:

*"You always disrespect my time!"* → **"I feel frustrated when you cancel plans last minute. Can I ask you to let me know earlier?"**

## Step 3: Participant Practice – Role-Playing Boundaries

### You Say:

*"Now, let's try it out. Think of a real-life situation where you need to set a boundary. You'll share the situation (briefly), and the group will help brainstorm wording using the 'I feel... when... can I ask...' model."*

### Instructions:

1. One participant shares a scenario.
2. The group **brainstorms possible ways** to phrase the boundary.
3. The participant **practices saying it** with a partner or aloud.

### Facilitator's Role:

- Guide participants **toward** clearer, assertive, and **self-focused** boundaries.
- Redirect if statements become blaming or aggressive.
- Keep the focus on **practicing skills, not fixing problems**.

## Closing the Exercise

### You Say:

*"Setting boundaries is a skill that gets easier with practice. Try using the formula in daily life, even for small things. If you get pushback, remember: reinforcing boundaries takes time, and you have the right to protect your well-being."*

### Optional Reflection Questions:

- How did it feel to practice setting a boundary?
- What challenges might you face when using this in real life?

- What's one small boundary you can set this week?

**Facilitator Quick Tips:**

- Keep it **participant-driven**—let them brainstorm and refine boundaries.
- Gently **redirect unhelpful patterns** (e.g., blaming, over-explaining).
- Encourage **realistic, small steps** toward better boundaries.