

A GUIDE FOR SETTING BOUNDARIES IN ADDICTION RECOVERY

When a person struggles with addiction, they may often find that their personal boundaries become ignored. These rules may cause the addicted person to behave in ways that they otherwise would not. For example, many people struggling with addiction may lie, cheat and steal to cover up their behaviour or gain access to their preferred substance. When going through recovery, it is important for the person to have clear personal boundaries which can more easily allow them to navigate their way through recovery. In addition to this, if clear boundaries are set by loved ones, the person who is addicted will be much more likely to gain access to help.



➤ What Is A Personal Boundary?

A personal boundary may be thought of as a limit that we set for ourselves, in how far we will comfortably go in a physical, mental and emotional sense. These boundaries may also extend to material things, sexual boundaries and spiritual boundaries. You might think of your personal boundaries as being your 'rules.' Many people set personal boundaries as a way of ensuring that they do not come to any harm or find themselves in a situation with which they are uneasy. They allow you to have greater control over your personal relationships and set out clear rules as to what you are comfortable with. By setting these types of boundaries it can give you a sense of self-worth and self-respect.

Below you will see a summary of personal boundaries:

- **Physical boundaries** are to do with your body and your personal space, for example – do you feel more comfortable with a hug or a handshake when greeting someone?
- **Mental boundaries** relate to your thoughts and feelings such as how impressionable or easily swayed you might be. These could also apply to your morals and how easily you might move away from them
- **Emotional boundaries** allow you to set apart your own feelings from those of other people, this might translate into how you react to a person or situation
- **Sexual boundaries** are to do with how comfortable you are in engaging in various sexual activities, for example, who you are intimate with and when
- **Material boundaries** relate to your personal belongings, for example, are you happy to loan out items to a friend?
- **Spiritual boundaries** pertain to your spiritual or religious beliefs

It is important to remember that there is no right or wrong when it comes to personal boundaries, what is right for you may not be for someone else and we each have a right to stand by our own limits.

➤ **How To Establish Boundaries In Addiction Recovery?**

Getting through addiction recovery is a difficult time for both the addicted person and those around them, so setting healthy boundaries can often be a challenge. However, in order to get through this time successfully, it is important that all parties are honest and open about their feelings and needs.

You should consider what it is that you need from the boundaries and why you are setting them, this will allow you to come up with relevant personal boundaries. It is wise to ensure that these boundaries will ensure your sobriety and will not tempt you to fall back into addiction.

Furthermore, there should be a consequence if a boundary is broken, this will ensure that they are more strictly followed and that recovery is much more likely. A good example of this is that should you find yourself in a situation where you are exposed to the substance you are addicted to – you will be aware that this may cause a relapse and you should agree to leave the situation. Once boundaries are established it is important that you clearly communicate them with those around you and you should never feel that you are 'in the wrong' for doing so. For example, if you are addicted to alcohol and are invited to a friends' birthday party which will be held in a nightclub, politely declining the offer doesn't make you a bad friend, it puts you in control so that you can be a better friend.

➤ **Examples Of Boundaries In Addiction Recovery**

Everyone will require their own set of boundaries whilst going through addiction recovery and one of the most important first steps is to understand the needs of the individual. Boundaries for others should also be taken into consideration and it is important for the person struggling with addiction to respect these as part of their recovery.

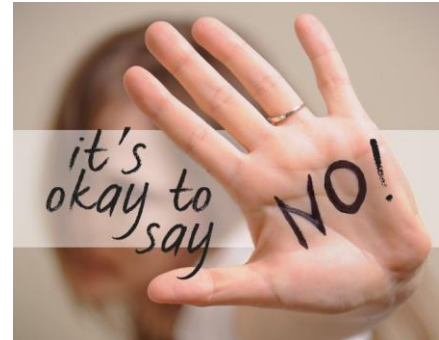
Some examples of boundaries which may be appropriate could be as follows:

- Nobody who uses drugs or alcohol will be allowed to enter my home
- If somebody uses drugs or alcohol in my presence, I will remove myself from the situation
- If I get into legal trouble as a result of my addiction, my family and friends will not bail me out or provide me with legal representation
- My family and friends will not give me money to fund my addiction and I will respect this
- I will not take what does not belong to me in order to access drugs or alcohol
- I will consider the feelings of those I care about
- There will be no negative comments made about myself or other people – I will respect myself and the people around me
- My family and friends will not lie for me

One of the easiest ways to determine what boundaries to set is to look at how various situations make you feel, if there is any unease, this is a clear sign that a boundary needs to be put into place.

➤ **What Is The Best Way To Communicate Boundaries?**

When you are letting other people know your personal limits, it is most important to do so clearly and firmly. You should not be afraid to really mean what you are saying. However, this isn't to say that you should be rude, exerting yourself in a calm, polite manner will show authority in a much better way than aggression. There are certain ways in which expressing your needs can be made easier since it can feel as though you are making yourself somewhat vulnerable.



- Stay with factual information rather than emotional, for example saying something like 'If I go to the pub, there will be a temptation, we should meet in the park instead'
- Using 'I' statements can be very effective in communicating your boundaries as this gives a more personal feel to what you are saying
- You should be prepared to experience a reaction from the person you are talking to. It is important to remember that your boundaries are for you and other people may not completely understand. Remaining calm and explaining *why* you have the boundary in place can go a long way in gaining an understanding
- Above all, honesty is key

➤ **The 6 Different Aspects To Have Boundaries On In Addiction Recovery**

There are different areas of your life that boundaries will apply to during addiction recovery with each one being just as important as the next. These boundaries include:

Family. You will likely spend a lot of time with your family throughout your recovery and if there are boundaries that they need to respect, you should be open in talking about this. For example, if you have a member of the family who likes to drink a bottle of wine with their meal when you go to dine with them, you should ask them not to drink in your presence.

Friends. As with your family, your friends should be aware of and respect your new boundaries. As a way of avoiding difficult situations, it is important to set clear personal boundaries with your friends at the beginning of your recovery journey. You might also take this opportunity to reassess your social circle, are there friends with whom you used to engage in addictive behaviour? Removing yourself from friendships which may lead to you relapsing can work well as a boundary.

Social Activity. There may be certain social activities in which you will no longer be comfortable and if this is the case, it is important to be honest with yourself and other people about this from the get-go. Those who truly care about you will be

more than happy to arrange social events at locations where drugs and alcohol are not used.

Work. Your job may be your livelihood but it is important not to over-work yourself. If you do, you will likely be exposed to higher stress levels and this may result in a relapse. Honesty is important and speaking with your employer is essential.

Significant Other. Your partner will likely be the person who goes through your recovery with you in the most depth, therefore boundaries with this person are vital. Gaining their support will be extremely important in remaining sober and asking them not to use drugs or alcohol around you is an important boundary which they should respect. That being said, it is important to communicate both of your needs openly and clearly so that you can find a way to move forward and both be happy.

Yourself. Throughout your time as an addict, you may have lost your sense of who you are, and now is the best time to rediscover who you are as a person. Setting limits and rules for yourself during this time is vital to your recovery.

➤ **What To Do When Boundaries Are Not Respected**

There are bound to be times when your personal boundaries are pushed or ignored and it is important to know how to handle this type of situation. When your boundaries are broken this may lead you to feel tempted to go back to the substance you are addicted to but there are healthier ways in which to address this issue.

You should speak directly with the person about how you feel the boundary has been broken, using the 'I' statements we discussed earlier and offering clear information on how you feel will be conducive in getting the message across. On top of this, you should be prepared to distance yourself from this person if they are not willing to change their behaviour.

➤ **Boundaries To Set When Helping Someone Recover From Addiction**

It may be challenging, but in the long term, what you are doing is going to help them and it comes from a place of love. It is important, therefore that you set clear boundaries from the beginning and express to the addicted person that you expect them to be observed.

- No drugs or alcohol will be allowed in the house, nor will you be allowed in if you have used them
- You will not bring anyone who uses drugs or alcohol into the house
- I will not provide you with money
- I will not take responsibility for your behaviour nor will I cover for you

➤ **Don't be afraid to ask for help**

<https://www.rehab-recovery.co.uk/resources/boundaries-addiction-recovery/>

Contact STABILIS TREATMENT CENTRE: 012 333 7702/ www.stabilis.org.za