

# **MODULE 11**

**Boundaries and Safety**

**Meeting A**

**Materials**

MH sessions 4 and 5  
Handout  
Flip chart or chalkboard

Goal – Members will begin to develop a sense of how much or how little control they have over what happens to their bodies.

Goal – Members will begin to understand what it means to set an interpersonal limit.

**Discussion Questions**

P. 34 – Exercise #1 – Begin this session with exercise #1, including the questions related to the exercise on p. 36.

P. 37 – Questions #2 and #3

Refer back to exercise #1 and remind group members that they attempted to draw a boundary around their physical selves in order to feel comfortable and safe. Ask group members how they attempt to protect and feel good about their emotional selves.

P. 43 – Questions #2 and #3

P. 45 – Question #4 – Have you ever said “no” in a way that worked? Leader will record client responses on flipchart or chalkboard.

P. 46 – Question # 5 (modified) What do you think the link is between your trauma experience(s) and your boundary issues? Give handout – ask client to choose 1 or 2 boundary issues they need to work on and write about the issue(s) for homework.

**Meeting B**

Role-play assertive responses with clients using the following three phrases:

I understand....

But the fact of the matter is....

Therefore, I need .....

## TOPIC 4 Physical Boundaries

### SESSION RATIONALE

Whether it is physical or sexual, abuse violates and intrudes on an individual's personal space. Abuse survivors may find themselves confused about what constitutes safe and appropriate space for them personally and within their peer groups. The session gives members a chance to explore the topic and receive feedback from one another.

**GOAL 1:** Each member will begin to develop an understanding of her own personal space. She will also learn how her level of personal comfort and safety varies when she respects her need for space versus when she does not.

**GOAL 2:** Each member will begin to develop a sense of how much or how little control she has over what happens to her body.

Begin the session with Exercise 1.

### QUESTIONS

1. How much space do you need? What is the comfortable distance between you and others?
2. Does anyone ever come physically close to you when you do not want to be approached?
3. What constitutes unwanted contact? How do you react to unwanted contact?
4. How does one's body language say stay away or come close?

### EXERCISES

1. As group members enter the room, the leaders call their attention to boxes outlined on the floor with masking tape. The boxes are shapes of different

sizes. Some are asked to stand. Members know to discuss boxes.

Each group (other boxes):  
2. Measuring a woman's need follows:

A. Members pair stand a leaders measure recorded on they feel recorded. N

B. Using own interpretation comfortable be next to the the distance whom the stranger. A chance to

### LEADER

You will need tape. You will floor by floor. Prepare at members to have. The floor the following. As groups

sizes. Some are close together, others are farther apart. Group members are asked to stand or sit in a box. The group leaders discuss the boxes and let the members know that they represent boundaries and that the group is going to discuss boundaries.

Each group member should notice what kind of box (size, proximity to other boxes) she selects.

2. **Measuring Personal Space:** This exercise is designed to measure a woman's need for personal space. Two approaches to the exercise are as follows:

A. Members are arbitrarily paired with one another. Members in each pair stand a comfortable distance from one another. Using a tape measure, leaders measure the distance between members of each pair. Distances are recorded on a flip chart. Members then are asked to stand next to someone they feel could become a friend. This distance is also measured and recorded. Members compare and discuss the two readings.

B. Using a tape measure, each member of the group measures off her own interpersonal comfort zone (the distance that one requires to feel comfortable being with other people). All distances are written on a flip chart next to the appropriate member's name. Members then are asked to adjust the distance (or not) imagining that the other person is someone toward whom they feel close. Members then make the same adjustment for a stranger. All distances are written on the flip chart and members have a chance to discuss their responses.

### LEADERS' NOTES

You will need to prepare for the group by having a large roll of 1" masking tape. You will need approximately 20 minutes prior to the group to prepare the floor by forming various boxes, triangles, and rectangles with masking tape. Prepare at least 12 to 15 boxes for a group of 8 to 10 persons allowing members to have a choice.

The floor of the group room may resemble the configuration at the top of the following page.

As group members enter the room, ask members to choose a box. Begin

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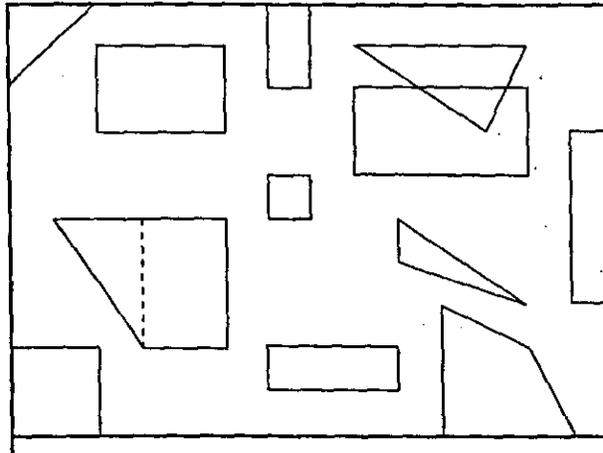
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the group by informing members that the boxes represent boundaries and asking members what they mean when they use the word *boundary*.

Once members have selected a box in which to stand, ask members to pay attention to which box they chose, how far or near it is to someone else, and what is the exact location of the box in the room. Additional prompts for discussion may include:

- Why did you choose that box?
- What part of the box do you feel most comfortable standing in?
- Are you in the middle of the room or on the periphery?
- Is there room for anyone else to stand in your box?
- Are you facing others or is your back to others in the room?
- If you could choose another box, which one would you choose? Which one wouldn't you choose?

Sometimes you will need to make a member's strategy explicit. For example, "It looks like you need to have your back to the wall to feel safe." Leaders can be somewhat creative and playful during this exercise.

After the above discussion, members can be seated for discussion of questions 1-3.

#### QUESTION 1

How much space do you need? What is the comfortable distance between you and others?

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Ask members to consider relationships with partners, family, roommates, as well as situations such as riding the bus, sitting in the doctor's office, going to the movies, and being approached by someone unfamiliar.

You will want to emphasize that boundaries may change depending on safety and familiarity with others in the environment. Discussion should be directed to include the strategies a member uses to control her boundaries as well as how she responds when those boundaries are violated.

**TYPICAL RESPONSES** I need to keep people at arm's length.  
I don't need any space.  
I need more space.  
I don't like to touch anyone.  
It depends on how well I know them.  
I don't like people to stand over me.

You will need to respect that in addition to individual and family differences, there are also cultural differences in how comfortable people feel with managing personal space. These differences should be acknowledged in the discussion.

### QUESTIONS 2 AND 3

Does anyone ever come physically close to you when you do not want to be approached?

What constitutes unwanted contact?

**TYPICAL RESPONSES** Someone brushing up against me  
Someone standing too close to me  
Someone forcing sex on me  
Someone touching me when I don't want to be touched  
Someone hitting me  
Someone staring at me  
Someone talking too close to my face

Pay attention to the range of responses. For some women, contact must be

forced sex before it is labeled as being unwanted. For others, a simple glance feels like an intrusion when it is unsolicited.

How do you react to unwanted contact?

<b>TYPICAL RESPONSES</b>	Get angry	Feel anxious	Tune out
	Get mad and cuss	Give in	Strike out
	Leave the situation	Feel nauseated	Feel indignant
	Panic	Get scared	Get intimidated
	Get embarrassed	Have difficulty breathing	

Ask members what feelings and defenses occur as a reaction to unwanted contact. Members will discuss whether current responses are a replication of childhood responses or if they are responding as they wished they had during childhood. Once again, encourage members to assess their response patterns and to understand whether or not those patterns are new or old.

**QUESTION 4**

How does one's body language say stay away or come close?

<b>TYPICAL RESPONSES</b>	<b>STAY AWAY</b>	<b>COME CLOSE</b>
	Folding my arms across my body	Motioning with my hand to come here
	Turning my body away from the other person	Putting my arm around someone
	Turning my head away while someone is talking to me	Standing closer to someone
	Running away from someone	Having open body posture
	Staring back hostilely	Making eye contact
	Looking down and avoiding eye contact	Smiling

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**ADDITIONAL Q**

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**EXERCISE 2A**

Exercises A and Have a measurin with pairs and m be more approp After compl shorten the dista fort with someoi

**TYPICAL RESP**

**MARY BET**

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This question should enable members to look at the ways they carry their own bodies in the world and to examine their own definitions and behaviors regarding physical boundaries. Women may want to demonstrate the different ways in which they hold their bodies.

**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS**

1. Are there times when you need more space than at other times? What cues do you respond to?
2. What happens when you can't get the space you need?

**EXERCISE 2A AND B**

Exercises A and B are designed to measure a woman's need for personal space. Have a measuring tape available for use in these exercises. Exercise A is done with pairs and may be suitable for an already interactive group. Exercise B may be more appropriate with isolated individuals who seem like loners.

After completing the exercise, ask members "What would you need to shorten the distance?" and "What are the factors that go into feeling more comfort with someone?"

<b>TYPICAL RESPONSES</b>	Time passing	Familiarity
	Gender	Race
	Trust	Similarity
	Relaxation	Liking and enjoying the person

**MARY BETH'S STORY**

I really like the physical boundaries session. As a former dancer I have a fondness for open spaces and the room, without the chairs, feels really open and without obstacles.

As I start moving through the room, mingling with others and deciding on a box selection, my excitement begins to turn to anxiety. I suddenly become aware that I will have to disclose why I chose a particular box. I panic and yell

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to myself in anguish, "I can't possibly be vulnerable in front of this many people!" When I stop moving and settle into my space, my kinesthetic joy is replaced by a series of mental calculations.

I wonder: "How will I protect myself? Can I lie about my choice and still sound convincing?" I decide I can and create escape hatches by making up less revealing reasons why I am in my box.

It is then that I realize that I still have a body attached to this head. That is when I notice that my stomach is tightening; I feel hot. The room that was once so open feels too small as my space needs suddenly become larger. I wonder if there is a way I can quietly, without being noticed, get outside. Surely there is enough space in the outdoors to satisfy my personal needs.

As we all make our choices and come to stillness we look at each other, and I realize I am not going anywhere but here. My anxiety begins to dissolve into a desire to share my experience. I realize that others too have their own obstacles to overcome.

## TOPIC

## SESSION

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## GOAL 1:

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## QUESTIONS

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## TOPIC 5 Emotional Boundaries: Setting Limits and Asking for What You Want

### SESSION RATIONALE

Women survivors of trauma have a history of feeling in jeopardy when they say no to the demands of others. Survivors worry that they will hurt or disappoint others. They also worry that they will be abandoned, attacked, or disliked. Sometimes they become fearful that they themselves will counterattack and be unable to control their own anger. Survivors must learn that:

- A. They have a right to say no.
- B. They can survive the consequences of saying no.
- C. The responses of others may be different from what they expect.

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**GOAL 1:** Each member will be able to form an "I want" statement that is individual and specific to her alone.

**GOAL 2:** Each member will begin to understand the difference between active and passive strategies to get what she wants.

**GOAL 3:** Each member will begin to understand what it means to set an interpersonal limit.

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### QUESTIONS

1. Do you ask yourself what you want when you enter a new situation or a new relationship? If not, why not?
2. Has anyone else ever asked you what you wanted? Did you trust that they meant it?
3. When do you say no to others?
  - What things get in the way of saying no?
  - How do you feel when you want to say no or actually say no?

4. Have you ever said no in a way that worked? Please share these successful strategies with the rest of the group. What conditions make it easier or harder to say no?
5. What do you think the link is between your trauma experience and the difficulty with saying no?

## EXERCISES

1. Each group member frames an I-want statement. Each member is instructed to form her statement so that it is personal, avoiding statements such as "I want world peace." A leader writes the statements down and puts them in a large box. One statement is drawn out at a time. The group brainstorms on how to achieve the goal of the I-want statement and looks for two strategies that will work and for one strategy that is a real loser. Strategies are written on a flip chart and the leaders help the group identify strategies as active or passive. The leader then asks when one might use a passive strategy (looking for issues of safety and fear) as opposed to a more active one.
2. Each member will think of a situation in which she is currently having difficulty setting limits. The group will choose one or two of these situations for shared problem solving.
3. Members will practice saying the word *no*. To begin, each member will say "No" in her everyday voice. Members will raise their voices up one notch at a time until they begin to feel uncomfortable. Members will do this one at a time and give feedback to each other.

Abuse survivors need to acknowledge their own desires as healthy and legitimate.

## LEADERS' NOTES

### QUESTION 1

Do you ask yourself what you want when you enter a new situation or a new relationship? If not, why not?

**TYPICAL RESPONSES** No, I assume they're only willing to take . . . not give.

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No, I don't always know how to get my needs met.  
 No, because I'm happy with whatever I get.  
 No, no one listens to me anyway.  
 No, because then I will be too vulnerable.  
 No, I wait and see what happens.

This question encourages members to develop awareness of their internal state when asking themselves what they want in specific situations, especially during important events. Some women may be surprised to realize that what they want never enters their minds when entering a new relationship. Many women are merely passive players who drift into relationships with little or no self-awareness.

### QUESTION 2

Has anyone else ever asked you what you wanted? Did you trust that they meant it?

#### TYPICAL RESPONSES

No.  
 Not really.  
 I'm suspicious of them and their motives.  
 Yes, but I'm very honest . . . maybe too trusting.  
 Yes, but I hold back.  
 Yes, but it didn't make any difference.  
 No, because I thought the information would be used to control me.

This is not a question generally posed to women. Even so, group members should ask themselves whether they believe they are asked this question less than the average woman. Members might want to consider why their needs and wants are often ignored.

### QUESTION 3

When do you say no to others?  
 What things get in the way of saying no?

How do you feel when you want to say or actually say no?

As an introduction to the discussion about saying no when setting personal limits, ask members to list what situations prompt members to say no.

**TYPICAL RESPONSES WHEN DO YOU SAY NO TO OTHERS?**

When someone asks me to lend them money or to borrow my car.

When someone asks me if I want to go out partying or get high.

When someone wants sex and I don't want sex.

Pressure from my family to do something that I don't agree with or don't want to do.

I am never able to say no.

Encourage group members to discuss what gets in the way of saying no and how it feels to say no. It is useful to stress the link between trauma experiences and the difficulty women have saying no.

**TYPICAL RESPONSES WHAT THINGS GET IN THE WAY OF SAYING NO?**

Feeling guilty

Being disliked

Feeling hurt

Needing to keep the

Being afraid of the repercussions

peace with family or friends

Being rejected by others

Feeling pressure from

Someone getting angry or mad at me

someone to say yes

Hurting the feelings of others

Being manipulated

Being stunned

Having the other person be my lover or mate

Wanting to fit in

Not wanting to disappoint the other

Wanting to be liked

person

**TYPICAL RESPONSES HOW DOES IT FEEL TO SAY NO?**

Scary

Strong but nervous

Anxious

Guilty

Often, this happened with this and show

**QUESTION**

Have you ever used strategies with to say no?

Encourage no. Strategies pros and cons following v

**TYPICAL**

Help men gies. It is

Angry	Relieved
Powerless	Empowered
Ashamed	Fine

Often, this question will provide an opportunity for members to share what happened when they previously reported a trauma. You should not discourage this and should allow members to tell their stories.

**QUESTION 4**

Have you ever said no in a way that worked? Please share these successful strategies with the rest of the group. What conditions make it easier or harder to say no?

Encourage group members to list both effective and ineffective ways to say no. Strategies should be written on a flip chart so members can consider the pros and cons of the various strategies. For example, members may suggest the following when wanting to say no.

TYPICAL RESPONSES	INEFFECTIVE STRATEGIES	EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES
	Becoming passive	Making clear statements
	Shutting down	Deciding for yourself
	Lashing out in anger	what you can give or take
	Letting the feelings fester inside	Specifying what is good for you
	Directing anger toward someone else such as an innocent bystander	Negotiating
	Exploding	Communicating what you want and listening to what the other person wants
	Drinking or using drugs	Keeping self-preservation in mind
	Simply withdrawing from the situation	Taking a time out

Help members to examine the possible ramifications of both types of strategies. It is important to understand not only why one has chosen particular

strategies in the past but also what the current consequences of particular strategies are.

### QUESTION 5

What do you think the link is between your trauma experience and the difficulty with saying no?

- TYPICAL RESPONSES**
- Remembering painful incidents from the past when I couldn't say no makes it difficult to say no now.
  - Feeling the same fear I did as a child when I couldn't say no to the abuser.
  - Feeling the emotional pain I did in the past.
  - It did not matter if I did say no.
  - My saying no doesn't matter.
  - Feeling unworthy to say no.
  - Feeling that I have no power to affect anything.

You can help members to share their own experiences by giving examples of what happens to some people when they say no or stand up for themselves:

- The perpetrator may call you crazy.
- The abuser may threaten you or someone you care about.
- The abuser may threaten a pet or something else you value.
- The abuser may threaten suicide.
- The abuser may withdraw love and attention.

If the sharing of such experiences has been covered in a previous discussion, do not force a repeat of this material.

### ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. Can you distinguish between verbal and nonverbal or active and passive ways of saying no?
2. How do you defend yourself beyond just saying no?

### EXERCISE 1

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**EXERCISE 1**

The exercise using I-want statements works best when women have achievable goals such as to:

- Manage my money better
- Communicate with my sister
- Improve my relationship with my brother
- Get enough money to go to the movies
- Get a better job
- Live on my own
- Rely on myself to make decisions

You can point out that some goals are harder to accomplish because they are too vague or unrealistic such as:

- A partner to love me forever
- A million dollars
- Be a success
- Be happy
- Be famous

**EXERCISE 2**

Women are asked for current examples of where they are having trouble with setting limits. Women may need help from the leaders because they may be unaware of exactly where they are having trouble setting limits. Those who have been taken advantage of repeatedly may not recognize unfair situations until someone else points them out.

**EXERCISE 3**

The exercise in which women say the word *no* works best when women incorporate movement and body language.

### SHANA'S STORY

Nobody ever asked me what I wanted. In my family my mom was the one who told everybody what to do. It was never a choice. Since I became depressed, my sister thinks she can do the same thing—tell me how, where, and when. She's extremely bossy and she's younger than me. But she has a good job, and a car, and a house so everyone in the family thinks it's OK for her to say what she wants.

I have a hard time feeling like I have any choice about anything since it seems like so many things have happened without my wanting them to happen. Even the littlest things leave me feeling like I have to go along with other people or I might get hurt. Like when someone asks me for money, I give it over. Even if it's my last few dollars. Nobody can understand why I don't just say no. It's more complicated than saying no. I get scared, wondering what might happen if I refuse, if they might threaten me, or make trouble for me. It doesn't seem worth it to stick up for myself, since the consequences have been so bad so many times before.

## TOPIC 6 Self-Esteem

### SESSION RATIONALE

Histories of abuse and years of feeling overwhelmed serve one's positive sense of self-esteem. Women need to nurture who they are. By focusing on what they like about themselves survival skills as positive strengths, a woman can begin caused by years of abuse.

**GOAL 1:** Each member will begin to develop an inventory of personal qualities.

**GOAL 2:** Each member will look at how other people's perceptions affect her feelings about herself.

**GOAL 3:** Each member will develop an understanding of how her life has affected her self-esteem.

Each member rates herself on a Self-Esteem Thermometer drawn on a flip chart before the session (see Appendix I). After the session, members turn rating how they feel about themselves and then discuss.

### QUESTIONS

1. What makes you feel good about yourself?
2. What have people in your life said or done to you that makes you feel good or bad about yourself?
3. Have there been times in your life when you have felt more confident than at other times? Why do you think that is?
4. To what extent does how you feel about yourself depend on the opinion of you?
5. How do you think being abused has affected your self-esteem?
6. Are there certain areas of your life about which you feel less confident? Relationships? Work? Family?