BOUNDARIES IN RECOVERY

A Resource Guide & Reflection Worksheet

Healing from Betrayal, Problematic Sexual Behavior, and Addiction-Related Harm

Purpose of This Resource

Boundaries can help individuals rebuild a sense of safety, reconnect with their own needs and values, and make intentional choices about their relationships. In recovery from sexual betrayal or problematic sexual behavior (PSB), boundaries can be especially important because secrecy, broken agreements, and repeated disappointments may undermine trust and emotional security.

For the person who has experienced betrayal, boundaries can support self-protection, clarity, and healing. For the person working toward recovery, boundaries can strengthen personal accountability, respect for others, and consistency between intentions and actions.

The goal is not to control another person. The goal is to identify what you need, determine what is within your control, communicate clearly, and choose how you will respond.

This worksheet is intended for personal reflection and can also be used in individual therapy, couples work, or recovery support.

PART 1: UNDERSTANDING BOUNDARIES

What Is a Boundary? A boundary is a personal limit that helps you determine how you will care for yourself, honor your values, protect your well-being, and fulfill your responsibilities.

Boundaries help clarify:

- What you are comfortable with and what you are not.
- What you are willing to participate in.
- What you need in order to feel emotionally or physically safe.
- What behaviors you will accept in your relationships.
- What actions you will take when an agreement or limit is not respected.

Boundaries may relate to physical safety, emotional well-being, sexual consent, privacy, finances, time, communication, technology, and relationship expectations.

Boundaries, Requests, and Consequences: What's the Difference?

A request is something you ask another person to do. Example: “I am asking you to communicate with me if you will be late.”

A boundary identifies what you will do to care for yourself. Example: “If you arrive home late without communicating, I will pause our planned conversation and take the evening to care for myself. We can revisit the issue when we are both prepared to talk.”

A personal limit identifies what you are or are not willing to participate in. Example: “I am not willing to engage in sexual activity when I feel pressured or emotionally unsafe.”

A consequence or follow-through action is what you choose to do if a limit or agreement is not respected. Example: “If I continue to feel pressured, I will end the interaction and leave the room.”

A boundary is most useful when it describes an action you can realistically take yourself. It does not guarantee that another person will change.

What Boundaries Are—and Are Not

Healthy boundaries:

- Protect your physical and emotional well-being.
- Clarify personal responsibility.
- Support honesty, respect, and accountability.
- Allow each person to make choices and experience the consequences of those choices.
- Help establish the conditions under which you can safely participate in a relationship.
- Can be reviewed and adjusted as circumstances change.

Boundaries are not:

- A way to force another person into recovery.
- A punishment intended to produce guilt or compliance.
- A guarantee that betrayal or other harmful behavior will never happen again.
- A requirement to remain in a relationship or to leave one.
- A substitute for professional support, safety planning, or treatment when needed.

Important distinction: You can request that someone change a behavior, but you cannot make their recovery choices for them. You can, however, decide what you will do to protect yourself if their choices affect your safety, health, or well-being.

PART 2: IDENTIFYING YOUR BOUNDARY NEEDS

Exercise 1: Where Do I Need Greater Clarity?

Take a few minutes to reflect on the areas of your life where you feel uncertain, overwhelmed, unsafe, or disconnected from yourself. For each area, consider what has been happening, what you need, and what you can do to support yourself.

Area of life	Reflection questions
Emotional well-being	What interactions leave me feeling overwhelmed, dismissed, fearful, or depleted?
Honesty and transparency	What information do I need to make informed decisions about my relationship and my well-being?
Sexual boundaries	Do I feel free to say yes, no, or not now without pressure or retaliation?
Physical safety	What situations or behaviors make me feel unsafe?
Technology and privacy	What agreements about devices, online behavior, and privacy would support safety and trust?
Finances	What financial information or safeguards do I need to make responsible decisions?
Communication	What forms of communication are acceptable to me? What happens when conversations become hostile or unproductive?
Time and personal space	What time, space, or activities do I need to maintain my own well-being?
Recovery responsibilities	Am I taking responsibility for my own healing, or am I trying to manage another person's recovery?
Family and relationships	What limits do I need regarding children, relatives, friends, or other people affected by the situation?

My Reflection

1. Which areas feel most important for me to address right now?

2. What am I currently tolerating that is negatively affecting my well-being?

3. What have I been afraid might happen if I establish a boundary?

4. What would honoring this boundary make possible for me?

PART 3: STAYING WITHIN MY OWN RESPONSIBILITY

Exercise 2: What Is Mine to Control?

In relationships affected by addiction or betrayal, it is understandable to want certainty. You may find yourself monitoring, reminding, investigating, persuading, or repeatedly explaining what another person needs to do.

These responses may arise from a desire to prevent further harm. However, when your emotional stability becomes dependent on managing another person's choices, your own needs can become difficult to attend to. Use the following exercise to distinguish your responsibilities from those of the other person.

What belongs to me?

Examples include:

- My choices and actions.
- My emotional and physical self-care.
- My willingness to participate in conversations or activities.
- My decision about what I need to feel safe.
- My recovery, support system, and therapeutic work.

- My response when an agreement is broken.

My responsibilities:

What belongs to the other person?

Examples include:

- Their honesty and choices.
- Their willingness to seek help.
- Their recovery work and accountability.
- Their decisions about following agreements.
- Their responsibility for repairing harm caused by their behavior.

What I need to stop taking responsibility for:

What requires shared responsibility?

Examples include:

- Establishing mutually agreed relationship expectations.
- Discussing how to rebuild trust.
- Making decisions about shared finances or parenting.
- Participating in couples therapy, when appropriate.
- Creating agreements that affect both partners.

What we may need to address together:

Reflection: Am I Supporting or Managing?

Check any patterns that feel familiar.

☐ I repeatedly remind my partner to complete recovery activities.

☐ I feel responsible for whether my partner remains in recovery.

☐ I spend significant time checking, monitoring, or investigating because I feel unable to trust what I am told.

☐ My own healing feels dependent on whether my partner is doing well.

☐ I avoid expressing my needs because I fear the other person's reaction.

☐ I try to persuade, argue, or negotiate after I have already communicated a limit.

☐ I neglect my own relationships, interests, health, or support system.

☐ I am able to recognize the other person's responsibility while making choices that protect myself.

What stands out to me?

One responsibility I can return to the other person is:

One action I can take for myself is:

PART 4: RECOGNIZING BOUNDARY VIOLATIONS

Exercise 3: What Has Happened, and How Has It Affected Me?

A boundary violation may involve interference with another person's ability to make informed choices, protect themselves, or exercise autonomy. In relationships affected by sexual betrayal, certain patterns can be particularly damaging.

Examples include:

- **Deception or withholding important information:** Preventing a partner from making informed decisions about the relationship, sexual health, or finances.
- **Manipulation or gaslighting:** Pressuring someone to abandon their perspective, doubt their perceptions, or make decisions based on distorted information.

- **Repeated pressure or intimidation:** Continuing unwanted arguments, demands, or persuasion until the other person feels unable to maintain a limit.
- **Broken agreements:** Repeatedly failing to honor commitments on which another person relies.
- **Sexual or physical boundary violations:** Ignoring consent, applying sexual pressure, or engaging in unwanted physical contact.
- **Privacy violations:** Accessing another person's belongings, messages, or accounts without permission.
- **Misuse of power:** Using authority, dependence, fear, or vulnerability to influence another person's choices.

A person declining a request is not, by itself, a boundary violation. However, the response to that refusal may become harmful if it involves coercion, intimidation, retaliation, or interference with the person's autonomy.

My Boundary Awareness Log

Use this worksheet to record specific observations when you feel confused or uncertain about what happened. Focus on facts rather than assumptions. This exercise is intended to help you stay grounded, not to create a record of grievances.

Date or situation:

What I directly observed or was told:

What agreement or personal limit was involved?

How did the situation affect me?

What do I know, and what remains uncertain?

What support or information would help me make an informed decision?

What action would support my well-being now?

If you are experiencing repeated deception, coercion, or confusion about events, consider discussing your concerns with a qualified therapist or trusted support person. You do not have to resolve every uncertainty alone.

PART 5: CREATING A PERSONAL BOUNDARY

Exercise 4: From Concern to Action

A clear boundary identifies the concern, the need behind it, and an action you are prepared to take. Use the following framework:

When [specific behavior or situation occurs], I feel/recognize [impact or concern]. I need [limit or condition]. If this continues or happens again, I will [specific action within my control].

The goal is to communicate clearly without threatening, shaming, or trying to control another person.

Example 1: Honesty

Concern: Important information has been withheld, making it difficult to make informed relationship decisions.

Boundary statement: “I need honest communication about matters that affect my ability to make informed decisions about this relationship. If I discover that important information continues to be withheld, I will pause decisions about our future and seek support to determine what is safe and appropriate for me.”

Example 2: Sexual Consent

Concern: Sexual activity feels pressured or emotionally unsafe.

Boundary statement: “I will only participate in sexual activity when I freely want to and feel comfortable doing so. If I feel pressured, I will say no or stop the interaction.”

Consent can be withdrawn at any time. You do not need to justify a refusal.

Example 3: Communication

Concern: Conversations become hostile, circular, or intimidating.

Boundary statement: “I am willing to discuss difficult issues, but I will not continue a conversation that includes yelling, insults, or intimidation. If that happens, I will end the conversation and consider returning to it when it is safe and respectful.”

Example 4: Recovery Accountability

Concern: One partner feels responsible for monitoring the other's recovery.

Boundary statement: “I recognize that your recovery is your responsibility. I will not take on the role of managing your recovery activities. I will make my own decisions about what I need in order to feel safe participating in this relationship.”

Example 5: Broken Agreements

Concern: A repeated failure to follow an agreement affects emotional security or practical responsibilities.

Boundary statement: “When an agreement that affects me is not honored, I will address the impact and reconsider what arrangements I can safely rely on. If the pattern continues, I will take steps to protect my well-being and reassess our current agreements.”

My Boundary Plan

1. The specific behavior or situation I am concerned about:

_____

_____

2. Why this matters to me:

_____

_____

3. The value or need I am protecting:

☐ Safety

☐ Honesty

☐ Respect

☐ Emotional well-being

☐ Sexual autonomy

☐ Financial security

☐ Privacy

☐ Trust

☐ Personal recovery

☐ Other: _____

4. The boundary I want to establish:

_____

_____

5. What I will say to communicate it:

_____

_____

6. What action I am realistically prepared to take if the boundary is not respected:

7. What support I may need to follow through:

PART 6: NONNEGOTIABLES AND RELATIONSHIP SAFETY

Exercise 5: What Do I Need in Order to Participate in This Relationship?

A nonnegotiable is a condition or limit that reflects something essential to your safety, dignity, or ability to remain involved in a relationship. Nonnegotiables are personal. What one person needs may differ from what another person needs. They may also change as circumstances evolve.

The purpose is not to create a list of demands that guarantees another person's compliance. It is to clarify what you need and what choices you will make if those conditions are not present.

Potential areas for consideration include:

- Honest disclosure of information that materially affects relationship decisions.
- Respect for sexual consent and physical autonomy.
- Appropriate medical evaluation or sexual health testing when indicated.
- Clear agreements regarding contact with an affair partner.
- Accountability regarding spending or shared financial resources.
- Recovery support and treatment commitments that have been mutually discussed.
- Agreements about technology, online sexual behavior, and transparency.
- Respectful communication without intimidation or retaliation.
- Protection of children and other vulnerable family members from harmful situations.

These are discussion topics, not universal requirements. Any agreement involving privacy, technology, finances, or monitoring should be considered carefully, with attention to autonomy, proportionality, safety, and professional guidance where appropriate.

My Nonnegotiables

The conditions I consider essential for my well-being are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Why these conditions matter to me:

_____

_____

Which of these conditions have been clearly communicated?

_____

Which require further discussion or professional guidance?

_____

What will I do if a condition is not met?

_____

_____

Am I prepared to take that action? If not, what would help me develop a realistic plan?

_____

_____

A boundary should not depend on a consequence you are unwilling or unable to carry out. If a potential consequence involves leaving a shared home, separation, divorce, financial changes, or child-related arrangements, consider practical planning and appropriate professional advice before acting, unless immediate safety requires urgent action.

_____

PART 7: COMMUNICATING AND MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES

Exercise 6: Practicing Clear Communication

Communicating a boundary can feel uncomfortable, particularly if you are accustomed to avoiding conflict or if past attempts to speak up have been met with anger, dismissal, or defensiveness. A useful approach is to be brief, specific, respectful, and consistent.

Before I communicate a boundary

Ask yourself:

- Do I understand what I need?
- Am I describing a specific behavior rather than attacking someone's character?
- Is the requested change clear?
- Am I identifying an action I can take myself?
- Have I considered whether it is safe to communicate this boundary directly?
- Do I need a therapist, advocate, or other support person involved?

Practice Statement

The situation I need to address:

What I want the other person to understand:

What I will say:

What I will do if the conversation becomes unproductive:

If My Boundary Is Challenged

Consider the following responses:

- “I understand that you see this differently. This is what I need to do to care for myself.”
- “I have explained my limit. I am not going to continue arguing about it.”
- “You are free to make your own decision, and I am responsible for deciding what I will do in response.”
- “I need time to think before I make a decision.”
- “I am willing to discuss this with our therapist, but I am not willing to continue this conversation in its current form.”

You do not need to persuade someone to agree with your boundary for it to be meaningful.

My preferred response when a boundary is challenged:

PART 8: RECOVERY BOUNDARIES FOR THE PERSON WHO HAS CAUSED HARM

Exercise 7: Taking Responsibility for My Own Behavior

Boundaries are not only relevant to betrayed partners. Individuals recovering from compulsive or problematic sexual behavior also need to recognize and respect the boundaries of others.

Recovery involves more than asking others to trust you. It includes behaving in ways that respect their autonomy, consent, and ability to make informed choices.

Reflect on the following questions:

1. Where have my actions interfered with another person's ability to make informed decisions?

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2. Have I used secrecy, minimization, blame, pressure, or defensiveness to avoid accountability?

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3. How have my actions affected another person's sense of safety, trust, or autonomy?

4. Can I tolerate another person's anger, uncertainty, or need for space without demanding reassurance or forgiveness?

5. What agreements or boundaries have I committed to respecting?

6. What specific behaviors will demonstrate accountability, rather than simply promising change?

7. If I cannot or do not intend to honor an agreement, how can I communicate that honestly instead of making a promise I may not keep?

My Accountability Commitment

One behavior I need to stop:

One behavior I need to begin practicing:

One way I will respect another person's autonomy:

One recovery support or accountability resource I will use:

One way I will respond if I violate a boundary:

When a boundary has been violated, meaningful repair includes acknowledging the behavior, offering an apology without excuses or blame, making appropriate amends, and demonstrating change over time. Forgiveness, trust, and reconciliation cannot be demanded as proof that the other person has healed.

PART 9: WHEN A BOUNDARY IS CROSSED

Exercise 8: My Response Plan

A boundary violation may bring up fear, anger, sadness, confusion, or an urgent desire to resolve the situation immediately. You do not have to make every decision in the moment. Use this sequence to guide your response.

Step 1: Recognize what happened.

What did I observe? What agreement or limit was involved?

Step 2: Acknowledge the impact.

What am I feeling? What do I need right now?

Step 3: Ground myself.

What would help me pause, regulate my emotions, and think clearly?

Step 4: Seek support.

Who can help me assess the situation without pressuring me toward a particular decision?

Step 5: Decide whether communication is appropriate and safe.

Do I need to clarify an agreement, express a concern, or seek professional guidance? Is direct communication safe in this situation?

Step 6: Take action.

What will I do to care for myself or protect my responsibilities?

Step 7: Reassess.

Does the current boundary still meet my needs? Do I need additional support or a different plan?

If there is physical violence, sexual coercion, intimidation, stalking, or an immediate threat to safety, prioritize safety and seek appropriate professional or emergency assistance. Direct confrontation is not necessary when it could increase danger.

PART 10: SELF-CARE AND CONTINUED GROWTH

Exercise 9: Maintaining My Own Recovery

Boundaries are easier to maintain when you have support, opportunities for rest, and a life that is not entirely organized around another person's behavior. Self-care does not mean ignoring betrayal or avoiding accountability. It means continuing to recognize your own needs while navigating difficult circumstances.

My Self-Care Inventory

Check the areas you would like to strengthen.

☐ Individual therapy or professional support.

☐ Peer support or a recovery community.

☐ Time with trusted friends or family.

☐ Rest, sleep, and physical health.

☐ Activities that bring meaning, pleasure, or a sense of identity.

☐ Time away from repetitive conflict or monitoring.

☐ Financial, legal, or practical guidance when needed.

☐ Journaling or another way of processing emotions.

☐ Spiritual or reflective practices, if meaningful to me.

☐ Personal goals that are independent of my relationship.

One area of self-care I have neglected:

_____

One small action I can take this week:

_____

Someone I can reach out to for support:

_____

How I will recognize that I am making progress:

_____

_____

PART 11: REVIEWING AND ADJUSTING MY BOUNDARIES

Exercise 10: My Weekly Boundary Check-In

Boundaries may need to change as trust, safety, recovery, and relationship circumstances change. Reviewing them periodically allows you to assess whether they remain appropriate and whether you are following through on the actions you have chosen. Complete this check-in weekly or as needed.

1. What did I do this week to honor my boundaries?

_____

_____

2. Where did I struggle to maintain a limit?

3. Did I take responsibility for something that belongs to someone else?

4. Did I respect another person's boundaries, including their right to say no?

5. Is there a boundary I need to clarify, strengthen, or reconsider?

6. What progress can I acknowledge without minimizing the work that remains?

7. What is one intention I want to carry into the coming week?

CLOSING REFLECTION: CHOOSING SELF-RESPECT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Take a moment to consider what you have learned about yourself through these exercises. Complete the following statements.

I am learning that I have the right to…

I am learning that I am not responsible for…

I want my relationships to reflect these values…

When I feel tempted to abandon my boundaries, I can remind myself…

My next step toward healthier boundaries is…

Final Thoughts

Healthy boundaries are an ongoing practice. They require self-awareness, honesty, courage, and a willingness to act in accordance with your values—even when another person disagrees.

For betrayed partners, boundaries can help restore a sense of agency and support informed decisions about safety, trust, and the future of a relationship. For individuals working toward recovery, respecting boundaries means accepting responsibility for personal choices and recognizing that another person's healing cannot be rushed or controlled.

You can care deeply about someone without taking responsibility for their choices. You can support recovery without managing it. You can remain open to connection while recognizing what you need to feel safe.

A boundary is not a guarantee that someone else will change. It is a commitment to take your own needs, choices, and responsibilities seriously.