

Compassionate Boundary Setting

Section 6



INTRODUCTION

“Without boundaries, you will act, sleep, work, groan, feel used and fulfill basic responsibilities rather than make choices to live and love fully, to work hard and nobly, to fulfill your purpose and to contribute passionately to your world.” - (Black, J. and Enns, G, *Better Boundaries: Owning and Treasuring Your Life*. Oakland, CA. Raincoat Books)



INFORMATION

[Distribute this document to all participants to explore prior to this session.](#)



APPLICATIONS

Circle Agenda

[Circle Agenda for Section 6, In-Person](#)

Use this agenda if you are leading your group in a session in-person.

[Circle Agenda for Section 6, Virtual](#)

Use this agenda if you are leading your group in a session virtually.

Handouts to Support Content Covered in Circle Agenda

[Tips for Compassionate Boundary Setting](#)

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INTRODUCTION

“Without boundaries, you will act, sleep, work, groan, feel used and fulfill basic responsibilities rather than make choices to live and love fully, to work hard and nobly, to fulfill your purpose and to contribute passionately to your world.” - (Black, J. and Enns, G, *Better Boundaries: Owning and Treasuring Your Life*. Oakland, CA. Raincoat Books)



INFORMATION

Boundaries support our wellbeing and the wellbeing of those we care about. Effectively managing boundaries might mean remaining mindful of our goals and values in the midst of emotionally charged encounters, treating children with respect at all times rather than assuming a tone of excessive intimacy or authority, defining what is OK and not OK in how others treat us, holding to agreed upon boundaries even when you want to give in, or walking away from a situation when you think your involvement might undermine someone else’s boundaries.

Boundaries are particularly important in relationships with people who are survivors of trauma, many of whom have histories of being taken advantage of that have left them without the means to establish or maintain boundaries. Setting clear boundaries can protect our relationships with our youth and also allow us to maintain a level of self-awareness and self-regulation, protecting us from compassion fatigue.

When we are clear about what our boundaries are, we can communicate them ahead of time calmly rather than in a situation when they have already been crossed and emotions are stronger. In communicating our boundaries, it helps to be open to discussion and invite the other person to help problem solve how best to respect your boundaries. Discussing boundaries with our family members can help clarify how to support consistent boundaries and consider any exceptions to them.

Just as with most things in life, some of our boundaries will shift overtime. Circumstances will vary, information about our children (perhaps in relation to their mental health, learning abilities and strengths) will change and our own priorities may shift. During this time of flexibility, practicing self-compassion can help us stay grounded in the fact that we are doing the best we can with the resources we have available.

Brené Brown offers great insight into boundary setting and the link to empathy and compassion in this [6 minute video](#).

Developed in partnership with:



compassionresiliencetoolkit.org

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To help identify needed boundaries, consider at least three ways that you would complete each of these three statements:

1. I have the right to ask for (examples: privacy, information before making a decision, etc.)
2. To protect my time and energy, it is OK to (examples: change my mind, set a time limit, etc.)
3. People may not (examples: humiliate me in front of others, go through my desk/wallet/purse, etc.)

Behavior and Beliefs in Relationships that Might be Signs of Ignored/Unstated Boundaries:

Too close - total dependence, “I need your approval and support 100% of the time.”

Avoid conflict - “If I ignore it, it will go away eventually.”

Victimhood - Identify self as the victim, “I have no power.”

Distant - Due to past experiences with people not respecting boundaries, one is fiercely independent, “I dare you to come close!” or shies away from openness with others.

Invisibility - Not wanting to be seen or heard so that boundaries are not violated

Three Types of Boundaries:

Permeable/with holes - A boundary is set but there is very little reinforcement of the boundary. For most of us, having overly permeable boundaries will allow unwanted behaviors from others and may mean that we are letting too much of ourselves out, limiting our privacy and self-care.

Rigid - These are the boundaries that you reinforce at all costs. Too rigid boundaries do not allow us to be open to new ideas or perspectives and can often keep us in the dark and unapproachable.

Flexible - Flexible boundaries are firm and clear yet open to new ideas and resources when needed. They are also sufficiently closed to protect us from harm.

But What about Compassion?

Our maintenance of boundaries does not override our ability to be caring. We continue to make ourselves open to and respectful of children, entering into their worlds and imagining what they have been through. We, in other words, employ both empathy and boundaries when relating to others. For example, if out of rage your child says something disrespectful to you, you can say, “I’m sorry that you’re in so much distress. Even so, it’s not okay for you to be so disrespectful to me, because it hurts my feelings and I wouldn’t let someone else speak to you that way. When you’re able to share your feelings with me more respectfully, I will be ready to help you.”

Boundaries Between Interactions

Between challenging interactions with our children, it is very helpful to do something to release tension and re-set for the next interaction. Examples include taking some slow breaths, visualizing a scene that is calming to you, stretching, humming, moving out of the environment for a moment, saying affirmations to ourselves, or talking with a friend.

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SELF-CARE



STRATEGIES

Reflect on this passage by Michelle Olak as you consider how and why to set compassionate boundaries.

And then I learned the spiritual journey
had nothing to do with being nice.
It had to do with being real and authentic.
Having boundaries.
Honoring and respecting my space first,
others second.
And in this space of self-care,
being nice just happened, it flowed...
not motivated by fear, but by LOVE.

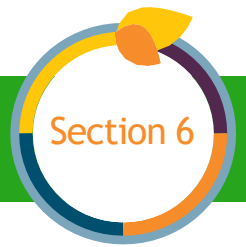
By Michelle Olak



WHAT'S NEXT

Influencing our Family Culture - how does compassionate boundary setting inform our family culture?

Compassionate Boundary Setting



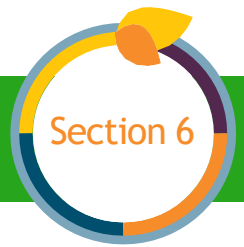
Parent & Caregiver



Circle Agenda

Circle Topic	CR Section 6: Compassionate Boundary Setting to Build Compassion Resilience
<p>Planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Send out pre-read for Section 6 <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare materials for Session 6 <input type="checkbox"/> Write Brené Brown quote on flipchart paper to hang in the room
<p>Purpose of Circle</p>	<p>Today you will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learn how to set boundaries that will help us build compassion resilience.
<p>Time/Materials/Preparation</p>	<p>Time: 90 minutes</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Group agreements <input type="checkbox"/> Group values and family goals <input type="checkbox"/> Centerpiece <input type="checkbox"/> Talking piece <input type="checkbox"/> Fidgets <input type="checkbox"/> Flipchart paper with compassion resilience definition <input type="checkbox"/> Markers <input type="checkbox"/> Flipchart <input type="checkbox"/> Name tags <input type="checkbox"/> Handouts: Tips for Compassionate Boundary Setting <p>Preparation: Arrange chairs in a circle without furniture in the middle. Hang compassion resilience definition and Brené Brown quote on the wall.</p>

Compassionate Boundary Setting





Circle Topic	CR Section 6: Compassionate Boundary Setting to Build Compassion Resilience
Opening and Check-in (20 minutes)	<p>Share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome back! I invite everyone to get into a comfortable position with your eyes closed or looking towards the ground. We are going to take a moment to pause. Take a few slow breaths. <i>(Pause)</i> Name in your mind what you want to let go of to be present in this circle and your personal reason for being here. <i>(Pause for 10 seconds)</i> I invite you to bring your attention back to the circle. <p>Ask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• (Go-around) How are you doing on a scale of 1-5? If you had a free day to do anything you wanted, what would you do? <p>Share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Last time we were together, we looked at expectations and the impact our expectations have on our wellbeing and our families. Today we are going to look at how to incorporate those expectations into setting compassionate boundaries with others; using our “nos” to support our “yeses.”• As always, we will work to follow our group guidelines during our time together.

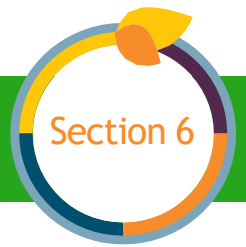
Guiding Questions (45 minutes)	<p>Share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I have a quote from Brené Brown to center us in our conversation around boundaries today.<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>“Compassionate people ask for what they need. They say no when they need to, and when they say yes, they mean it. They’re compassionate because their boundaries keep them out of resentment.”</i>• We know having boundaries is important and it can be helpful to explore the different types of boundaries to help us think about what boundaries we tend to have.<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Permeable/with holes: A boundary is set, but there is very little reinforcement of the boundary. For most of us, having overly permeable boundaries will allow unwanted behaviors from others and may mean that we are letting too much of ourselves out, limiting our privacy and self-care.- Rigid: These are the boundaries that you reinforce at all costs. Too rigid boundaries do not allow us to be open to new ideas or perspectives and can often keep us in the dark and unapproachable.- Flexible: Flexible boundaries are firm and clear yet open to new ideas and resources when needed. They are also sufficiently closed to protect us from harm.
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Circle Topic	CR Section 6: Compassionate Boundary Setting to Build Compassion Resilience
<p>Guiding Questions (45 minutes) <i>continued</i></p>  	<p>Ask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• (Open mic) What type of boundaries do you usually have with your family? <p>Share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We are going to do an activity to help us think about what boundaries we need to set to create and maintain the type of family culture we'd like to see. <p>Ask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• (Open mic) What are specific behaviors your family exhibits when they are at their best? <p>Scribe the examples on a flip chart paper.</p> <p><i>Facilitator Tip: Coach participants to be as specific as possible with their behavior brainstorm. For example, "we are respectful" needs to be more specific - what one person considers respectful could be very different than another. A more specific example would be, "we greet each other when we see each other for the first time in the morning and upon returning home."</i></p> <p>Share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• These things are our "yeses" for our family. Things that we'd like to see in our family culture. If you did this activity with your family, these could be used to create family agreements.• In our role as parents and caregivers we guide our children and the best way to guide them is through the boundaries they see us set. <p>Ask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• (Open mic) What is a boundary that you could put in place that would allow you to do the behaviors listed on our list most of the time? <p>Scribe the examples on a flip chart paper.</p> <p><i>Facilitator Tip: An example of a boundary that could help meet the desired behavior of having dinner together as a family most evenings would be to restrict activities that keep us out of the house during mealtimes to twice a week.</i></p> <p>Hand out Tips for Compassionate Boundary Setting and point out that their specific behaviors of their family at their best are their "yeses." Knowing these is the first step to compassionate boundary setting. Walk participants through the rest of the handout.</p> <p>Ask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Please find a partner. Use the tips for compassionate boundary setting to practice how you would state the boundaries listed to someone you wanted to respect the boundary.• (Open mic) What are some of the examples you practiced in your pairs?• (Open mic) Can I have one or two volunteers to share a story of when they successfully set a new boundary that promoted positive change in their life?

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Parent & Caregiver



Virtual Circle Agenda

Circle Topic	CR Section 6: Compassionate Boundary Setting to Build Compassion Resilience
Planning	<input type="checkbox"/> Send out pre-read for Section 6 <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare materials for Session 6 <input type="checkbox"/> Share handouts from Session 5
Purpose of Circle	Today you will: 1. Learn how to set boundaries that will help us build compassion resilience.
Time/Materials/Preparation	Time: 90 minutes Documents to Share During Session: <input type="checkbox"/> Tips for Compassionate Boundary Setting Items to Place in Chat During Session: <input type="checkbox"/> Group Agreements <input type="checkbox"/> Family Goals <input type="checkbox"/> Brené Brown quote
Opening and Check-in (20 minutes)	Share <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome back! I invite everyone to get into a comfortable position with your eyes closed or looking towards the ground. We are going to take a moment to pause. Take a few slow breaths. <i>(Pause)</i> Name in your mind what you want to let go of to be present in this circle and your personal reason for being here. <i>(Pause for 10 seconds)</i> I invite you to bring your attention back to the group.



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Circle Topic	CR Section 6: Compassionate Boundary Setting to Build Compassion Resilience
Opening and Check-in (20 minutes) <i>continued</i>	<p>Ask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• (Go-around) How are you doing on a scale of 1-5? If you had a free day to do anything you wanted, what would you do? <p>Share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Last time we were together, we looked at expectations and the impact our expectations have on our wellbeing and our families. Today we are going to look at how to incorporate those expectations into setting compassionate boundaries with others; using our “nos” to support our “yeses.”• As always, we will work to follow our group guidelines during our time together. These are in chat for your reference.
Guiding Questions (45 minutes)	<p>Share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I have a quote from Brené Brown to center us in our conversation around boundaries today. <i>Place the quote in chat.</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">- “Compassionate people ask for what they need. They say no when they need to, and when they say yes, they mean it. They’re compassionate because their boundaries keep them out of resentment.”• We know having boundaries is important and it can be helpful to explore the different types of boundaries to help us think about what boundaries we tend to have.<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Permeable/with holes: A boundary is set, but there is very little reinforcement of the boundary. For most of us, having overly permeable boundaries will allow unwanted behaviors from others and may mean that we are letting too much of ourselves out, limiting our privacy and self-care.- Rigid: These are the boundaries that you reinforce at all costs. Too rigid boundaries do not allow us to be open to new ideas or perspectives and can often keep us in the dark and unapproachable.- Flexible: Flexible boundaries are firm and clear yet open to new ideas and resources when needed. They are also sufficiently closed to protect us from harm. <p>Ask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• (Open mic) What type of boundaries do you usually have with your family? <p>Share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We are going to do an activity to help us think about what boundaries we need to set to create and maintain the type of family culture we’d like to see.

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Circle Topic	CR Section 6: Compassionate Boundary Setting to Build Compassion Resilience
<p data-bbox="123 384 334 478">Guiding Questions (45 minutes) <i>continued</i></p>  	<p data-bbox="456 384 505 411">Ask</p> <ul data-bbox="456 426 1382 453" style="list-style-type: none">• (Open mic) What are specific behaviors your family exhibits when they are at their best? <p data-bbox="456 485 1268 512">Scribe the examples on a shared virtual space, such as a virtual whiteboard.</p> <p data-bbox="456 543 1471 680"><i>Facilitator Tip: Coach participants to be as specific as possible with their behavior brainstorm. For example, “we are respectful” needs to be more specific - what one person considers respectful could be very different than another. A more specific example would be, “we greet each other when we see each other for the first time in the morning and upon returning home.”</i></p> <p data-bbox="456 711 529 739">Share</p> <ul data-bbox="456 758 1458 909" style="list-style-type: none">• These things are our “yeses” for our family. Things that we’d like to see in our family culture. If you did this activity with your family, these could be used to create family agreements.• In our role as parents and caregivers we guide our children and the best way to guide them is through the boundaries they see us set. <p data-bbox="456 940 505 968">Ask</p> <ul data-bbox="456 987 1438 1052" style="list-style-type: none">• (Open mic) What is a boundary that you could put in place that would allow you to do the behaviors listed on our list most of the time? <p data-bbox="456 1083 1446 1182">Scribe the examples on a shared virtual space. If you are using a virtual whiteboard or sharing a PowerPoint slide, have the “Family at Its Best” brainstorm on one side and the boundaries brainstormed on the other.</p> <p data-bbox="456 1213 1430 1312"><i>Facilitator Tip: An example of a boundary that could help meet the desired behavior of having dinner together as a family most evenings would be to restrict activities that keep us out of the house during mealtimes to twice a week.</i></p> <p data-bbox="456 1344 1446 1442">Hand out Tips for Compassionate Boundary Setting and point out that their specific behaviors of their family at their best are their “yeses.” Knowing these is the first step to compassionate boundary setting. Walk participants through the rest of the handout.</p> <p data-bbox="456 1474 505 1501">Ask</p> <ul data-bbox="456 1520 1471 1824" style="list-style-type: none">• In a moment, we are going to break into pairs. Use the tips for compassionate boundary setting to practice how you would state a boundary to someone you wanted to respect the boundary. You are welcome to use one of the boundaries we brainstormed earlier. Share the list generated earlier again and give participants a moment to review the list before breaking them into breakout groups of two.• (Open mic) What are some of the examples you practiced in your pairs?• (Open mic) Can I have one or two volunteers to share a story of when they successfully set a new boundary that promoted positive change in their life?

Tips for Setting Compassionate Boundaries



1. **Know what you want to say “Yes”** to in your life (values, behaviors, and priorities).
2. **Be proactive.** Have “meetings” to discuss boundaries. Structure offers safety for both sides.
3. **Just say it!** Don’t make them guess. Use simple and direct language.
4. Reinforce by pointing out the violations **IN THE MOMENT.**
5. **Give explanations that are specific,** relevant to the other person, and offer shared solutions.
6. **Back up your boundary with action.** If you give in, you invite people to ignore your needs.