

Helpful Workplace Behaviors to Inform Compassionate Boundary Setting

1. Begin by asking the group to envision a compassionate work environment, where they can be their best self in their job. What staff behaviors would lead to such an environment?
2. Create a space to document a group brainstorm, for example some large flip-chart paper if in person or a Jamboard if together virtually.
3. Ask the group to share what they envisioned, encouraging them to share their ideas as behaviors. If the group shares attitudes instead of behaviors, ask *“What behavior would demonstrate this attitude?”*
4. If participants are having difficulty coming up with ideas, ask them what behaviors are important to the mission and well-being of the organization. After the group is done brainstorming, add to the title of the exercise, *“Our Yeses.”*



The second step of this exercise is to brainstorm what things staff need to say “no” to in order to support their “yeses”. These “nos” may become individual boundaries that staff members choose to set. Have the group brainstorm what things they need to say “no” to in order to support the items on the “yes” list. (Example: **Helpful Behavior** – Communicating concerns directly to the person the concern involves. **The “No” to support the Yes** – engaging in gossip with other staff members.)

5. Review the tips for how to set such boundaries in your professional and/or personal life. Practice role playing communication between staff about some of the identified boundaries.

Tips for Setting Compassionate Boundaries

- Know what you want to say “Yes” to in your life (values and priorities).
- Be proactive. Have “meetings” to discuss boundaries. Structure offers safety for both sides.
- Just say it! Don’t make them guess. Use simple and direct language.
- Reinforce by pointing out the violations or near violations **IN THE MOMENT**.
- Give explanations that are specific, relevant to the other person, and offer shared solutions.
- Back up your boundary with action. If you give in, you invite people to ignore your needs.
- Remember your locus of control. Boundaries aren’t about perfection. When you must say “yes,” look for where you have control.

Compassionate Boundary Setting to Build Compassion Resilience

Section 6

Questions that may get staff thinking for this activity from the perspective of behaviors with clients as well as with colleagues.

Clients: Do you think it is OK to...

1. Friend clients on Facebook or other social media.
2. Share personal phone numbers with clients who may need extra support.
3. Touch a client when they are upset.
4. Call clients to remind them to bring documents or other important items to an appointment.
5. Visit with or accept calls from client when off duty or outside of work hours.
6. Talk about your personal life with a client during an appointment.
7. Find ways to provide clients with health-related services without being reimbursed.
8. Attend events in a client's life, such as a graduation, wedding, family gathering, etc.
9. Maintain relationships with clients, after they are no longer in your care.
10. Keep secrets (personal or health-related) between you and a client that is different than client confidentiality.

Colleagues: Do you think it is OK to...

1. Engage in gossip about other colleagues or clients.
2. Take on the extra work of a colleague.
3. Work overtime.
4. Ask a colleague to work overtime.
5. Be available at all hours.
6. Touch a colleague when they need a hug.
7. Criticize colleagues when you feel they did not do their job well.
8. Assist a colleague more than they give.
9. Complain to colleagues about your job.
10. Talk with colleagues about personal problems while at work.

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Examples of simple and direct language for boundaries

To set a boundary with a colleague that complains too much about what you cannot control:

"I am working on showing up with good energy for my clients, I find that talking too much about what I can't control makes that hard for me. Let's switch topics."

To set a boundary with someone who takes more ideas/ assistance than they give:

"I wouldn't be here if it weren't for the collaboration I have had with other providers. I am happy to offer you advice and want to be sure that I also learn a few tricks from you. I'd love to know how you approached _____."

To set a boundary with someone who seems to always share bad news:

"I am making it a priority to find things to laugh about. Humor and positivity are how I make it through the day in good shape! I need you to bring some funny stuff along with the bad news. Want to hear what made me laugh yesterday?"

To set a boundary with an angry person:

"I want to work with you and figure this out. It will be hard if our brains are not calm enough to think. How about we take a 5-minute break?"

To say no to extra commitments:

"Although our agency's goals are really important to me, I need to discuss what can come off my plate or what I can do in a different manner in order to take on anything new. I am working on how to balance my family's needs and my workload."

To set a boundary with someone who is critical without your permission:

"I find that the feedback that works best for me to grow is given when I ask for it. It would be helpful to me if you would ask for my permission before giving me feedback. Can you do that?"

To buy yourself time when making decisions:

"I find I make my best decisions when I have time to think them through; I'll need a day to think on it."

