

# Boundaries

Setting boundaries with loved ones who are struggling with substance use might seem frightening, or even mean. Sometimes, family members worry that they will lose touch with or completely alienate their loved one if they set boundaries. However, boundaries are necessary in any relationship. Good boundaries can protect the needs and rights of families and can help to develop trust, stability and respect.

## What is a boundary?

Boundaries are about self-care and are the foundation of all healthy relationships. It is about informing another person, without shaming, blaming or attacking, what behaviours are acceptable and unacceptable. Boundaries are also about consequences- what we do when our boundaries are not respected.

## Types of Boundaries

### PHYSICAL

- These boundaries keep us physically safe; and determine what we are physically comfortable with. They set limits around touch and space

### EMOTIONAL

- You set this around how you allow people to treat you. When someone is disrespectful or being verbally abusive, this is breaking the rules around emotional boundaries

### INTELLECTUAL

- These are about us being able to communicate clearly what we want and need in our world. Acknowledging that we have needs too

### FINANCIAL

- Financial boundaries give us control of our finances. Demands, unreasonable requests or manipulation to gain financial support are a violation of our financial boundaries

## Why have boundaries?

They invite the user to be more responsible for their behavior

They model a healthier and safer way of relating to people

They help families to reduce the impact of substance use and associated behaviours on their lives

They help the whole family to break down the roles that members can get stuck in, such as the person using drugs being dependent or parents taking on the role of Carer

## Some things to remember when setting boundaries

### IDENTIFY YOUR LIMITS

- Consider what you are prepared to tolerate and accept. Which behaviours would you like to see stop altogether? Which behaviours would you like to see less of? Spend some time thinking about what you will do, might do and won't do

### TUNE INTO YOUR FEELINGS

- When someone's behaviour leaves you feeling uncomfortable, that can be a cue that your boundaries may have been crossed. Listen to your gut - it is usually right

### 'START SMALL'

- Setting boundaries is a skill that takes practice and it is OK to begin at your comfort level. Start by setting a boundary that isn't too overwhelming. You can gradually increase to more challenging ones as your confidence grows

### STICK TO WHAT YOU SAY

- Setting boundaries does not work if we go back on what we say. Many times, those that struggle with substance use will try to call our bluff or choose manipulative behaviours. This is where things can become tricky- make sure that you are ready to stick with a boundary *before* you set it. Remember, our actions speak louder than our words

### GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION

- Boundaries are a sign of healthy relationships and of respect for ourselves and others. Give yourself permission to set boundaries and work to keep them in place

### BE OPEN TO CHANGE

- What is the right boundary at one time may not feel like the best fit for all circumstances. We are free to reconsider our position on things and reevaluate our boundaries over time

### MAKE YOU A PRIORITY

- Valuing ourselves and putting us first can give us more energy, peace of mind and a more positive outlook. We can then be more present with others and "be there" for them. When we are in a better place ourselves, we can be better for those we care about

### BE ASSERTIVE

- We sometimes expect others to know what hurts us or what our boundaries are. However, they are not mind readers. It is up to us to assertively communicate with the other person if they have crossed our boundary

### GET SUPPORT

- Boundaries are difficult at the best of times - even more so if we feel isolated or unsupported. It is helpful to get as much support as possible around these issues. Developing the skills and building our confidence takes time and sometimes we will make mistakes; that is normal. Having good support for when we do stumble is an important part of our self-care