

Boundaries with Sexually Addicted Spouses

Quick Start

1) **Blast myths:**

Before we start creating, communicating, and enforcing boundaries, let's do some myth-blasting so you have a solid foundation to begin learning this new skill:

- **Myth: I don't have a right to set boundaries with my spouse.**

Truth: You have every right to set boundaries around what you will and will not tolerate from other people. You have even more rights to set boundaries with your sexually addicted spouse! You have a right to expect the promise and vows that you both agreed to, to be kept without exception.

- **Myth: Boundaries are controlling.**

Truth: Boundaries are what YOU will or won't do. That's not controlling another person, that's self-control. Others are free to make healthy or unhealthy choices, and you're simply deciding what you'll do in each case.

- **Myth: Boundaries are mean, or punishment.**

Truth: Boundaries are an act of love and compassion, for yourself – and for others. If we don't let other people experience the natural consequences of their actions, we're not helping them understand the world around them and sending the wrong message that their behavior is acceptable, when it's really not. Boundaries use our

voice to teach people what we're willing to tolerate, and what we're not willing to tolerate.

- **Myth: Boundaries don't work because my spouse continues to cause chaos and behave in hurtful and harmful ways.**

Truth: While it's true we can't control other people or make them change, that's not the purpose or power of boundaries. The purpose of boundaries is to help us create and retreat to a physical and/or mental mindset, that will allow us to be distanced from harmful behavior or others.

What other myths have you believed about boundaries?

For more myth-blasting on boundaries, get notified here when the digital course and community, "[Boundaries for Clarity and Peace: Transforming Confusion and Chaos into Clarity and Calm Without Guilt and Isolation](#)" becomes available.

2) Blast fears about boundaries:

Most of us experience some level of fear about boundaries. Let's get our fears about boundaries out in the open and acknowledge them, so they have less power:

- **Boundaries can be scary because of the fear of the unknown:**

Living a boundary lifestyle and mindset is a new way of thinking, speaking, and behaving. We have no historical frame of reference to predict how others might react, or how we might problem-solve if something unexpected happens, and that can be uncomfortable.

Acknowledging this fear is half the battle. Acknowledging that boundaries are healthy and worth the effort to take back your power is the other half.

- **We fear being responsible for hurting other's feelings or making them angry.**

We need boundaries because other people's behaviors can hurt and harm, and using words requesting they stop haven't brought us sanity. It's not fair that we are the only ones who must shoulder that hurt alone. **It's healthy and fair if an enforcement brings them hurt feelings, they aren't experiencing real harm by you withdrawing as an enforcement.** They have a right to feel anger and express it with, "I feel" statements. However, if they act out in a toxic or wounding way, that needs a boundary also.

- **We worry about losing the relationship permanently, and that will cause pain.**

This is understandably the most common concern. What we must remember when setting boundaries, is the relationship as we currently know it has already changed from what we originally agreed to, into something painful. Their behavior has become a detriment to our emotional well-being.

On their own, the other person's behavior is likely to get worse, not better. At some point, you will be faced with choosing your own well-being over the relationship. **Not choosing your own well-being keeps you in limbo: not enjoying relationship comforts and not able to make a personal change. Boundaries can give you data about whether your spouse is willing and capable of changing their harmful behavior.** You need to know this, one way or another so you can make informed choices about your own health and your future well-being.

What other fears do you have about boundaries? Write them out here:

For more tips on blasting your boundary fears boundaries get notified when the digital course and community, "[Boundaries for Clarity and Peace: Transforming Confusion and Chaos into Clarity and Calm Without Guilt and Isolation](#)" becomes available.

3) Craft your boundaries:

Now that we've exposed some myths and fears about boundaries, it's time to take our first stab. They don't have to be perfect, and they're not written in stone. Boundaries can be fluid and change over time – because they are your plan, for what you will do if certain situations arise.

- **Find a quiet time** to sit where you feel safe and calm to write your boundaries down for yourself.
- **[Use the feelings wheel below](#)** to identify the words that describe how you feel about your partner's unhealthy behaviors. This is your truth. This is where you will use your Voice.
- This is a “quick start” fill-in-the-blank way to start setting boundaries:

WHEN YOU (hurtful behavior)

I FEEL (use words from the [feelings wheel](#) to describe your emotions when he does the behavior, use the Feelings Wheel to find the words)

IF YOU (continued hurtful behavior)

I WILL (what you will do to feel safe, some examples might be: ask you to sleep on the couch; invite you to my therapist's office; go to ___'s house; enact an in house or out of house separation and not be in relationship with you -- whatever makes you feel safe until they change the behavior)

EXAMPLE:

When you refuse to actively seek legitimate, medically recognized recovery efforts for your addiction to sexually acting out, **I feel** scared, vulnerable, hurt, ashamed (not enough) grief, despair, miserable, hopeless and I don't feel safe.

If you don't seek recovery,

I will ask you to leave this home. If you cannot leave this home, **I will** request you sleep in another room.

I will not be in relationship with you. **I will not** provide you with relationship comforts such as sex, physical touch, emotional conversation, and **I will** only discuss housing, shared financial responsibility and co-parenting.

I will enforce this boundary until you show the fruits of recovery, not just doing the tasks of recovery, or while I consider my options regarding the future of this relationship. Meanwhile, **I will** seek counseling with a qualified betrayal trauma therapist for professional advice on how to respond to a partner's sexual addiction in a healthy way and seek support groups for spouses of sexually addicted people.

Use this format and a separate document to start writing your boundaries:

WHEN YOU _____

I FEEL _____

IF YOU _____

I WILL _____

- Share your boundaries with a betrayal trauma informed therapist, coach, or safe recovery person for unbiased feedback to see if your boundaries are realistic for you, and reasonable for your safety.

4) Plan your enforcements before you communicate them

- Think about how you will enforce your boundaries to create some safe space where you can calmly **think your own thoughts** (not his), **feel your own feelings** (not his) and **plan next steps** for excellent self-care.

You can **call safe friends and family** and let them know you're setting new boundaries. Ask if you can spend some time with them or call them in the future if you need to get some space.

Friends I can call for support if a boundary is broken:

- **Create a sanctuary in your home** if you're able, where you can get some space to yourself. Place calming items such as pleasant scents, encouraging reading materials, journaling tools, headphones, a comforting wrap, or blankets in your sanctuary. Keep a copy of your written boundaries available to refer to.

What room in my home will I use as my sanctuary and what items will I place/take there if a boundary is broken:

- **Think about places you go outside the home** if you need to leave the house to get some distance, and your safe friends aren't available: the library, shopping malls, museums, the zoo, parks, gyms, coffee shops, restaurants, hotel lobbies, or other public places where you might feel safe and secure.

What are some places I walk or drive to if a boundary is broken:

5) Communicate your boundaries

- **Consider delivering your boundaries in a therapist's office if you expect a strong pushback.**
- **Pick a time when things are calm**, and you won't be interrupted by family or work. Inform your partner in advance, that you have something important to tell them. Don't surprise them with this difficult conversation.
- **Breathe deeply** and try to remain as calm as possible. Remind yourself that you have a right to these boundaries. If you feel yourself getting upset, leave a printed copy with your partner and ["tap out"](#) so you can go self-care.
- **Expect pushback:** If words alone worked to change our relationships for the better, we wouldn't need to resort to boundaries, so expect some verbal pushback. However, our boundaries are a statement of what WE will do and so your partner doesn't need to "verbally agree" to them. Don't engage in contentious conversation if your partner tries to bully or coerce you into changing them or tries to negotiate with you about your boundaries. Exit the conversation and then begin to enforce.
- **If your partner continues to verbally challenge your boundaries:** Make a boundary around them verbally challenging your boundaries and enforce it by getting some physical distance from them so they're out of earshot.

6) Enforce your boundaries when necessary

- **Refer to your boundaries document** so you can easily remember what you planned to do when there was a violation. When you're in the moment, it's easy to get flustered and forget what you planned to do.
- **Self-care, self-care, self-care!** You've just experienced a wounding event, and you're probably hurting. This is the time to put yourself first without guilt. You deserve to get some space to process through your feelings, thoughts and figure out what your primary needs are, and what your "next right step is."
- **Reach out to safe people:** Safe family and friends, and safe recovery community. Now is not the time to isolate into your own thoughts which are likely to be mostly about your partner and why they behave in hurtful ways. Safe people will remind you to focus on your right to safety, kind treatment and good self-care. They'll help you sort through painful cognitive distortions and encourage you to enforce boundaries that help you feel safe.

7) Employ boundaries with others

- * children, underage or grown;
- * co-workers and bosses
- * parents and in-laws, siblings, and extended family
- * neighbors and friends
- * faith leaders and worship community members
- * your therapist and husband's therapist

Congratulations – You now have beginning keys to setting effective boundaries.

Remember:

- You have the right to set and enforce boundaries.
- Boundaries may be new to you but remember no one ever regretted enforcing boundaries with a person they love.
- Your boundaries are a proclamation, not necessarily a conversation.
- Don't isolate! Staying connected to others will strengthen your boundaries and make them easier to enforce.

*For more education, skill building and safe community support on boundaries with your sexually addicted spouse, get notified here when the digital course and community, [**“Boundaries for Clarity and Peace: Transforming Confusion and Chaos into Clarity and Calm Without Guilt and Isolation”**](#) becomes available.*



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