Breakout 11 — Building and Maintaining Healthy Relationships — Boundaries, Honesty, and Trust Rebuilt

One sentence for the board: Healthy relationships are built on purpose — with clear boundaries, honest words, and trust earned back one kept promise at a time.

Purpose	Teach clients to build and maintain healthy relationships in recovery: setting and holding boundaries, communicating honestly and kindly, resolving conflict without combat, and rebuilding trust through sustained changed conduct — while keeping safety first and never turning a group into couples work.
Who chooses this group	Curriculum groups meet separately for men and for women. Breakout groups are coed unless otherwise specified. Placement for participants who do not fit a men/women split follows the participant's stated preference, confirmed with staff for safety and privacy. Nothing about a participant's placement is disclosed to the group. Any participant who wants stronger relationships — with family, a partner, friends, children, or coworkers — whether they are rebuilding a relationship, starting fresh, or learning to choose healthier connections. No participant is asked to name another person or describe a private relationship in detail. The stated preference stands unless a stated safety reason requires a private conversation. Safety and privacy are the only criteria.
Length	60 minutes
Materials	Paper and pens for every client, whiteboard or flip chart and markers, and the topic resources named

	in this outline

Time	Segment	What happens
0–5 min	Welcome	Ground rules, confidentiality limits, right to pass. State plainly at the start: no one is asked to share private relationship details, and this group never works on a couple together.
5–30 min	Teaching	The teaching points below, in order, on the board: trust rebuilt in kept promises, boundaries, honest communication, conflict without combat, forgiveness and amends, safety before repair, and choosing a circle on purpose.
30–45 min	Discussion	Prompts below. General answers are always complete answers — no one is asked to describe their own relationships in detail.
45–55 min	Practice — one boundary, one repair step	Clients draft one boundary in writing and one small repair step for this week. Writing stays with the client.
55–60 min	Close	Takeaways, and one boundary or repair step each client will actually carry out this week.

Teaching points

- **Trust is rebuilt in small kept promises.** Addiction breaks trust in specific ways: promises made and missed, money gone, words said that cannot be unsaid, presence withdrawn. Trust is not rebuilt by one big apology or one good week. It is rebuilt the way it was broken — in daily conduct, over time: showing up when promised, telling the truth when it costs something, and doing the next right thing whether anyone is watching or not.
- **Boundaries are care, not punishment.** A boundary is a clear statement of what you will and will not do, stated plainly and held kindly. Boundaries protect recovery and protect the relationship at the same time: they stop resentment from building, they keep a client out of situations that threaten sobriety, and they give the other person something honest to count on. A boundary held without anger is not rejection. It is the condition under which closeness stays safe.
- **Say it straight, say it kind.** Healthy communication has a shape: state the facts without blame, name what you need, listen fully before answering, and confirm what was agreed. Use words about your own experience — what happened, how it affected you, what you are asking for —

rather than labels about the other person. Timing matters: do not hold a hard conversation when either person is exhausted, hungry, or flooded. If voices rise, pause and return later; a conversation postponed is not a conversation refused.

- **Conflict without combat.** Conflict itself is not the problem; contempt is. Work one issue at a time, keep the issue separate from the person, and refuse the weapons that end relationships: name-calling, bringing up old grievances as ammunition, threats, and the silent treatment used as punishment. Agree a time-out signal in advance for hard conversations — either person may call it, and the conversation resumes at a named time. After a conflict, repair it: name what went wrong on your side, apologize without excuses, and state what you will do differently.
- **Forgiveness and amends are different jobs.** Forgiveness is personal and cannot be demanded, scheduled, or used as a test of recovery — by a client, by family, or by a facilitator. An apology is words; an amend is sustained changed conduct, and in Twelve Step tradition amends are made directly wherever possible, except where doing so would injure the other person or others. This group does not direct any client to contact a particular person or to make a particular amend. Decisions about contact and amends belong with the client, their sponsor or counselor, and program staff — and where there has been harm or danger, safety decides first.
- **Safety comes before repair.** Where a relationship has involved coercion, control, or violence, repair never requires contact, and no exercise in this group works on a couple together. A client who wants to rebuild a relationship after harm does that work through appropriate separate support and program procedure, never by being placed in joint work with the other person in this room. If a client discloses current danger, tell the Program Director or on-call supervisor the same hour and connect them to staff and an advocate the same day. See the escalation box at the front of this packet.. The Domestic Violence outline governs whenever safety is in question.
- **Choose your circle on purpose.** Recovery changes who a person spends time with, and that change is not disloyalty — it is protection. Support people are the ones who respect boundaries, tell the truth kindly, and show up steadily. High-risk relationships are the ones that pull a person back toward old places, old people, and old patterns. Clients are not asked to cut ties dramatically in group; they are asked to notice honestly which relationships steady them and which ones cost them their footing, and to invest time accordingly.
- **Support grows where honesty lives.** Family and social support strengthen recovery when the support is honest and steady — and strained or dishonest support can add risk. The work of this group is therefore two-sided: become a person others can rely on, and build a circle you can rely on. Both sides run on the same habits: keep small promises, say what you mean, repair quickly, and ask for help before a hard moment becomes a decision.
- **The warrior's reading.** So the warrior's reading, said plainly: nobody rebuilds a relationship by wishing it whole. You rebuild it by holding a boundary calmly, speaking honestly, fighting fair, and keeping the next promise — and the next, and the next. That is how trust comes back: not all at once, and not by accident, but by conduct other people can count on.

Discussion prompts

- “What is the difference between a boundary and a wall — and how can a person tell which one they just built?”
- “What does honest communication sound like, word for word, when the truth is hard to say?”
- “Where does conflict usually go wrong: the words used, the timing, or what happens after? What helps each one?”
- “What is one small kept promise that would mean the most to someone you care about — and what would it cost you to keep it this week?”

Practice — one boundary, one repair step (10 minutes, your writing stays with you)

1. Choose one relationship where a boundary would protect both your recovery and the relationship. Write the situation in general terms — no names are needed.
2. Draft the boundary in plain words: what you will do, what you will not do, and what you will do if the boundary is crossed. Keep it short enough to say calmly.
3. Choose one repair step for this week: one small, specific act of changed conduct — a kept promise, a call made on time, help given without being asked — with the day you will do it.
4. Before acting on either draft, name who you will check it with — staff, a sponsor, or a counselor — especially where safety, a court matter, or a fragile relationship is involved. Do not use group time to send messages or make contact.
5. Keep your page. It is yours. Nothing written in this practice is collected, copied, or kept by the facilitator or the program.

Facilitator boundaries — Building and Maintaining Healthy Relationships

- **No couples work, ever.** Never run conjoint or joint exercises in this group, carry messages between partners or family members, or mediate a disagreement between two clients in the room. Relationship repair after harm is separate work through program procedure.
- **Do not direct contact or amends.** Facilitators do not tell a client to contact, apologize to, forgive, or reconcile with any particular person. Refer decisions about contact, amends, and family involvement to the client's sponsor, counselor, and program staff.
- **Safety decides first.** If a client discloses current danger, coercion, or a plan that would put anyone at risk, follow program procedure and connect them to staff and an advocate the same day. Do not investigate, confront another person, or attempt a rescue yourself.
- **General learning is complete participation.** No client is pressed to name a person, describe a private relationship, or share anything they wrote. Facilitators never repeat a client's private relationship details outside the room, beyond program procedure and any reporting duty that applies.

- **Warrior close:** Close with the steady standard: “Boundaries held calmly, words spoken honestly, promises kept small and kept well — that is how a warrior rebuilds a life other people can trust. Start with one boundary and one kept promise this week.”

Sources & Evidence

Clinical evidence: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Family Therapy. Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series 39 — family involvement in treatment, communication-skills training, conflict-resolution skills, and the daily trust discussion in behavioral family counseling, as the background for the boundary, communication, and trust-rebuilding approach in this outline. This group teaches those skills as recovery education; it does not provide family therapy.

Recovery-support evidence: Alcoholics Anonymous, Twelve Steps — Step Nine, making direct amends wherever possible except when doing so would injure others, cited here as recovery-support tradition, clearly distinct from clinical evidence. This group presents that tradition as background only and does not direct any amend. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration — the four dimensions of recovery: health, home, purpose, and community — with family and social support as part of the community dimension that sustains recovery. No outcome is promised for this group.

Note: No outcome is promised for any group in this packet.