Session 20: Boundaries: Where I End and You Begin

Duration: 60 minutes • Recovery education group. Ensure all participants are seated and ready

Materials: Boundary frame worksheet; whiteboard; the Session 20 handout (My Boundary)

Learning objectives — by the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Define a boundary as a property line — what I will do — rather than a wall or an ultimatum aimed at controlling another person
- Sort examples into boundary, request, and manipulation
- Write one boundary in the session's sentence frame with a built-in consequence they control

Opening (3 minutes)

Newcomer bridge (60 seconds): This is Phase 3 — Rebuilding. The one idea today is that a boundary states what I will do — a property line, not a wall or a threat. You are welcome here without earlier sessions; everything you need for today is in this session. A boundary is a property line: it states what I will do — not a wall, not a threat, not a wish with no action behind it. Today we sort boundaries from requests and manipulation, and everyone writes one real boundary, in the frame, with a consequence they actually control.

Check-in prompt (8 minutes)

Name, craving 0–10, one word for your week — then: “Where in your life right now are you carrying a load that is not yours — and resenting it in silence?” Log every craving score on the roster.

Passing is honored — you may pass any question, prompt, or practice without explanation, step out and rejoin, and choose a partner-only option where one is offered.

Teaching (20 minutes)

Codependency, in plain terms, is losing the property lines: fixing, rescuing, controlling, and absorbing consequences until both people are disabled by the arrangement — one from consequences, the other from exhaustion. A boundary restores the line by stating what I will do: 'If drinking starts, I will leave and take my ride home.' It is not a threat about what you must do, and it is not a wish ('I need you to respect me') with no action behind it. Healthy boundaries in recovery protect four territories: my body and safety, my money and property, my time and commitments, and my recovery itself — meetings, program rules, medication routines, sleep. Expect pushback; a boundary that is never tested was probably a preference. We state them kindly, briefly, once — then we let our actions do the repeating.

- **Boundaries describe my behavior** 'I will leave / I will not lend / I will hang up and call tomorrow' — every real boundary ends in an action the speaker controls.
- **Consequences are not punishments** They are the natural, pre-announced result that makes the boundary real. If I will not actually do it, I do not say it.
- **No is a complete sentence, and so is a kind offer** Boundaries also say yes on purpose: what I will gladly do, within limits I can sustain without resentment.

Sources & Evidence — Facilitator background — do not teach

Boundaries are taught in this session as clear, predictable limits that protect recovery: what I will do, stated kindly and briefly, with the line carried by action. Group literature treats clear boundaries as a condition of a safe group (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020; Najavits, 2002). Key sources for this session: Yalom & Leszcz (2020); Najavits (2002); SAMHSA (2014a), TIP 57. Evidence strength: Moderate; strong as a practice framework for boundary-setting. Spiritual practice: Scripture meditation — correlates with boundary-setting as a taught coping skill; evidence: Moderate (Najavits, 2002). Full citations: Appendix H. The session's Scripture material is in its optional handout (Appendix I), as theological foundation, quoted from the King James Version.

'Evidence strength' grades the correlated mechanism, not the spiritual practice itself

Pause midway through teaching: ask, "What part of that sounds most like your life right now?" Take two or three answers, connect them to the teaching, and continue. Teach in your own words — the bullets are your map, not a script to read aloud.

Discussion questions (10 minutes)

1. Sort these aloud: 'Don't ever call me drunk again' / 'If you call drunk, I'll end the call and try you tomorrow' — which is a boundary, and why?
2. Where do you most need a line: money, time, body/safety, or recovery protection?
3. What boundary have you set with words and broken with actions? What made you cave?
4. Who models a healthy boundary in your life, and what exactly do they do?

Skill practice (12 minutes)

Boundary-writing workshop: each participant writes one boundary using the frame — 'I love/care about _____. I will _____. I will not _____. If _____ happens, I will _____.' Pairs audit each other's drafts with three checks: Is every verb theirs? Is the consequence real and kind? Is it short enough to say while nervous? Revise in the room.

Personal application — homework (5 minutes)

Deliver or rehearse your boundary this week if the situation arises naturally — do not manufacture a confrontation. Either way, write the sentence on a card and keep it where you will see it before the relevant call or visit. Participants write it in their workbook before leaving. Facilitator: name the homework again at the door as people leave.

Facilitator notes and cautions

Do not let participants set 'boundaries' that are actually program or safety violations in disguise (cutting off the care team, refusing drug testing, isolating from all supports). Recovery-protective community is not negotiable isolation. If a needed boundary involves another participant or a household conflict, route it through the Program Director rather than rehearsing a participant-to-participant confrontation in group.

Closing (2 minutes)

State it kindly, briefly, once — then let your actions do the repeating. Keep the card where you will see it before the call or the visit. Next session: communication that repairs instead of repeats.

Fidelity check for this session: objectives named at the start ☐ craving scores logged ☐ skill practice completed in full ☐ homework written down by participants ☐ session note filed today ☐

Week 5 — Forgiveness and Amends