Session 48: Boundaries in Helping Roles: Carry With, Not For

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

Materials: Whiteboard; workbooks and pens

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

- State the difference between bearing burdens with someone (support) and carrying loads for them (substitution)
- Identify their three highest-risk boundary crossings in a helping role
- Write a boundary sentence for each risk, in advance

Opening (3 minutes)

Newcomer bridge (60 seconds): This is Phase 5 — Giving Back. The one idea today is that helping boundaries let a helper keep helping for years: carry with, not for. You are welcome here without earlier sessions; everything you need for today is in this session. The helper's version of relapse is quieter: no substance, just a slow collapse under other people's loads — until resentment or rescue takes the wheel. Today we set the boundaries that let a helper keep helping for years instead of weeks.

Check-in prompt (8 minutes)

Name, craving 0–10, one word for your week — then: "Finish this sentence honestly: 'When I am helping someone, the line I am most tempted to cross is ___ because it makes me feel ___.'" 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)

Session 20 drew boundaries in relationships generally; a helping role adds weight, because a newer person may test a peer's limits precisely where the peer feels safest. Money, rides after hours, messages at midnight, secrets from staff, special friendships — each crossing feels like kindness once and becomes an obligation forever. The peer's protection is pre-decision: sentences written in calm and used in the moment.

- **With, not for** Support sits beside a person while they make the call, write the application, tell the truth. Substitution makes the call for them and calls it love. One builds their strength; the other builds your importance.
- **Money and midnight** Two crossings account for most peer disasters: lending or holding money, and unlimited after-hours access. Both are pre-decided here: money never changes hands between peers, and peer help happens inside program hours and places — emergencies go to staff and the crisis protocol.
- **Early is kind; late feels like betrayal** State limits at the first conversation, warmly and plainly: 'I am glad to walk with you. Here is what I can do, and here is what goes to staff.' Early lines protect the relationship; late lines end it.

Sources & Evidence — Facilitator background — do not teach

Trauma-informed practice treats clear, predictable boundaries as a safety condition, and group and

peer literature links role clarity with healthier helping relationships (SAMHSA, 2014a; Yalom & Leszcz, 2020). Key sources for this session: SAMHSA (2014a), TIP 57; Yalom & Leszcz (2020); White (2008). Evidence strength: Moderate. Spiritual practice: Service and helping others — correlates with bounded helping roles and relapse prevention for the helper; evidence: Moderate (Riessman, 1965; SAMHSA, 2014a). 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. Which of your three risks has history behind it — where has this crossing cost you before?
2. Why does being 'the only one who understands' a newer person feel good, and why is it dangerous for both of you?
3. Say your hardest boundary sentence aloud to your partner. What makes it hard to say?

Skill practice (12 minutes)

Boundary rehearsal (in pairs): the partner plays a newer participant making three escalating asks — hold my paycheck until Friday; text with me at 2 a.m. because nights are the worst; don't tell staff I missed my meeting. Respond to each with the prepared pattern: warmth, the line, the alternative — 'Here is what I can do.' The partner rates each response: was the line early, clear, and kind?

Personal application — homework (5 minutes)

Write your three boundary sentences in your workbook, word for word. If the situation arises this week, use one; if it does not, tell the sentences to your accountability partner so they exist outside your own head. Participants write it in their workbook before leaving. Facilitator: name the homework again at the door as people leave.

Facilitator notes and cautions

Suspected boundary crossings between a peer helper and a newer participant — gifts, money, romantic interest, secrecy — are reported to the Program Director the same day by anyone who sees them, including the peer. This is protection, not accusation; the program asks kindly and acts clearly.

Closing (2 minutes)

Boundaries are not walls against people; they are the banks that keep a river a river. Write your sentences before the water rises. Next session: the hardest peer moment — someone you help is slipping.

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 ☐