

# Setting Group Boundaries & Expectations

Setting clear group boundaries and expectations fosters community growth and helps keep people accountable for harmful actions. Boundaries set firm limits for what's acceptable in a space, while expectations encourage best practices. It's possible to not meet an expectation but still be within a set boundary.

A clearly written set of boundaries and expectations is especially useful if a group member repeatedly causes harm and makes others uncomfortable. In these situations, referring to a community-developed document allows you to avoid ideological arguments over whether something someone did was "wrong." Instead, all that needs to be discussed is whether a boundary has been crossed. Boundaries, paired with expectations that demonstrate healthier alternative behavior, helps the person doing harm understand why their actions are unacceptable in a given space and how they can improve.

**Take time as a group to talk through this worksheet and develop a written set of boundaries and expectations. Be sure to clearly post this document in meetings spaces, email it to all members, and include it in event descriptions.**

Once a list of boundaries and expectations has been agreed upon, discuss how the group and/or its facilitators will respond if boundaries are repeatedly crossed. Responses can include having a brief discussion with the person, recommending helpful articles to read, or asking them to leave a meeting. In some cases, temporarily suspending someone from attending meetings may be necessary, though be sure to discuss these scenarios with your advisor or a professionally trained mediator before taking action.

# Boundaries, expectations, and examples to consider:

- **Physical Boundaries** refer to personal space and physical touch.
  - “Always ask for consent before touching another person.”
  - “No physically intimate touch during meetings.”
- **Physical Expectations**
  - “Understand and respect that everyone has differently sized bubbles of personal space.”
  - “People are free to leave and re-enter the space whenever they need to.”
- **Discussion Boundaries** refer to thoughts, ideas, and topics.
  - “No debating the identity or existence of people.”
  - “No debating whether or not someone is included in the LGBTQ community.”
  - “No ‘playing the devil’s advocate’ by introducing racist, sexist, transphobic, ableist, etc. arguments.”
  - “No racist, sexist, transphobic, queerphobic, ableist, classist, or otherwise discriminatory language or actions.”
  - “No sharing stories or others’ personal details with folks outside of this group.”
- **Discussion Expectations**
  - “Use ‘I’ statements and avoid generalizing others or their experiences.”
  - “If you are told that your language or actions are harmful, step back and consider the critique before defending your language or actions.”
- **Emotional Boundaries** refer to a person’s feelings and their personal information.
  - “No degrading or screaming at people.”
  - “No unnecessary gossip. Avoid sharing personal stories about classmates during meetings unless the story directly involves you or presents a safety concern.”
- **Emotional Expectations**
  - “When possible, provide content warnings before sharing details that may be trauma-related.”
  - “Respect others’ right to privacy.”
- **Sexual Boundaries** refer to the emotional, intellectual, and physical aspects of sexuality.
  - “No sexual comments directed at other group members during meetings.”
  - “No sex in the shared group space.”
- **Sexual Expectations**
  - “Understand and respect when talking about sex may be making people uncomfortable.”

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