

Group Boundary Setting Exercise

This exercise provides an opportunity to practice using body language and speech to set boundaries with others in a group setting.

You need a space big enough for participants to move freely and two facilitators (one to lead and one to support).

Allow 10-12 minutes for the exercise and 3-5 minutes to debrief.

Instructions

Ask participants to line up in two rows about five meters apart facing each other. Ensure everyone is paired with someone from the opposite row. Each row will take turns advancing towards the other, and then being stopped.

Step One: Setting a boundary using body language

Instruct row one as follows:

“Everyone in row 1, pick a spot on the floor that you do not want crossed. Keep the location to yourself. When I say, ‘go,’ the people in row 2 will walk toward you. When that person reaches the spot you’ve picked, use your body language to indicate you don’t want them to come any closer. Here are some examples of how to do this.”

Demonstrate body language examples such as: raising one hand, turning your back, or walking away.

Instruct row two as follows:

“When you see your counterpart in row one has set their boundary with you, you will respect the boundary and stop walking.”

Allow each group to take a turn practicing this skill.

Step Two: Setting a boundary using voice and body language

This time, participants will use their voice in addition to their body language to indicate to their counterparts to stop coming closer.

Demonstrate some examples of things to say, including “stop”, “back off”, or “you’re too close”.

Some participants will be louder or quieter than others, so this round can be repeated to encourage participants who are quieter to practice being louder, and participants who are louder to practice being quiet yet firm.

Step Three: Reinforcing a boundary that has been crossed, using voice and body language

This time, participants walking toward the boundary-setter will continue past the designated stopping point, and the boundary-setter practices resetting their boundary using a combination of body language.

Demonstrate a combination of raising a hand and saying “back off”; turning their back and saying “stop”; or walking away saying, “you’re too close.”

Debrief Questions

When both groups have practiced all three rounds, ask participants to thank their partners. Ask the group:

- What was hard?
 - What was easy?
 - How did it make you feel?
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- Adapted from Home Alive (2022) <http://www.teachhomealive.org/curriculum/iv-boundary-setting/across-the-room/>

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