



SHaRE & REPaIR Programme

WEEK SIX – Relationships and Boundaries.

What are boundaries?

Boundaries are limits, or rules, which separate what we consider is OK from what is not OK, we use them (often unknowingly) to guide how we interact in all our relationships. Effective boundaries are strong, flexible and reliable and provide protection from toxic people, situations, thoughts and feelings. For some people boundaries can be ineffective or **‘porous’** providing little or no effective protection; others can develop **rigid boundaries**, whilst the ideal **healthy boundaries** allow us to live well whilst relating to ourselves and others in a responsible way.

Let’s look at the 2 main types of boundaries;

- 1) External boundaries; how you define yourself and your needs as separate to another persons’.

If you leave conflicts wishing you’d spoken up for yourself; if you feel drained in social situations because you feel like you’re performing; if you over-commit to obligations and under-commit to activities that bring you joy; if you feel like you give much more than you receive in your relationships with others you may have ineffective external boundaries.

- 2) Internal boundaries; how you relate to you.

If you find yourself ruminating on perceived mistakes, if you break promises you make to yourself, if you’re inconsistent with your values and goals, or cannot separate yourself mentally from worries or fears, you may have ineffective internal boundaries.

Task 1.

Take a look at the following chart and tick those traits that apply to you. Remember it is normal to have a range of boundaries, for example you may have more porous boundaries with your romantic partner, and more rigid ones at work. Being flexible with boundaries allows you to change how you relate to others based on the situation, and can even alter how boundaried you are with your own thoughts.

Common traits; Porous, Rigid & healthy boundaries		
Porous boundaries	Rigid boundaries	Healthy boundaries
Overshare personal information	Avoids intimacy and close relationships	Values own opinions
Difficulties saying ‘no’ to others	Unlikely to ask for help	Doesn’t compromise values for others
Overinvolved with others’ problems	Has few close relationships	Share personal info in an appropriate way (not over- or

Dependant on the opinions of others	Very protective of personal information	under-sharing)
Accepting of abuse or disrespect	May seem detached even with romantic partners	Knows personal wants and needs, and can communicate them effectively
Fears rejection if they do not comply with others	Keeps others at a distance to avoid the risk of rejection	Accepting when others say 'No' to them

Where do our boundaries come from?

Boundaries are shaped by our experiences in life including what culture we grew up in – because of this, everyone’s boundaries are different.

People with FM often report experiencing challenges in childhood, for example not having their emotional needs heard or responded to, or growing up with critical or distant care-givers, this can lead to developing traits such as rigid boundaries where we block off our emotions as a form of protection, however this also separates us from our inner emotional compass. Another trait that can develop is one of people pleasing, which can lead to compromising your inner and outer boundaries habitually. These unhelpful traits ultimately result from a lack of self-trust or poor self-esteem, to the extent that we may not even respond rationally and fairly to our own inner voice, which may be critical or harsh.

By accepting this habit as ‘it’s just me’, you can lose the opportunity to do something else. Identifying and understanding these habits, as habits ,creates a space where we can choose to respond differently.

If an opportunity has been missed to respond appropriately with our true needs in mind, negative emotions e.g. guilt, anger, resentment and shame will often show up as signs that a boundary has been broken. Instead of pushing these feelings away, ask yourself, “What am I feeling? Why am I feeling this way? What would need to change for me to feel safer?”

Task 2.

Look at the following diagram, if you identify your habits from amongst the 4 petals of the flower, consider what self-beliefs may be the central driving force behind them.

Challenge yourself to re-write your self-belief. This may be something you can do with a trusted friend, to be supported in developing a true and accurate sense of a healthy self-belief. Although this may feel unnatural to start with, repetition of a healthy set of beliefs will start to rewire the brain, and will be the basis on which you will build your new healthy boundaries.

If this feels difficult, review the Bill of Rights (see below). How do you feel about these rights? Can you see how all people, including you, should be entitled to these rights?

New self-belief: _____



PERSONAL BILL OF RIGHTS

1. I have the right to ask for what I want.
2. I have the right to say no to requests or demands I can't meet.
3. I have the right to express all of my feelings, both positive and negative, in a manner that will not harm others.
4. I have the right to change my mind.
5. I have the right to make mistakes and not have to be perfect.
6. I have the right to follow my own values and standards.
7. I have the right to say no to anything when I feel I am not ready, it is unsafe, or it violates my values.
8. I have the right to determine my own priorities.
9. I have the right not to be responsible for others' behaviour, actions, feelings or problems.
10. I have the right to expect honesty from others.
11. I have the right to feel angry at someone I love.
12. I have the right to be uniquely myself.
13. I have the right to feel scared and say "I'm afraid."
14. I have the right to say "I don't know."
15. I have the right not to give excuses or reasons for my behaviour.

16. I have the right to make decisions based on my feelings, beliefs and values.
17. I have the right to my own needs for personal space and time.
18. I have the right to be playful and frivolous.
19. I have the right to be healthier than those around me.
20. I have the right to be in a non-abusive environment.
21. I have the right to make friends and be comfortable around people.
22. I have the right to change and grow.
23. I have the right to have my needs and wants respected by others.
24. I have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
25. I have the right to be happy.

Building better boundaries

The first step is to know your own boundaries, Task 1 will have allowed you to consider this more clearly. Task 2 will have given you an understanding of how they may have developed in the first place, and laid the foundations for you taking ownership.

Task 3.

Take a look at the following situation and possible responses, consider how each response makes you feel, and label the response, porous, rigid, healthy. Imagine which response you are more likely to have made, and how you would have felt internally, your inner boundary.

Situation: A friend calls you at 11pm to discuss their relationship breakup. You have been working recently on improving your stress and sleep to help manage your FM and know how important it is to unwind before sleep.

Response A: "It's really late, but I can tell you are upset, tell me all about it"

Response B: "I can tell you are upset, I want to talk to you but I need to get to bed. Can we arrange a time to talk in the morning?"

If you feel OK with your response you may be on the right lines, if you noticed feelings of guilt, shame or resentment related to how you responded to this situation, those feelings represent an internal boundary (there to protect you) being overridden.

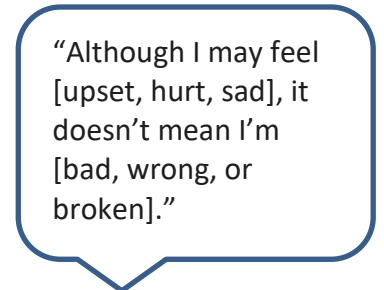
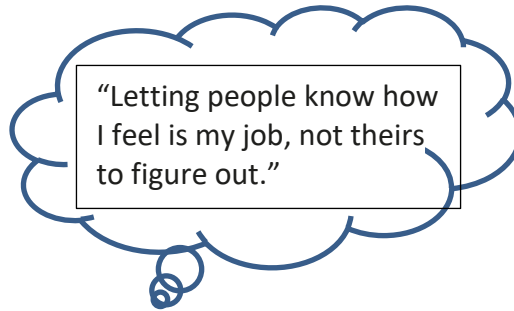
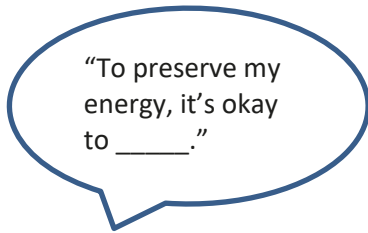
How will you develop a 'new rule' or healthy boundary for protecting your wellbeing, what different response would you choose which aligns with your values, and internal and external boundaries?

Don't forget, setting external boundaries may initially feel unnatural, and you may worry that friends and family will not be used to you saying 'no' or limiting how available you are to them. **Setting boundaries to take care of yourself does not make you mean or selfish –**

it helps you focus on what you need to do to care of your health. If you are clear and compassionate in communicating your boundaries, most people will understand and with practise will learn to respect them.

A good strategy for overcoming discomfort with using your new rules/healthy boundaries is to use self-talk, coaching yourself with appropriate reminders helps rewire your brain to view boundaries as positives.

Use phrases like:



Task 4.

Here are some more chances to understand your boundaries, and consider some alternatives. Please circle the phrases which you consider to be more effective at supporting healthy boundaries.

You have been invited to a party but do not feel well enough to attend:

"Thanks for the invite, but I cannot attend the birthday party"

"I'm not sure I'll be able to attend the birthday party."

A friend asks you to pick up her children from school:

"I'm not able to take on new responsibilities right now,"

"I can't pick them up because having so many kids in the car stresses me out, and stress can cause my fibromyalgia symptoms to flare, and then I won't be able to do my housework or enjoy the weekend ."

You receive critical feedback at work.

"I'm a failure, I always knew I couldn't do it, someone else will take my job now."

"**FAIL** means first attempt in learning, I can take something from this and improve."

Whilst talking to a member of the family, you notice them looking away at the clock.

Inner voice "I must be boring them"

Inner voice "I wonder if they have another commitment."

Task 5.

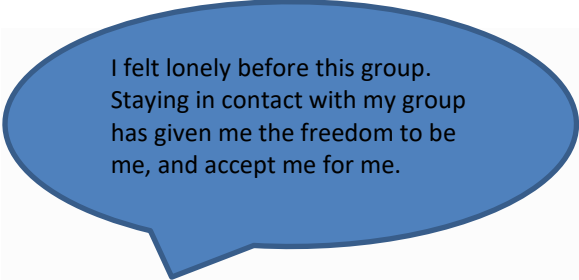
Boundaries are there to protect our needs and values, and ultimately our health and wellbeing. This can be further supported by creating a safe virtual place where you can rest body, mind, and spirit in true comfort.

Practise the safe place meditation to develop your own virtual place of safety and rest.

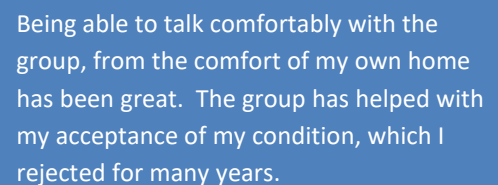
Task 6.

The relationships you have started to build as part of our SHaRE and REPAIR program have no doubt been an important part of your journey so far. For most people participating in a pain management program, continuing to maintain social contact with members of your group can be a wonderful way of continuing to support each other and share how the things you've learnt can help to manage pain and improve your wellbeing.

Benefits of follow-on activities, what previous group members have said:



I felt lonely before this group. Staying in contact with my group has given me the freedom to be me, and accept me for me.



Being able to talk comfortably with the group, from the comfort of my own home has been great. The group has helped with my acceptance of my condition, which I rejected for many years.

Ideas for follow-on group activities:

- ☞ meet up for a social catch up in a cafe
- ☞ have a regular Whatsapp/Facebook get together
- ☞ go on outings and visit places of interest together
- ☞ go out for a meal
- ☞ go for short walks
- ☞ share skills such as knitting, painting, arts and crafts.

Watch this video; <https://tinyurl.com/y34zau4u> to hear others talking about the benefits of maintaining social contact with members of their group.

Jot down some idea's that you can discuss next week with your group;

How would you like to maintain contact?

Will you agree a date to meet up, having an agreed date and time can help to consolidate your plans? It can be hard to find a date/time that suits everyone, you may want to be flexible.

Where would be convenient to meet, café, open space, sports centre etc?

Task 7.

As you continue to practise your **Tai chi movements** allow the shapes you make to imbue you with a ***sense of creating and maintain the boundaries that you need to feel safe*** and protected. They may be inner boundaries that you need to create a compassionate and comfortable state, or they may need to be strong external boundaries to keep unhelpful demands at a safe distance from you to avoid overwhelm. You may even be able to create your own physical gestures, postures, shapes or movements that will provide you with an embodied sense of your boundaries being supported and maintained.

Summary

Setting boundaries is hard work, daily reflection and evaluation is needed to make the necessary changes. Some days it may come naturally and you may feel very strong and clear in your boundaries, and other days you might feel less sure, particularly if you have a history of people pleasing. There can be setbacks along the way, so it's helpful to remind yourself that building boundaries takes time. It can be helpful to have a reminder phrase to keep you on track;

“I set boundaries to feel safe.” Or “Setting boundaries is an act of personal responsibility.”

Some extra resources from within past PMP sessions:

- Click onto our service website <https://dorsetpain.org.uk/Home/Welcome/The-Four-Pillars-of-Pain-Management/What-does-the-Four-Pillars-of-Pain-Management-mean-and-involve/Pillar-D--Emotional-wellbeing>
Select D4 'Improving communication', then select D4.1 – DESC assertiveness worksheet.
- Practising to move into the present moment...remind ourselves of this saying

“Yesterday's the past,
tomorrow's the future,
but today is a gift.
That's why it's called
the present.”

- [Practising the Power of Now: Meditations, Exercises and Core Teachings from The Power of Now: Amazon.co.uk: Eckhart Tolle: 9780340822531: Books](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Eckhart-Tolle-9780340822531-Books)
- The link for the Dorset Pain Pals Facebook page;
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/223105045724590/> Once you have joined you can search for Lesley's post with her favourite tai chi video with music.