



# Assertiveness & Boundary Setting

*with DOVE Inc.*

**WELCOME!** Class will start soon.

While you wait, please feel free to use the chat box to write your name, pronouns, and one thing that is bringing you joy in this time!

# WHAT TO EXPECT

- We will be muting everyone to reduce background noise.
- Please respect each other and be accountable for confidentiality.
- Some lecture, some dialogue, some moving around, some roleplay.
- PowerPoint link for accessibility.



# ABOUT IMPACT

*IMPACT is a non-profit organization that works to prevent violence and abuse by giving people the tools to protect their safety and advocate for healthy relationships and respect in their communities and society.*

For more information, visit us at:

[impactboston.org](http://impactboston.org)



*What is a boundary?*



*What is a challenging  
conversation?*



# A CHALLENGING CONVERSATION CAN BE...

- Asking questions that are uncomfortable for you or the other person
- Communicating a concern or problem you see with someone else's actions
- Questioning a common practice or widely held organizational belief
- Bringing attention to actions you see as inappropriate



*Why might we avoid  
having a challenging  
conversation?*



BUT IF WE AVOID THEM...

NOTHING CHANGES!





**SOCIAL JUSTICE  
&  
BOUNDARIES**

*in a trauma-informed  
workplace*



# SOME ELEMENTS OF A TRAUMA- INFORMED WORKPLACE

- Intentional about challenging (and not replicating) abusive dynamics
- Recognizes the impact of personal and secondary trauma
- Work culture supports open conversation about impacts of trauma
  - Seeking support is valued
  - Struggling with the work is normalized
  - Impacts of targeted violence are normalized
- Choice, agency, flexibility

# PERSONAL BOUNDARIES




- Each person's own preferences, values & beliefs
- What feels safe or comfortable for each person
- Can be different from coworkers

# SHARED OR COLLECTIVE BOUNDARIES

- Parameters of roles at the organization
- Agreements that create clear expectations in stressful situations
- Based on shared values or practices
- Are consistent across the organization





Staff are **supported and valued**,  
needs of program participants are  
**prioritized.**

## **Personal Boundaries**


- Physical space around someone's desk
- Level of participation in social activities
- Level of personal sharing at work

## **Shared or Collective Boundaries**

- Parameters for going to survivors' homes
- Parameters for adults' interactions with children
- Types of speech, language or communication that are not accepted at work



Honor and respect a range of **personal boundaries**, have consistency and clarity about **shared or collective boundaries**.



# “EMBRACING COMPLEXITY”

- LAURA VAN DERNOOT LIPSKY

- Relationships may be deeper and involve more personal sharing than another type of workplace
- This requires more careful and intentional definition of boundaries
- Shared values are consistent, specific practices are not





# **BOUNDARIES THAT REPLICATE INEQUITIES**

- Using boundary setting to suppress conflict
- Rigid definitions of “appropriate” or “professional”
- Using boundaries to create divisions between staff and program participants
- Shutting down challenging conversations to avoid accountability



# **BOUNDARIES THAT SUPPORT SOCIAL JUSTICE**

- Encouraging self-advocacy, direct communication and constructive challenge
- Ensure that the organization focuses on its mission and priorities and stays within its capacity
- Prevent or interrupt abuses of power
- Create accountability



# **POWER IMBALANCES & BOUNDARIES**

- Setting a boundary with a supervisor, Board member or funder is always a greater risk



# **ADDRESSING POWER IMBALANCES: MODELING ACCOUNTABLE LEADERSHIP**

- Express appreciation and make substantive change when someone sets a boundary
- Be clear about what is and is not a choice
- Give people time to think
- Specifically invite constructive challenge




Challenging conversations often  
involve setting a boundary!

Let's review the principles of  
boundary setting.

# PRINCIPLES OF BOUNDARY SETTING

1. Breathe.
2. What's going on? (*Name the behavior.*)
3. How do I feel about it?
4. What do I want/need?
5. Ask for what I want/say what I need.

***Note: Setting boundaries and noticing how someone responds is a way for us to learn how trustworthy they are.***



Roleplay  
Intros  
&  
Demonstrations



*How might someone  
react or respond to us  
during a difficult  
conversation?*





## COMMON REACTIONS

- Accepting
- Minimizing
- Shifting Focus/Blaming
- Insulting/Mocking

- Before we talk about each common reaction, we will show a demonstration in which Jim's characters model them. We will be using the same story background for each demonstration.
- The situation is:
  - Sam (played by Jim) and his partner Quinn are both friends with Marina (played by Adriana).
  - Sam and Quinn had an argument that Marina overheard.
  - Marina heard Sam say to Quinn: "I could smack you right now."
  - Marina is confronting Sam on threatening Quinn with violence with a challenging conversation.



# Demo #1



# **REACTION#1: ACCEPTING**

- Don't assume all challenging conversations will go badly!
- Sometimes the other person will hear what you've said and accept it.



# Demo #2



## **REACTION #2: MINIMIZING**

- Dismissing the problem or trying to convince you that you are overreacting



# STRATEGIES AGAINST MINIMIZING

- Emphasize that the issue is important to you
- Communicate clearly about WHY it is important to you
- This situation was about safety in community; it was important to Marina.



# Demo #3





## **REACTION #3: SHIFTING FOCUS**

- Bringing up other problems or issues as an explanation
- Placing blame on other people
- Trying to move the conversation to a new topic



# STRATEGIES AGAINST SHIFTING FOCUS

- Stay on point, do your best not to get sidetracked.
- Acknowledge any truth in their response.



# Demo #4



## **REACTION #4: INSULTING / MOCKING**

- Expressing anger or disrespect in response to the concern
- Trying to turn negative focus on you



# STRATEGIES AGAINST INSULTING/MOCKING

- Stay calm.
- Don't let your ego get hooked.
- Avoid apologizing or minimizing your concern.
- Maintain focus on the issue.
- **End the conversation if it is no longer productive.**



# STEPS TO A CHALLENGING CONVERSATION

1. Breathe.
2. Clearly identify the problem.
3. Say what you want/what you need to change.
4. Assess their response.
5. Think through next steps.



## STRATEGIES FOR HAVING EFFECTIVE CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS

- Use consistent, neutral tone and body language to match your message, to the best of your ability.
- Emphasize that the issue is important to you.
- Do your best not to get off the topic.
- Acknowledge any truth in their response.
- *Don't let your ego get hooked!*

# HOW WE COMMUNICATE

- Nonverbal communication plays a major role in any conversation. Before focusing on our words, people first notice:
  - Tone of voice
  - Body language
    - How we are sitting or standing
    - Gestures/fidgeting/natural movement-it's normal!
    - Facial expressions
- In order to communicate effectively our words, tone of voice, and body language need to be as in sync as possible.



# KEY POINTERS


- Body Language
  - Neutral Position & Facial Expression
  - Turned towards the other person, positioning
  - Be aware of possible fidgeting or gesturing, be as grounded as you can.
- Tone of Voice
  - Calm
  - Assertive

## REMEMBER...

- Having challenging conversations can be stressful and test us!
- They can also be validating, and are crucial to have in order to grow, create change, and learn in our life experiences.
- In order to think clearly and communicate effectively, it's important to manage our body's stress response.

# WHAT IS ADRENALINE?

- Adrenaline is a hormone produced in the body when there is a perceived threat or danger (the threat may be psychological).
- It is commonly known as the body's flight/fight/freeze response.
- Adrenaline responses are normal survival mechanisms that can help us react quickly to uncomfortable or life threatening situations.



*What changes in your body or behavior do you notice most when you feel stressed or tense during a conversation?*



## **ADRENALINE MANAGEMENT & GROUNDING TECHNIQUES**

- ❖ Finding your breathing
- ❖ Points of Contact
- ❖ Tapping
- ❖ Positive Imagery



## Questions? Connect with us!

Adriana Li

Program Coordinator, IMPACT Boston

[ali@impactboston.org](mailto:ali@impactboston.org)

Support Resources

<http://impactboston.org/resources/support-services/>



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