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2 – Now that I Know, How Do I Respect My Partner’s Boundaries?

(A Guide to Help Addicts Respect Boundaries)

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Here are 6 ways you can better respond to your partner’s boundaries:

1) Make sure you understand your partner’s boundaries!

This may seem obvious, but it’s vital to understand what your partner’s boundaries are. You may feel backed into a corner, with no option but just to agree to all of your partner’s boundaries. While we DO recommend agreeing to your partner’s reasonable requests, you need to make sure you understand what you’re agreeing to.

For this reason, we often recommend you not simply agreeing to the boundaries the first time they’re presented to you. Instead, talk with your therapist or coach about the boundaries: Do you understand them? Are there any points that you need to clarify? If you agree to honoring these boundaries can you HONESTLY commit to keeping them?

It will go much worse for you and for your relationship if you are just agreeing to boundaries to get your partner off your back right now. If you aren’t clear on the boundaries or if you aren’t able/willing to follow them, you need to communicate this to your partner. Your partner will be seeing if your words line up with your actions as a way of rebuilding safety (remember what we said earlier?). If your words say, “I agree” but your actions ultimately say, “I disagree” you will erode any trust and safety you are trying to rebuild. So make sure you really look at your partner’s boundaries and make sure you understand them. Your partner probably spent a lot of time preparing her boundaries, so respect her by putting the same amount of time in to understand what she’s needing right now.

2) Remember that you are not the victim!

As you look through these boundaries you may start to feel angry. You may start to feel controlled. You may start to feel like your partner is becoming a “parent” to you. Again, remember that boundaries when done well are NOT for control or punishment. They’re for safety. Don’t forget that the whole reason you are going through this boundary exercise is because of your sexual betrayal.

So if you're starting to feel controlled, make sure to talk to your therapist, group, sponsor, coach, and/or other members of your team who have good recovery and who have been down this road before you. Your feelings are understandable and do make sense. Yet, you have to remember that these safety boundaries are a way you can demonstrate care and help repair your relationship. Like we talked about before, following these boundaries will help your partner rebuild safety and trust. And what boundaries she needs right now very well may not be what she needs in the future. And again, remember that you're not the victim here!

3) Communicate any boundary clarifications / modifications if needed

At this point you've looked through your partner's boundary list when presented to you and hopefully you've also gotten a chance to look at it with a trusted guide after it was presented to you. As you look through this document, are you fully able / willing to honor all of these boundaries? If not, are there any tweaks you could recommend that would enable you to now honor the boundaries? Do you need to table any of them for now? Do you need to ask for any further clarification or make any other requests around any of these boundaries?

Make sure to talk with your support team carefully about any changes you are proposing in these boundaries. Your partner has considered these boundaries, and they serve as a guard rail for her. If you're going to recommend changing any of the guard rail, you need to really carefully consider how you will preserve that guard rail of protection for her.

We'd also recommend to communicate any proposed clarifications or modifications to your partner's boundaries in a safe setting, most likely with a couples counselor or other similar professional who understands healing from betrayal trauma.

4) HONOR THE BOUNDARIES

Now that you've agreed to the boundaries your partner has requested with any additional clarifications / modifications you are requesting, here's the most obvious yet most critical part: HONOR THE BOUNDARIES!!!!!!! We can't say this enough. Make sure you remember these boundaries. Do whatever you need to do to remember them and protect them as you would a valued treasure. Your partner has given you a roadmap of relational healing / restoration. You've got a choice to help build healing by following that roadmap or to continue eroding safety and trust by not following the boundaries.

Two other important points: First, until otherwise specified, follow the boundaries to the letter. This may seem obvious, but it's important. For example, if your previous acting out occurred after work

hours, and you're now agreeing to be home by 6PM every night, be home by 6PM every night! If you aren't able to be home by 6, make sure to communicate early and with empathy that you will be late. Every minute that goes by after 6 that you return home will seem like an eternity to your partner, and will highlight that you aren't doing what you said you'd do. Trust me on this one.

Second, don't modify these boundaries on your own! Just because your partner isn't actively talking about a specific boundary anymore doesn't mean it still doesn't apply. If you aren't sure if boundaries are still relevant, talk to your partner, or set up a session to review boundaries in the future (we'll address this in a bit). Treat this boundary document as sacred until both you and your partner have decided it's time to update it.

5) Review boundaries as often as you need to so you can continue following them!

If you're like most of us, you may forget things. And if you're not used to following boundaries, honoring your partner's boundaries may not be at the forefront of your mind. If that's the case, do whatever you need to do to keep these boundaries in your mind. Put them on your phone and set a reminder to review them. Review them as a part of your recovery / relational check-in. See how you're doing on them and build them into your recovery accountability program.

Again, these boundaries are a huge gift your partner is giving you for how you can rebuild safety, trust, and repair the relationship. If you forget to do them or aren't invested in following the boundaries, your partner may come to feel disrespect, unvalued, unsafe, and continue to be threatened. If that's her experience, you're going to find it really difficult to repair trust in your relationship. So do whatever you need to do to keep the boundaries at the forefront of your mind.

6) Re-assess how you're doing with the boundaries with your team

Some boundaries your partner needs right now may not be what she needs in the future. It can help to set up a time to talk with your couples counselor to review the boundaries, say at 30 days, 90 days, or whatever time frame works for you and your partner. It's at this time that you can review how the boundaries are working for your partner and if any of them need to be adjusted in any way.

As we talked about previously, boundaries live and breathe, and as you continue to build relational safety by honoring your partner's boundaries, these boundaries can shift over time.

You can do this!

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We know that it can be really difficult to abide by these boundaries. It takes a lot of courage, humility, and faith to do so. Yet boundaries are so helpful to help protect your relationship moving forward. We wish you all the best in your work honoring your partner's boundaries.

Get support from other people in recovery to help you when needed. And remember, the more hard work you do right now will ultimately help rebuild a strong relationship that's anchored with trust and safety. You have a huge part in helping rebuild, and boundaries comprise a huge part of safety rebuilding in your relationship.

You can do this!