



2 – Setting Boundaries to Help You Heal

(A Guide for Partners)

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If you are a partner of a sex addict you have most likely experienced emotional pain, hurt, and betrayal that is difficult to navigate. Many partners struggle because they love someone who is making destructive choices that greatly affect both the addict and partner. To make it worse, many of the solutions to sex addiction are not in the control of the partners. So what do you do? Sit there and watch your partner destroy their life and continue to suffer yourself. Try to control the situation, which has never actually worked in the past. Pray harder. Try to ignore the problems. Try to be the best partner you can be and hope that drives them to stop acting out. Be sexier or more sexually and emotionally available. These are all things that unfortunately, do not make sex addicts stop acting out and often leave partners feeling more hopeless. One thing partners can do to regain hope and health is set healthy boundaries.

Healthy boundaries are emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual limits you set in order to feel safe and begin to heal. Healthy boundaries are self-focused, not something done to try to change and punish the sex addict. Healthy boundaries set by partners often end up helping sex addicts on their road to recovery, but is not a guarantee and should not be to reason for setting boundaries (or that would just be another way to try to control the situation). The desired outcome of setting healthy boundaries is healing for you as the partner!

Setting healthy boundaries, that are self-focused, is easier said than done. Though the boundaries are for you, they will also affect your partner. They may even make your partner upset. What seems black and white initially, may not be as you start to think about it more. Some questions you can ask yourself that may help are:

- Am I doing that to punish or control or am I doing this because it will help me?
- How will this help me feel emotionally, physically, sexually, or spiritually safe?
- If I set this boundary, will I actually follow through on what I say if it is violated?

It may help to discuss boundaries with a trusted friend or trained therapist before discussing them with your partner. They can help you make sure the focus of the boundaries is on you and help you be more prepared for any resistance your partner may give. They can also help you decide what you will do if your partner violates one of your boundaries.

Again, because setting healthy boundaries with no intention of punishing or controlling your partner is difficult, I have included some examples that I hope will help:

Healthy Emotional Boundaries:

- I don't feel safe when you have private conversations with a person of the opposite-sex because of how that has hurt me and our family in the past. I need you to no longer have private conversations with people of the opposite sex. If one is unavoidable due to work or another reason, check-in with me before and after.
- We only talk about slips and relapses before 7pm
- Don't tell me details of past sexual experiences unless I ask for them specifically.
- I go to my POSA group weekly and, during that time, someone else cares for the kids
- I decide when and what to tell my family/friends about your sex addiction

Healthy Physical Boundaries:

- When you have a slip I want to know within 24-hours and then I will sleep separate from you for a few days
- Never take me to a place where you acted out
- Don't touch me without asking first
- If you relapse, I will have a separate bedroom in the house.
- If you relapse, I will go stay with my sister so I have time to think about what I want/need to do next.

Healthy Sexual Boundaries:

- No sexual acts outside of our relationship
- I will not be sexually active with you until after you get a STI/STD test.
- My bathroom time is private, knock and only come inside if you are invited because I may not be comfortable with you seeing me changing my clothes, in the shower, etc.
- I will not do [specific sexual act] because it makes me uncomfortable.
- I want to be the only one to initiate sexual contact

Healthy Spiritual Boundaries:

- When I am reading/praying do not interrupt me.
- I will say "no" to additional responsibilities in my faith community until I feel stronger
- If you relapse, I will sit separate from you at church

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Healthy boundaries look different for everyone. Some of the examples I listed may not even be healthy for you. Creating healthy boundaries is a process. It is okay if your boundaries change overtime and as you navigate what helps you feel safe and heal.