BOUNDARY SETTING CURRICULUM

WHO, WHAT, WHY, HOW?

Introduction to boundary-setting concepts:

We usually start talking about boundary-setting with a big group brainstorm to set the scope of what we’re talking about. It can be a brief discussion, or more formal with notes taken on a whiteboard / butcher paper and a longer group conversation. It’s good to have a clear idea how much time you want to allow for this – if you only have 5-10 minutes for it, facilitate it tightly. Letting the group have a looser discussion can create awesome conversation, but also can easily last upwards of 15-20 minutes and sometimes lead to some lost attention. Figure out the best ways of facilitating this given your style and the character and needs of your group; if you have a co-facilitator, talk with them in advance about how to assist each other in keeping this rolling and wrapping it up when it’s time.

Ask the group:

“What is a boundary?”

“Who do we set boundaries with?”

Take all kinds of responses for a nice long list, eventually working your way up to “everybody.”

“What makes it hard/easy to set boundaries?”

Power imbalances; differences between setting boundaries with our close people vs with strangers; feeling clear within ourselves vs feeling confused; cultural differences; etc.

“How do we set boundaries?”

Physically, verbally, emotionally… Ask for examples and really break down each category to get at different tools we use.
HAND ON THE KNEE GAME

An awesome opportunity to practice different kinds of boundary setting, and to see how other folks do it. The debrief is a really valuable space to share useful tools.

Requirements:

A cleared area on the floor where participants can sit in a tight circle, cross-legged, with knees practically touching their neighbors’. Can also be done in chairs. Two instructors. How long it takes depends on how many people you’ve got, but the exercise itself moves pretty fast. Debrief can take anywhere from 5-20 minutes.

Instructions:

“This is called the Hand on the Knee Game. We’re going to take turns going around in a circle, putting our hand on the knee of the person next to us. And, for the purposes of this game, the owner of the knee does not want the hand there. So we’ll get a chance to try out some different boundary setting techniques to let the other person know that we don’t want their hand on our knee.

“First round, we’ll do this non-verbally, not speaking. What are some ways you could communicate this boundary without speaking?” Take a few examples [such as: glaring, moving their hand, moving your knee, coughing on them, etc.]. “This round, the person with the hand is going to respect the boundary as soon as it’s set, and remove your hand. Ready?” Each round is started by an instructor demonstrating with another instructor. Keep going around the room so everyone gets a chance. Maintain a relaxed yet sober demeanor when nervous giggle bouts erupt.

Second round: “Now we’re going to do it again, in the other direction, and this time we’re going to set a verbal boundary. What are some things you could say to communicate this boundary?” Take a few examples [such as: ”move your hand,” ”don’t touch me,” etc.]. “Again, the person with the hand is going to respect the boundary. Ready?” And go.

Third round: “This time, we’re going to step it up a bit. Has anyone ever had an experience where you set a boundary with someone, but they just kept on coming like they didn’t even notice? Well, now we’ll get a chance to practice with that. This time, you’ll get to use both verbal and nonverbal techniques to be super clear in communicating your boundary. Try different tactics, vary your level of intensity, this is a good opportunity to experiment. And the person with the hand, now you’re going to hold out a bit, make them convince you they’re serious before you remove your hand. Okay, ready?”

Debrief:

When it’s over, have everyone thank both of their neighbors. Then, move into debrief. Some questions to ask:

“How did it feel to have your boundary crossed?”

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“How did it feel to cross someone’s boundary?”

With this conversation, we reinforce the point that we all have a responsibility to respect other people’s boundaries just as we’d like our own respected. All of us may sometimes find ourselves on the other side, unintentionally pushing someone in a way that they find uncomfortable, and this is a good opportunity to get a gut-level feel for what that’s like, and to reassess how we want to handle that when we become aware it’s happening. A facilitator’s brief personal example is helpful here. None of us are perfect!

“What were some techniques people used that seemed especially effective?”

Affirm the tools people came up with. Emphasize the power of a consistent message: body language, words, tone of voice, facial expression, gaze all saying the same thing. Remind folks it can be okay to use humor; to lie; to ‘make a scene’; to refuse to provide a reason for the boundary. It’s not necessarily bad to act nice and smile, as many socialized females have been trained to do — but it’s also vital to feel empowered to act ‘rude’ and fierce.

This debrief leads nicely into the Four Skills, as they’ve mostly just been demonstrated by participants in the Hand on the Knee Game.

THE FOUR SKILLS

Requirements:

5-10 minutes. Can go longer and evolve into a fruitful group discussion. It’s helpful to write the Skills on the board as you explain them.

Name It, Direct It, Repeat It, End It

The Four Skills are simple boundary setting tools that can be useful in many different contexts — with close people as well as strangers. These can be shared with the class at the end of the Hand on the Knee Game debrief, as most of the Skills will have already been demonstrated by participants during that activity.

1. Naming the behavior

Naming the behavior can be as simple as stating, “Your hand is on my knee,” or “You’re all up in my personal space,” or “You keep asking me to go home with you even though I’ve already told you no.” Ask participants why this might be a useful technique to use.

- Maybe the person actually didn’t realize what they’re doing
- Relatively non-confrontational; gives the person an out

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- Other people nearby may hear and be alerted to the situation

You can share the story of a young woman who had been sexually abused by her uncle. Like many survivors of child sexual abuse, she had carried around the shame and secrecy for years. One day at a family gathering, the uncle patted her butt as she passed by. She said, loudly, “Uncle Frank, your hand is on my butt!” Everyone turned and looked at Uncle Frank. It was like taking all the guilt and ickiness of the abuse off her own self and handing it off to the abuser, where it more rightly belongs.

Naming it can also help you gain more clarity about a situation that feels off to you, even if you can’t yet pinpoint why. You can use the tool to validate your own intuition and instincts, however vague, by naming them even if only inside your own head.

2. Give a directive

Tell the person exactly what you want them to do, as concisely and clearly as possible. This can sound like “Take your hand off my knee,” or “Back off,” or “I need this conversation to stop now; we can discuss it more tomorrow.” Ask participants why this technique could be valuable.

- Sometimes people respond well to direct orders
- Demonstrates that you are clear about what you want
- Again, may alert bystanders to the situation

You can share the story of an older, wheelchair-bound woman who opened her front door to a man pointing a gun at her. She ordered, “You put that gun down right now!” and the guy dropped it. Sometimes giving a directive works really well!

3. Repeat it

Stay focused on the directive you are giving, and don’t let yourself be diverted until it is respected. Call it broken record or skipping CD; this skill is about demonstrating persistence. Ask participants why this technique might be useful.

- Demonstrates serious clarity and intention
- Prevents you from being diverted by a clever manipulator
- Makes the situation abundantly clear to bystanders

4. End it

Sometimes all this good boundary-setting you’ve been doing does not yield the desired results. You’re not in control of how other people act and respond to you, after all, and sometimes people are just not willing to respect others. This may mean that you get up and leave the room, or that you seek out someone in the environment to assist you in ending the interaction, or that you end a relationship in which your boundaries are repeatedly disrespected.

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ACROSS THE ROOM

This exercise is an opportunity to practice using our body language and our voices to set boundaries with another person. Similar to the Hand on the Knee activity, but more physically active.

Requirements:

A space big enough for participants to move freely. Two instructors (one as lead facilitator, the other to support in demonstrating). Allow 10-12 minutes for the exercise and 3-5 minutes to debrief.

Instructions:

Have participants line up in two rows about 10-15 feet apart, facing each other. Make sure everyone in the two rows is paired with/facing someone from the opposite row. Each group is going to take turns advancing towards the other, and then being stopped.

(Acknowledge to the participants that this activity is void of context regarding who the two people are, whether they know each other, etc. Addressing context is a big element of Home Alive’s philosophy; occasionally, we practice context-less activities in order to focus on skill-building.)

Round 1: Setting a boundary using body language.

Explain: “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 towards you. When your counterpart in row 2 reaches the spot you’ve picked, use your body language to indicate you don’t want them to come any closer. What are some examples of how to do this?” Solicit and demonstrate some examples from the group, such as: put up one hand; get into your ready stance; turn your back to them; walk away; etc. “Row 2, when you see your counterpart in row 1 has set their boundary with you, you will respect the boundary and stop walking.”

Allow each group to take a turn practicing this skill.

Round 2: 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 counterpart to stop coming any closer. This is an opportunity to practice using the Four Skills (Name it, Direct it, Repeat it, End it). Ask for some examples from the group of things to say to indicate you don’t want them to come any closer. Examples include: say or yell “stop”; “back off”; “you’re too close”; etc. Since some participants tend to be louder or quieter than others, this round can be repeated to allow participants who are quieter to practice being louder, and participants who are louder to practice being quiet-yet-firm.

Round 3: Reinforcing a boundary that has been crossed, using voice and body language.

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This time, participants walking toward the boundary-setter will continue past the designated stopping point, so that the boundary-setter can practice re-setting their boundary and using a combination of body language, the Four Skills, tone, volume, inflection, etc. This can look like, “you’re too close – back off!” (name it & direct it); “stop stop stop!” (repeat a directive); starting quiet and getting louder; etc.

Debrief Questions:

After both groups have had a chance to practice all three rounds, have participants thank their partners. Ask the group: What was hard? What was easy? How did it make you feel?

RIDICULOUS REQUEST

This game gives us the opportunity to practice using basic boundary setting skills, with a ridiculous twist.

Requirements:

Two facilitators. Five to ten minutes with debrief.

Instructions:

In this game participants will play with having some kind of ridiculous request made of them by someone they know. The request should be for something that the person does not want to do, and/or is physically or logistically impossible — the more outlandish the better.

Facilitators first demonstrate for the group. “Build me a spaceship!” or “Do all my homework for the next three years, okay?” or whatever. Asker should demonstrate savviness with complimenting (“It’s just that you’re so incredibly smart”), manipulation (“We’re basically in the same classes so you’re already doing the work anyway”) and persistence (“Come on! Just do this one little thing for me!”), thus enabling the boundary-setter to get lots of practice setting and holding the No. Remind folks about Name It, Direct It, Repeat It, End It.

Then have participants pair up, take a moment to each think of a ridiculous request, and choose who’ll go first. Give them about two minutes and then have them switch roles.

Debrief:

Ask the group: What kinds of responses did you give or receive that worked well? What felt difficult? Did anything make it easier?
THE FOLLOWING GAME

The Following Game provides an opportunity to practice confronting a stranger who may be following you.

Requirements:

Space for the whole group to mill around in. About 5-10 minutes with debrief.

Instructions:

Ask participants to get in pairs. They will take turns following each other around in the big group. When the person being followed feels ready, they will turn around in confident stance and confront the follower, first just with stance and eye contact and then again also with words. (“Stop following me!”, “What do you want?” etc.) Then they will switch roles. Facilitators demonstrate first, emphasizing boldness and the element of surprise.

Debrief:

Ask the group: How did it feel to turn around and confront someone? What felt difficult or easy about it? How did it feel to be confronted? What are some ways our intuition works to warn us that something is off? What do we risk if we trust our intuition? What do we risk if we don’t?

You can share the story of two self defense instructors who were walking down the street together when they each independently got the feeling that they were being followed. Without discussing it, both women suddenly whirled around in confident/fighting stance, and the person walking behind them ran in the other direction.

SOLAR SYSTEM

The Solar System exercise gives participants a visual snapshot of their relationship constellation. It gives them information on who is in their life and how close they feel to those people, as well as an opportunity to express for themselves some of the qualities, strengths and challenges of their individual relationships. More than anything, the Solar System offers a bird’s eye view of our relationship life, and this perspective can bring valuable new awareness.

This exercise can bring up difficult feelings for people. It can feel intense or hard for people to take stock of who they have in their life and how they have them. Some people will find it clarifying, hopeful, or reassuring to see how many people they are close with. Others can feel frustration or disappointment at the make-up of their support system. It can help the group to have the facilitator say, after the exercise not before, that this is an intense exercise that can bring up sadness or other feelings. Additionally, this is a very introspective exercise, so you may have to draw participants out a bit with several questions, a story or a few talking points.

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1. Have everyone choose their favorite color from an assortment of markers, crayons, or colored pencils made available to them. With this color draw a smallish circle in the center of the page. This is YOU. Label it with your name, with the word “me” or with a personal doodle that you identify with. Instruct the participants to do the same. You can tell them that there are several steps to this exercise, and that you will outline all of them together and then leave them time to go back and add more to each step.

2. Have the participants put that color back and tell them they are not allowed to use it for the rest of the exercise.

3. Have the participants choose 3-5 different colors.

4. Choose 4-8 people in your life, who are closest to you. Plot them on the paper at a position and distance significant to you. Draw circles (or other shapes) around them.

5. Draw lines connecting you to these different people. These lines are like spokes on a wheel connected to you. These lines can be thick and bold, thin, jagged, dotted, loopy, any line you want. This is an opportunity to draw lines that represent an aspect of the connection you have to different people. For example, if my relationship to a specific person is hot and cold, I might draw a dotted line to show both connection and distance.

6. Next, we will illustrate the energy input and output each relationship represents. The question you are answering is: in this moment, is this relationship giving me energy and support or draining my energy? Using (+/-) or arrows to show the energy giving and energy depleting for your relationships.

7. It is important to remember that this is a snapshot of your solar system today. This is not an audit for your last year and it is not an audit of the lifespan of your relationships.

8. Give 10 minutes for them to work independently, including a short break.

For example:
Debrief Questions and Points (5-15 minutes): Due to the intense nature of this exercise, it is important to debrief the experience with the class.

- Why do you think I had you change colors? Answer: This is ME, this is YOU. Having ourselves in our own unique color helps solidify the idea of this line of distinction between ourselves and our world.

- The bumper sticker for this exercise is: YOU ARE THE CENTER OF YOUR UNIVERSE. Why? Of course we all know this does not mean that you are the center of THE universe. But without YOU there would be no ‘your universe.’ It is okay and necessary for YOU to be at the center. It is more than necessary, it is accurate. When we start putting other people at the center of our universe, it can be really difficult to know what our boundaries are and where we can assert our needs, desires, and expectations.

- What did you notice about your solar system?

- What, if anything, surprised you?

- What came up? What was it like to do this?

- How is this like life?

Additional Debrief Questions/Ideas to Consider:
- Is everyone in your universe in a place where you want them?
- Is there anyone who you want closer to you?

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Anyone who you want further from you?
What can you do to bring people in who are currently far away?
Are there any people who you find exhausting to be around?
Any people who energize/revitalize you?
What can you do to distance yourself from people who you don’t want to be so close to you?
What if everyone is far away?
What if everyone is really close?
There might be real/strategic/good reasons why everyone might be really far away or really close right now.
Do you want your universe to look this way forever?
Is the mapping of your universe currently serving you? Is it meeting your needs?
Does the mapping of your universe match your values and intention?
This is exercise not about passing judgments about other people’s boundaries (i.e. “you have awful boundaries, my boundaries are better than yours”); this will look different for everyone.
Encourage participants to repeat this activity on their own every few months or once a year to see how their universe may change!

Every time I lead this exercise I tell this story as a closing; you could tell it by saying something like “the creator of this curriculum says…”

“When I was 19 or so, I did this exercise for the first time. It was from a book, or a therapist had me do it, I’m not quite sure. But looking at my whole relationship world on a piece of paper did something for me. I got to see, as if from a far off vantage point, the relationships I had in my life. The most impactful part for me was seeing the quality of the relationships I had in my life daily versus the relationships that were infrequent. What I realized when looking at my solar system was that the people I was putting most of my energy into were people who were not particularly kind or good friends. And the people who were on the margins of my solar systems were people who were really positive and really interested in me and who I was. I looked at that piece of paper and said to myself ‘Oh! People who are mean are an exciting challenge, and people who like me are boring.’ It was an ‘a-ha’ moment no talk therapy or self-help book could have evoked in me. After that, over the course of several years, I noticed myself thinking in terms of my solar system when deciding who to put energy into, which friendships to pursue, and how to spend my social time. It didn’t happen overnight, but gradually I became more interested in people who were openly warm and interested in me. About 10 years later, I found my first solar system exercise, and before looking at it I quickly did another one. I got to compare them and see such a drastic change. Years later all of my close connections were with people who think I am wonderful, smart, special and amazing. There was nothing like seeing such a concrete testament to my growth and sense of self-worth.”

Thanks to former Home Alive instructor and program director Becka Tilsen for sharing her description of this exercise.
**BACK INSTRUCTORS UP**

This activity is sort of a higher-intensity version of Round 3 of the Across the Room exercise. In this activity, in the course of reinforcing the boundary that is being crossed, the participant will use a combination of body language, the Four Skills (Name it, Direct it, Repeat it, End it), fighting stance, and vocal tone, volume, and inflection in order to also back the boundary-encroacher across the room. It's a great high-energy opportunity for folks to get to really practice mixing up lots of different boundary setting tools and feel powerful doing it.

**Requirements:**

Enough unobstructed floor space for participants to move around. Two instructors. About 30-60 seconds per class participant.

**Instructions:**

An instructor will be the boundary-encroacher, and will practice this activity with participants one at a time. The participant will again pick a secret spot on the floor that they do not want crossed, and will use an assortment of skills to not only hold that line, but also back the instructor up across the room. People get to practice making themselves big and intimidating and aggressive, pushing back the boundary-encroacher with energy and volume alone. Encourage the other participants to cheer each other on! Noise helps. It's great for participants to feel supported by each other.

(Comfort and energy levels of the participants affect the success of this activity. We've found it to be most successful near the end of a class, and especially the last class in a series — once participants have had a chance to get more comfortable with each other and with the material. And it's very important for the instructors to really crank up the energy level and engage the whole group.)

**HUG DIVERTING**

Sometimes, we’re just not in the mood to be hugged, even by people we like. If someone is coming toward you with open arms, there are some great ways to divert the hug and still connect with the other person. Some hug diversions can include touch, such as a high-five or a handshake. These physically-engaging hug diversions are a great way to offer the would-be hugger a physical connection with you while respecting your wish to not be embraced.

**Requirements:**

About three minutes.

As a would-be hugger approaches:

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**High Five**: lift your hand up and call out, “High Five!”

**Handshake**: extend one or both of your hands and intercept their hand(s) for a shake. Use your voice to acknowledge them (“Hey! Nice to see you!”, “How’s it going?”, etc.).

**Fake a Coughing Fit**

**Meet them Sideways for a Hearty Clap on the Back**

Demonstrate an example or two with a co-instructor. Then, ask folks to pair up and practice diverting some hugs! Invite a few pairs to share any other hug diversion tactics they came up with.

(This is a nice quick, funny activity that works well near the end of class.)

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**ROLEPLAYS**

Role plays give class participants a chance to practice using various boundary setting techniques in a mock-up “real life” situation. Typically, we have found role plays to be most effective when done at the end of a longer series class after thoroughly teaching and practicing a full range of boundary setting techniques, with a supportive group of participants. There are many ways in which role plays can be set up. We have found that going into role plays with a solid plan, but also a willingness to be flexible and set them up a different way if necessary, is especially helpful. The facilitator can draw upon verbal/physical cues from the class participants as well as intuition and observations about where people are at mentally/emotionally to decide how, in that moment, will be best to set up the role play.

**What are role plays?**

Role plays are mini scenarios that reflect potential real life situations in which someone attempts to cross a boundary. They are basically short skits, in which volunteer participants get to try on different roles in a given situation and practice saying no, stating what they want or don’t want, or obtaining a particular goal in a given situation.

**Role plays are not . . .**

A chance for a particular class participant to work out an exact situation that happened in real life. If a participant suggests a scenario to practice via role play, and it becomes clear that it is a situation that happened in their life down to every detail, we recommend suggesting a made-up scenario that contains key elements of the suggested scenario, but with enough differences that it won’t become all about rehashing the event that actually happened. While examining events that happen in our lives is indeed very helpful and can be healing/therapeutic, it is unlikely to benefit the whole group if this exercise becomes all about one participant in particular.

Role plays are also not a time to practice physical skills. Role plays are designed to practice boundary setting skills, including confident stance, eye contact, voice, facial expressions, body language, and verbal techniques. Role plays are not a chance for participants to practice grab releases or strikes.

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Setting Up Role Plays

We generally use one of two basic frameworks for setting up role plays:

1. Explain to participants what role plays are and what their purpose is. Ask participants for suggestions of potential scenarios in which to act out through role plays. Write down suggestions as they come up. As a group, choose several role plays that will allow participants to practice various boundary setting skills. Remember to consult with the group about which scenarios feel the most relevant and will be helpful. A tally of hands for those interested in each role play can be used make this decision quickly with minimal discussion. Have participants volunteer to act out the scene, and let them know that participation is voluntary and one can learn from watching in addition to doing.

The benefit of this method is that generally, it allows participants to have ownership over the scenarios they are acting out. The scenarios tend to feel meaningful and class “buy-in” tends to be high.

2. Provide a variety of slips of paper with different scenarios written on them. Have participants form groups of 2-4 people and practice the scenario. Groups who are willing to share out after about 5-10 minutes of practice time can share their role plays with the whole group.

The benefit of this method is that generally, it puts less pressure on participants to “act” as they are working primarily with their small group and have a chance to practice before sharing with the whole group.

Possible Role Play Scenarios

Some scenarios we have seen practiced during role plays include. . .

- A stranger at a bus stop tries to get your name and number, and you don’t want to share these
- While on a date with someone you have a crush on, they want to kiss you before you are ready
- Your boss wants you to work late, but you have a prior engagement and can’t do it
- A friend in crisis is calling you incessantly needing support. While you want to support your friend, you are not able to be available to them every moment of every day
- While dancing at a party, someone tries to dance with you super close, but you don’t want to dance with them

Tips for Facilitating Role Plays

Facilitating role plays can be tricky! Emotions can come up and needs of participants can vary dramatically. While one person may need heavy coaching through a role play, another may prefer to be allowed to sweat it out solo. When set up intentionally and facilitated heavily, role plays can be an effective learning opportunity for folks with greatly varying needs.

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Use a variety of scenarios. Remember not to only use “stranger” situations. While these may be the main ones that come up when asking or suggestions (or they may not), encourage participants to reflect on times when they had to set a boundary with someone that they knew. Try to vary dynamics between the different role plays: stranger vs. someone you know, friend vs. boss or teacher, etc.

Be clear about guidelines. Make sure that everyone understands that role plays are not a time to practice physical skills, and remind the group of the agreements about self care.

Set the stage. Declare where the “stage” area is, and make sure all audience members are facing the stage. Grab chairs or other simple props if necessary for the role play. Make sure it is clear when the role play begins and when it ends. You might do a dramatic, “Lights! Camera! Action!” for effect.

Give everyone a role. Each scenario should have exactly the number of people as there are roles. For example, in the stranger at the bus stop scenario, you might have one participant play the part of the nagging stranger, one participant to practice setting the boundary, and possibly (this is optional) a third person who is a witness at the bus stop. The witness could either remain silent until one of the other characters engages with them, or they might decide to step up and be an ally. You can set guidelines about this so it is clear what everyone’s role is. When setting up each role play, explain that audience members are also participating. They are to observe carefully for powerful boundary setting moments, how body language and/or tone of voice affected the scenario, etc.

Pay close attention. Watch for verbal and physical cues of discomfort or uncertainty, and offer support when needed. Sometimes a simple, “you’re doing great” is enough to give someone a little confidence boost. At times you might say things like, “go ahead and set that boundary now!” or “your voice sounds confident! How can your body language match your voice more?” Don’t be afraid to do some serious coaching, but also give participants a chance to practice and draw on their own skills. It is a delicate dance!

Be vigilant about stereotypes. Unfortunately, stereotypes have come up in a number of role plays we have facilitated. For example, someone portraying a mentally ill person or a homeless person might rely on problematic stereotypes. This can make people extremely uncomfortable and must be addressed calmly and respectfully right away. We encourage you to be proactive and try to avoid scenarios that might invite common stereotypes, or to say something about stereotypes in the beginning when you set up the activity.

End it when it’s done. Given the opportunity, some people will go on and on! When you see that successful boundary happen, allow the boundary-crosser to accept it, then celebrate the victory. You might say something like, “Wow! That was so powerful!” and start a round of applause. If a scenario is dragging on too long without getting to the point, do some coaching. You might say something like, “Okay! You’ve given a lot of excuses and gone back and forth for a long time now. Go ahead and set that boundary now!”

Debrief. Debriefing after each role play is essential. Ask the boundary-crosser, “How did that feel when they said ______?” Ask the boundary-setter, “How did it feel to say ______?” Ask the audience members what they observed. When was the moment that the boundary sunk in? What worked? If someone feels strongly about a way it could have been done differently, invite them to try out the same scenario. It can be very helpful for folks to see a variety of ways a boundary can be set successfully.

Celebrate. Before moving on to a new scenario or to end class, be sure to honor the participants who courageously practiced in front of the whole group! Give them some good props and applause.

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A fun variation

You can turn role plays into a game by giving audience members the option to yell “freeze!” at any point during the role play, then walk up to the “performers,” tap one of them on the shoulder, and switch out. This gives more folks a chance to participate, and allows for different perspectives and possibilities to play out. (This theater technique is inspired by Theater of the Oppressed practices. Developing familiarity with these practices may help to improve your skill and confidence in facilitating role plays.)

How long do role plays take?

Ha! Who knows? Role plays could go on for hours, or could be a (relatively) short activity. It all depends on the group’s dynamic, needs, and mood that day. Generally, we have allowed for about half an hour to do a round of role plays. Be prepared with an extra activity in case interest is low. At the same time, be prepared to have to cut off the activity, even if engagement is high and people are totally into it, if you run out of time.