

SPILT MILK

THE IMPROV TOOL FOR HANDLING BIG FEELINGS!



Lesson Two: Boundaries

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What are “boundaries,” anyway?

Think about your backyard: is it surrounded by a fence?
 Think about your room: are there four walls and a door?
 Think about the last picture you colored: were there lines to fill in?
 These things - the fence, the walls, lines - are all types of boundaries!

Boundaries help separate things from other things!

Sometimes we have to stay within the boundaries (“Don’t leave the ballfield!”) and sometimes we are kept outside the boundaries (“Do not enter!”).

But boundaries aren’t just for places...

People can have boundaries on their bodies:

- Parts of your body you don’t want touched (elbow, ears, hair)
- Parts of your body you don’t want touched in a certain way (hitting, tickling)
- Parts of your body you don’t want talked about (can you think of one?)

People can also have boundaries around things we can’t see, like:

- Time: You do not want to spend more than lunchtime socializing
- Emotions: You will not let others tell you how to feel
- Personal Space: You do not like people sitting or standing too near you

We have to let others know our boundaries so they know not to cross them.
 We also have to ask, listen to, and remember others’ boundaries so we do not upset them.

We can only control our own boundaries.
 And we must respect others’!

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How do I figure out my own boundaries?

The fact is, when something doesn't feel right, it probably means you have a boundary! Do you often feel uncomfortable when a part of you is touched?

What part?

What kind of touch feels bad? Does any kind of touch on this part feel ok?

Do you find yourself getting grumpy when interacting with another person?

What is the other person doing to make you feel grumpy?

What makes you feel better?

Recognizing what we do not want and what makes us feel bad is a great way to figure out our boundaries! Because no one likes to feel uncomfortable, and we do not like spending time with people who make us uncomfortable!

There are a few circumstances - times and places - when we have to allow others to cross our boundaries: these include when we are at the doctor's office, when we visit the dentist, or when we have to talk to the police.

The doctor has to touch parts of your body in certain ways to make sure you are healthy. The dentist has to put their hands or instruments into your mouth to keep your teeth strong and clean. And sometimes the police have to talk to us and ask questions in order to maintain safety and ensure that laws are being obeyed (more on that in lesson seven!).

In these cases, it is important to find a way to stay calm and make ourselves feel safe. And that's why we are talking about boundaries today!

So, let's learn how to deal with boundaries with Spilt Milk.

In this lesson, we'll do some improv to notice boundaries and learn how to protect them!

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There are two “levels” of boundaries: hard and soft.

Hard boundaries are ones that make you feel the least comfortable, the ones that make you very angry or irritated, and the ones that make you want to yell. These are boundaries that you want to make sure no one crosses.

Soft boundaries still make you feel uncomfortable, but you can handle these feelings. They are the ones that you’d prefer didn’t happen, but you can stay calm. These are the boundaries that you might want to consider overcoming; maybe experiment with allowing others to cross them once in a while or figuring out ways to make yourself feel better in case they are accidentally crossed.

While all boundaries feel important, take some time to really figure out which can only be hard and which you can maybe think of as soft!

Once I figure out my boundaries, how do I tell someone about them?
You can go about it in several ways.

Tell them beforehand: You can let people know what makes you uncomfortable even before you feel the discomfort. For instance, if you are introduced to a new person and they hold out their hand, you can say, “I don’t like to shake hands. But I’d be happy to do a fist bump (or elbow bump, or maybe just wave)!” If someone invites you to lunch but you are sensitive to chewing noises, you can say, “I prefer to eat alone, but I’d love to hang out afterwards!”

Letting people know what makes you uneasy upfront - before they cross your boundaries - is a good way to make sure they hear you while keeping yourself feeling ok.

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It is a good idea to tell someone your hard boundaries beforehand so you don't risk getting upset or melting down.

Tell them once they have already crossed the boundary: For those that are less upsetting or make you less anxious - your soft boundaries - you can wait and see if someone crosses them before mentioning it. For instance, if someone pulls up a chair at lunch and scoots up right next to you, making you uncomfortable, you can always say, "Could you please move your chair a couple of inches away? I don't like sitting so close to people." Or if someone offers to brush or braid your hair for you, you can respond, "I don't really like people touching my hair. But, thanks for offering!"

While you should always stay polite even if someone does cross your boundaries ("please" and "thank you" are always appreciated!), you have the right to say "no" and make sure you feel protected.

Enlist the help of loved ones: If kissing your uncle makes you cringe (know how to cringe? Squeeze your eyes shut, pucker your lips, and scrunch your face!), consider telling another family member to suggest that everybody hug, instead. Or, if telling sad stories makes your insides rumble (everybody jump up! Shake out your arms! Shake out your legs! Ok... you can sit again), ask your friend to propose that everyone keep the conversation to funny stories only!

When telling someone what you wouldn't like, follow up with something you would like: Like the hand-shaking example on the last page, let people know what is ok after telling them what's not. "I don't like to be in the sun, so can we bring an umbrella to the beach?" or "The music is too loud for me here. How about we take a walk outside?"

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You can also use body language - the way your facial expressions and body let others know how you are feeling - to let people know when you are uncomfortable. Practice in a mirror - how does wanting to be alone look? How does wanting people with you look? How would you show someone you would like them to stop?

What about those situations mentioned before: doctor, dentist, and police? What if they want to cross my hard boundaries?

Even when you have the hardest of hard boundaries and you really want to protect them, these situations are important and have to be done for your health and safety. What you can do, however, is try to make them as calm as possible.

- Bring along a trusted adult - having someone with you to hold your hand or just make you feel more relaxed is a great way to deal with someone who must cross your boundary. Ask if they can come with you or sit beside you because you are uncomfortable. Most professionals will say "ok!"
- Let the professional know you are uncomfortable - tell them that you are nervous, uneasy, or anxious. They will most likely reassure you that everything will be fine, and they may have suggestions as to how to make it easier.
- Find ways to comfort yourself (we'll introduce a few new ways at the end of this lesson!). Ask if you can wear headphones and listen to soft music during your exam, find out before you show up if the office has or would allow an emotional support animal, or request a moment to breathe deeply and slowly before they begin. You are your best source of comfort - use it!
- Remind yourself that even though you don't want to do it and may not like it, sometimes we all have to do things we don't want to do. This is called "**radical acceptance**" - it doesn't mean it will feel any better, but at least you will commit to doing it. And, remember, it'll be over before you know it. You've got this!

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Discussion questions and exercises:

1. **Let's revisit the questions that started this lesson.** What part of your body do you think you might have a boundary around? (If you don't have a boundary around any parts, that's good, too!)
 - a. What emotions/feelings do you feel inside when someone touches it? Does it make you angry? Sad? Upset? Nervous?
 - b. In what other parts of your body do you feel these feelings?
 - c. How do these feelings make you want to behave?

get up
ON YOUR FEET

Have everybody stand up and begin to walk around the room, weaving in and out of other people's space. Call out "stop!" at random and have everyone one by one tell the person nearest them that they feel their personal space has been invaded. How many ways can they phrase it? How can everyone respond?

2. Think of boundaries that don't have to do with your body.
 - a. Do you become uncomfortable seeing certain things? Hearing them?
 - b. What about boundaries on your time or your emotions?
 - c. How does it feel inside when people cross those boundaries?
 - d. How does their invasion make you want to behave? Can you think of another way to behave instead?

get up
ON YOUR FEET

It's not just about *our* boundaries! Invite two volunteers take turns:

- a. Asking each other if it's ok to touch an uncovered part of their body (hands, maybe arms, maybe calves, face, etc.). The other person should respond that it's ok or that they are not comfortable, in their words.
- c. Asking each other if it is ok to sing loudly, flicker the lights, or "cry" (pretend!). The other should respond with their version of "ok" or "no."

BONUS: See if each person can show the other with body language that they do not want something touched.

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Calming technique spotlight: **SOOTHING OBJECTS**

What are “soothing objects?”

They are items that cater to each of your senses, helping you feel grounded and calm in challenging environments. They can help us get control of our feelings and stop a meltdown.

Most important:

ASK FOR PERMISSION BEFORE REACHING FOR ONE.

You should never reach into your bag or pocket without letting the other person what you would like to get, then waiting for an “ok.”

Calmly say, “I’m a little overwhelmed right now and would like to get my (item) because it comforts me. Is it ok if I reach into my bag/pocket and get it?”

If they allow you to retrieve it, move slowly and only take out what you mentioned.

If they do not allow you to retrieve it, calmly say “ok” and do not reach for it and keep your hands where they can see them, out of your pockets/bag. The police want to keep everyone safe, including you!

Carry different objects with you for different senses that need soothing.

- Visual - sunglasses, pictures of something you love
- Auditory - earplugs, headphones (with or without music)
- Tactile - soft blanket, fidget spinner, stress ball
- Taste and olfactory - piece of candy, gum, essential oils
- Emotional - a stuffed toy, photo of people you love

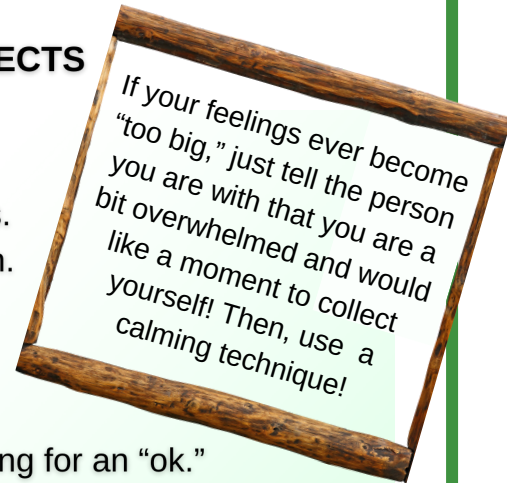
If you don’t want to carry something with you, try wearing soothing clothing!

Think: items without tags, compression socks, or weighted vests.

You can also pick up or touch items near you (remember, ask first!):

Are the things you touch soft or hard? Heavy or light? Warm or cool? Focus on the texture and color of each item. Challenge yourself to think of specific colors, such as crimson, burgundy, indigo, or turquoise, instead of simply red or blue.

Now, give yourselves a big round of applause and go do some improv!



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