Understanding and Communicating Our Boundaries

Module 1 explores how people understand and talk about boundaries. You'll consider how your communication style plays a role in building and maintaining safe and healthy relationships where your boundaries are respected.

After completing this module, you’ll be able to:

* Explore the role of communication in establishing boundaries and in safe and healthy relationships
* Consider ways to engage in conversations about safe and healthy relationships

# **[slide 1]** Welcome to Module 1!

In this module, you will explore the connections between your upbringing and how you communicate across all your relationships. You'll reflect on how your various cultural contexts influence how you talk about boundaries and relationships.

# **[slide 2]** A quick note

We will often use the word “culture” in this resource. We define culture as not simply bound to geographical location or created by territorial boundaries, but as existing in spaces that create a shared way of being. Examples of culture include national culture, workplace culture, queer culture, campus culture, and drinking culture. And of course there are many others.

# **[slide 3]** Video

[Module 1: Communication and Boundaries](https://media.bccampus.ca/media/Module+1A+Communications+and+Boundaries/0_z2tvsh80)

**[person 1]**

Have you ever had a chance to stop and think about how your upbringing has influenced the way you communicate your boundaries?

**[person 2]**

Boundaries help us define what we are comfortable with and how we like or expect to be treated. They apply to every kind of relationship we have – whether with a peer, friend, partner, family member, or anyone else in our life.

**[person 1]**

Boundaries can take different forms:

* Physical boundaries, for example, concern our personal space, privacy, closeness, or touch. For example, if someone says they are "not much of a hugger," you would not greet them with a hug, even if you were raised in a context where greeting someone with a hug was seen as a sign of respect or friendliness.
* Emotional boundaries refer to how much of our own emotional life we share, or how much of others’ emotional lives we can hold, as well as how our emotional needs are met. For example, this may mean choosing to share with others when you are feeling overwhelmed emotionally or taking time by yourself to process your feelings. This might mean being honest with someone about whether you have the energy to support them through a difficult time. Or it could mean if it seems like your feelings are often dismissed by a partner, establishing a clear understanding that you want to be heard.

Boundaries can also relate to shared or alone time, sex, online presence, and communication expectations. Remember, you can respect someone's boundaries without understanding why the boundaries are important to them.

**[person 2]**

I think it is also important to understand that the cultures we grow up in and our life experiences play a big role in how we establish our boundaries and understand other people’s boundaries. That means boundaries will be different for everyone. But it’s important to understand that we all deserve to have our boundaries respected.

So how do we establish boundaries with all our differences?

**[person 1]**

Talk it out! Intentionally making time to talk about our boundaries is a great way to start building caring practices for us and our peers, friends, partners, and family members.

As we work to build healthier relationships, learning to communicating our boundaries becomes very important. And, it's just as important to build skills around receiving other people's boundaries. For example, if someone shares a boundary with you, you can receive it by saying: "Thanks for letting me know," "I can do that for you," and "If I forget, please feel free to remind me."

After all, communicating, understanding, and respecting another person’s and our own boundaries is the beginning of what we call consent.

**[person 2]**

It can be a bit awkward at first. But remember: we all get better with practice!

So start having those conversations with your peers, friends, partners, and family members. When you feel safe, share what makes you feel comfortable or uncomfortable, and check in with them about their boundaries too.

# **[slide 4]** Question 1

Here are five questions to help guide you in reflecting on your communication style and how you establish your boundaries.

1. What affects your communication style?
   * Your emotions and state of mind (for example, feeling tired, angry, confused)
   * Who you are with (for example, peer, friend, family, partners)
   * Your environment (for example, in the classroom, at home, in a public place)
   * Your background and life experiences (for example, communicating differently with people of the same or different race, gender)

# **[slide 5]** Question 1: Feedback

We often change the way we express ourselves depending on what we are feeling, who we are with, where we are, and how similar to or different from us we perceive another person to be. It’s easy to forget that others do the same. Our communication style can vary, and it is important for us to understand how it changes. Being aware of these changes can make us better communicators – and better listeners!

# **[slide 6]** Question 2

1. How has your upbringing influenced your views on personal boundaries and privacy? Do any of these examples resonate with you?
   * Growing up in a family where sharing what you need is welcomed or discouraged.
   * Experiencing acceptance (or rejection) of public displays of affection
   * Seeing friends and family members in caring and valued relationships
   * Having family who are welcoming (or unwelcoming) of partners
   * Growing up in environments where touch is welcomed or refrained from
   * Growing up in a home with access to private space or with an expectation that all space is shared?
   * Understandings of expected roles and behaviours based on gender

# **[slide 7]** Question 2: Feedback

As we work toward building caring practices and healthy relationships, it is extremely helpful to identify and understand where we are coming from and how that has influenced us. Being attuned to these influences will bring clarity to our conversations.

# **[slide 8]** Question 3

1. What are some non-verbal tools of communication that we use with others?
   * Facial expressions
   * Eye contact
   * Hand gestures
   * Body movements
   * Virtual reactions (emojis, GIFs)

# **[slide 9]** Question 3: Feedback

Our use of gestures, such as facial expressions, and other non-verbal communication can change the meaning of our words, both consciously and unconsciously. Our non-verbal communication can also inform others about our comfort and enjoyment.

Remember, non-verbal communication can have different meanings for people of different cultural backgrounds (e.g., eye-contact can be threatening or disrespectful in some cultures and a sign of respect in others) and that not everyone has the same ability to notice and/or understand non-verbal communication (e.g., people with autism or a visual impairment).

# **[slide 10]** Question 4

1. What tools could you use to better understand how your life experiences play a role in your relationships and your communication style?

* Learning more about healthy communication practices
* Having open conversations with peers, friends, and family
* Attending training sessions about healthy relationships
* Questioning our assumptions about what relationships should look like
* Learning more about different types of relationships

# **[slide 11]** Question 4: Feedback

It’s important to continue our learning in different ways. We should always look for ways to improve our relationships and the connections we have. And make sure to always engage your curiosity and learning with care.

# **[slide 12]** Question 5

1. What are some ways in which we can establish healthy boundaries across all our relationships?

* Having conversations about what makes us feel comfortable or uncomfortable
* Asking our family members to respect our privacy and personal space
* Asking our partner(s) if they are okay with certain kinds of touch or activities
* Sharing what kind of activities or types of touch we like or dislike
* Checking in regularly with our friends or partners about changes in their interests or comfort levels
* Ensuring that we communicate with our friends or partners if our interests or comfort levels have changed
* Checking in with our peers about our preferred working and communication style

# **[slide 13]** Question 5: Feedback

Consciously making space and time to share our boundaries is a great way to create caring practices for ourselves and our peers, friends, partners, and family members. Communication is key to building and maintaining healthy relationships!

# **[slide 14]** Takeaways from Module 1

In learning about healthy and safe relationships we must continue engaging in opportunities to expand our knowledge. When we learn more about these topics, we are working toward creating safer communities for all. Here are a few things to take away from this module:

1. Everyone’s boundaries are different. If you are unsure about someone’s boundaries, just ask!
2. Our cultural contexts can influence the ways in which we communicate and understand other people’s boundaries. It’s important to be mindful of how these contexts can make us unaware of what others may find uncomfortable!
3. It can feel a little awkward at first, but with practice we can get better at communicating our boundaries and asking others about their boundaries and comfort levels.