

Creating Healthy Boundaries

IN THE WORKPLACE



Wheeler EAP
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



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Today's Objectives

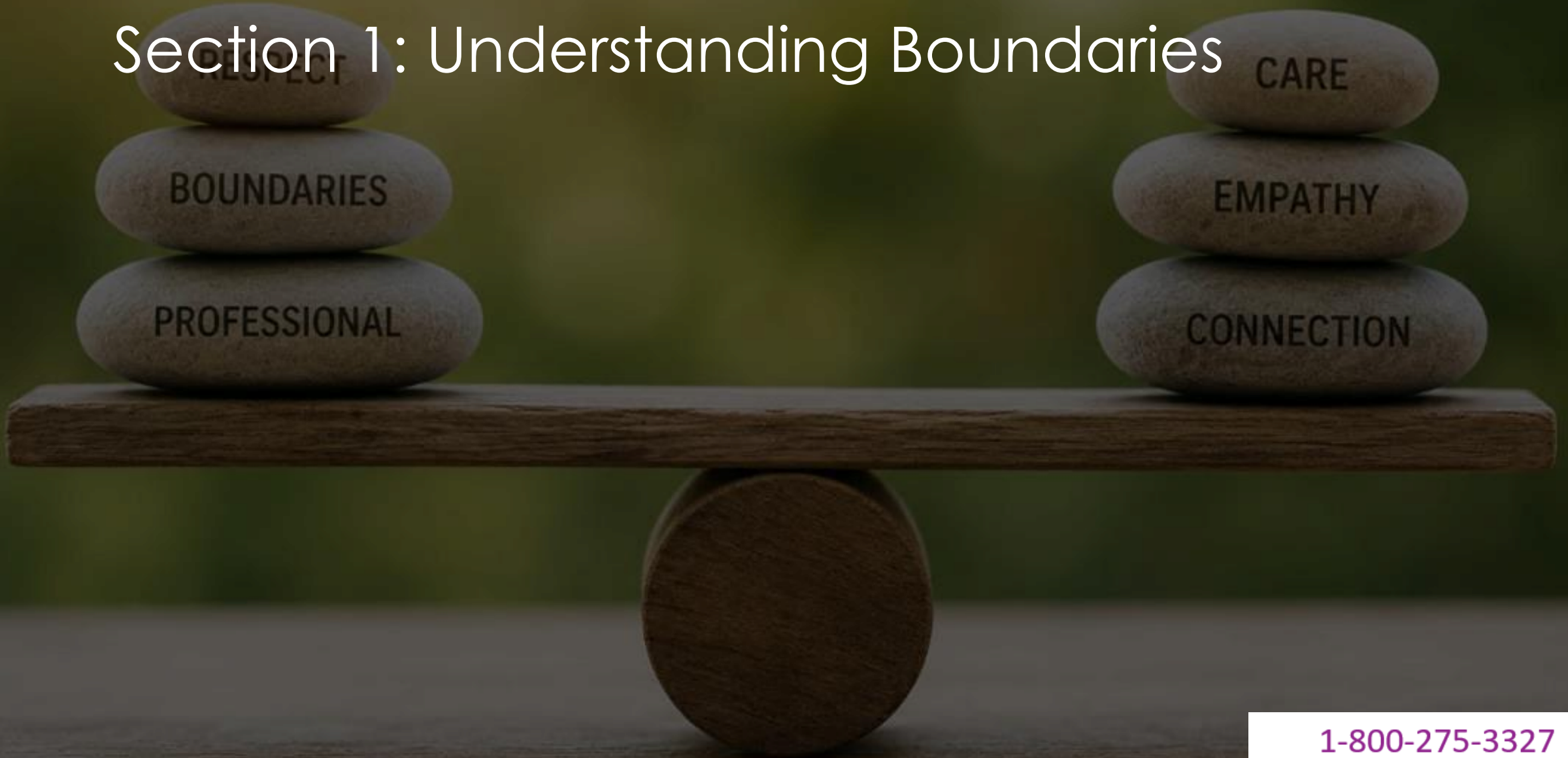
By the end of today's session, you will be able to:

- ✓ **Define** healthy workplace boundaries and why they matter
- ✓ **Recognize** when professional boundaries may be becoming unclear
- ✓ **Understand** the connection between boundaries, roles, respect, and accountability
- ✓ **Identify** the difference between helping and over-accommodating
- ✓ **Use** practical strategies to communicate and maintain healthy boundaries
- ✓ **Know** when additional workplace or EAP support may be appropriate

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Section 1: Understanding Boundaries



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What are healthy workplace boundaries?

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Workplace boundaries are the limits and expectations that help us understand:

- Our roles and responsibilities
- What we are and are not responsible for
- How we communicate with one another
- What is appropriate within professional relationships
- How we maintain respect while working together

Healthy boundaries create clarity.

Why Do Healthy Boundaries Matter?

Healthy workplace boundaries support:

RESPECT

People understand how they should treat one another.

CLARITY

Roles, responsibilities, and expectations are easier to understand.

ACCOUNTABILITY

People can be responsible for what belongs to them.

TRUST

Consistent expectations help create dependable relationships.

WELL-BEING

Clear limits can reduce unnecessary stress, frustration, and resentment.

Boundaries Aren't Walls

Healthy boundaries do not mean:

- Being cold or unfriendly
- Refusing to help others
- Avoiding relationships with coworkers
- Saying “that’s not my job” whenever someone needs assistance
- Becoming overly rigid

Healthy boundaries do mean:

- Being supportive while maintaining appropriate limits
- Communicating expectations clearly
- Knowing when to help and when to step back
- Respecting your role and the roles of others
- Addressing concerns before frustration builds

You can be kind, approachable and supportive and still have boundaries.

When Professional Relationships Become Familiar

Workplace relationships can become comfortable and familiar over time.

Strong working relationships can support:

Trust * Teamwork * Communication * Connection

At the same time, familiarity can sometimes make professional boundaries less clear.



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When Professional Relationships Become Familiar

Healthy working relationships still include:

- Respect for different positions and responsibilities
- Appropriate limits
- Accountability
- Direct and respectful communication

A positive relationship and a professional boundary can exist at the same time.

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Section 2: What Healthy Boundaries Look Like

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Healthy Boundaries in Practice

A person practicing healthy workplace boundaries can say: ¹⁰

“I understand my role.”

“I respect the roles of others.”

“I can ask for help without expecting someone else to take over.”

“I can say no appropriately.”

“I can disagree respectfully.”

“I can be helpful without becoming responsible for everything.”

“I can address a problem without attacking the person.”

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Role Boundaries Matter

"Every workplace includes different roles, responsibilities, and levels of authority."

Healthy role boundaries mean:

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- Understanding what belongs to your role
- Respecting the responsibilities of other roles
- Asking when responsibilities are unclear
- Following appropriate direction and decision-making processes
- Avoiding routinely taking over another person's responsibilities.
- Recognizing that collaboration does not eliminate accountability

Being comfortable with someone does not make their professional responsibilities optional.

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Respect Goes Both Ways

Respecting someone's role does not mean:

- You cannot ask questions
- You cannot offer another perspective
- You must agree with every decision

Healthy boundaries require mutual respect.

Having authority does not mean:

- Your boundaries matter more than someone else's
- Concerns should not be heard
- Respect only moves in one direction

We can disagree while still respecting the person, the role, and the workplace.

Section 3: When Boundaries Become Unclear

When Being “Nice” Becomes A Problem

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Wanting to help others is a strength.

But repeatedly avoiding boundaries to keep the peace, avoid disappointing someone, or prevent discomfort can create problems.

Over time, this may lead to:

- Unclear expectations
- Difficulty holding people accountable
- Repeated exceptions
- Increased dependency
- Frustration or resentment
- Unequal treatment

Helping vs. Over-Accommodating

HELPING	OVER-ACCOMMODATING
Offering appropriate support	Regularly taking over
Being flexible when reasonable	Constantly changing expectations
Helping someone solve a problem	Solving every problem for them
Listening and providing support	Becoming responsible for their emotions
Making an occasional exception	Making exceptions the expectation
Having a difficult conversation when necessary	Avoiding difficult conversations to keep the peace

Ask yourself: ***Am I helping—or am I removing someone else's responsibility?***



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Communication Is a Boundary

Healthy communication boundaries include:

Be direct.

Address concerns with the appropriate person.

Be respectful.

Disagreement does not require disrespect.

Stay focused.

Address the issue without attacking the person.

Know when to pause.

A conversation that becomes unproductive may need to continue later.

Use appropriate channels.

Some concerns belong with a supervisor, Human Resources, or another designated resource.

Disagreement is okay. Disrespect is not.

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Other Boundaries We Encounter At Work

Boundaries can also involve:

PERSONAL INFORMATION

How much we share or ask others to share.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Caring about someone without becoming responsible for solving their personal problems.

PHYSICAL SPACE

Respecting personal space, belongings, privacy, and comfort.

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Email, texting, social media, personal phone numbers, and availability outside regular responsibilities.

Appropriate boundaries may vary by role and situation. Follow your organization's policies, expectations, and procedures.

Signs Boundaries Are Getting Blurred

It may be time to reassess a boundary when:

- You regularly feel unable to say no
- Responsibilities continually shift without discussion
- Someone routinely expects exceptions
- You avoid addressing problems because the conversation feels uncomfortable
- Familiarity makes accountability difficult
- Resentment is beginning to build
- Roles or expectations have become unclear
- You feel responsible for managing another adult's reactions and emotions

Boundary problems are often easier to address early than after they become established patterns.

Section 4: Setting Boundaries

How to Set a Healthy Boundary

1. IDENTIFY

What is creating the problem?

2. CLARIFY

What expectation or limit needs to be clear?

3. COMMUNICATE

Be direct, respectful, and specific

4. OFFER WHAT YOU CAN

When appropriate, explain what you can do, not only what you cannot.

5. BE CONSISTENT

Repeatedly changing the boundary can create confusion.

6. SEEK SUPPORT

Follow organizational policies and ask for guidance when needed.

What CAN a Healthy Boundary Sound Like?

When you want to help without taking over:

"I'm happy to help you think through this, but I can't take responsibility for it."

When an expectation still applies:

"I understand your concern. The expectation still remains..."

When responsibilities are unclear:

"Let's clarify who is responsible for this moving forward."

When communication becomes disrespectful:

"I'm willing to continue this conversation, but not while we're speaking to each other this way."

When you need to say no:

"I'm not able to do that, but here's what I can do..."

SECTION 5

Putting
Healthy
Boundaries

— IN PLACE —



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Scenario: When Kindness Blurs the Boundary

Consider this situation:

A supervisor regularly makes exceptions for an employee because they have a good relationship, and the employee frequently asks for flexibility. Over time, other staff begin noticing that expectations are not being applied consistently.

Think about:

Where has the boundary become unclear?

How could the supervisor remain supportive while restoring accountability?

Scenario: Familiarity vs. Role Respect

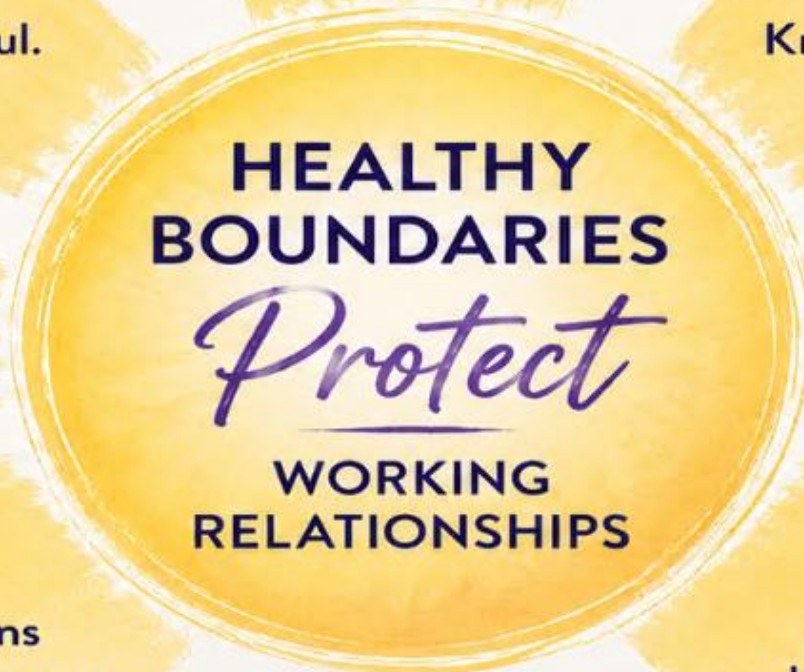
Consider this situation:

Two colleagues have worked together for years and have a friendly, comfortable relationship. Over time, one begins speaking over the other, dismissing decisions, and treating reasonable direction as optional because their relationship has always been informal.

Think about:

What has changed in the professional relationship?

How can they maintain a positive relationship while restoring appropriate boundaries?



Be clear.



Know your role.



Be supportive
without taking over.



Ask for help
when you need it.



Address concerns
before resentment grows.



Respect the
roles of others.



Be respectful.

HEALTHY BOUNDARIES *Protect* WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Healthy boundaries don't *weaken* working relationships.
They help make them *clear, respectful, and sustainable.*



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Need Support?

Connecting With *Wheeler EAP* Is Simple.

Having difficulty with boundaries at work or dealing with something else that is affecting your well-being? **We're here to help.**



Your privacy matters. EAP services are confidential. Your employer is not provided the names of employees or family members who use EAP services.



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