

# “CAN WE CHILL?”: IDENTIFYING AND ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES IN RELATIONSHIPS

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This lesson addresses experiences of known but undisclosed interpersonal boundaries occurring within relationships among Black, same-gender-loving men. Participants are invited to explore and identify their own boundaries, while reflecting on ways to safely express them as needed, while respecting others' boundaries in return.

## KEYWORDS

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Boundaries  
Communication  
Community  
Consent  
Emotional  
Intelligence  
Emotions  
Relationships  
Sexual Health

## THEME

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Family &  
Relationships

## FORMAT

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Workshop

## TIME

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70 minutes



# PREPARATION

PREPARATION

The facilitator(s) should use this section to prepare for the lesson.

## WHY THIS LESSON IS IMPORTANT FOR BLACK MEN

Data from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center ([nsvrc.org/statistics](https://www.nsvrc.org/statistics)) asserts that one in 71 men will experience rape in their lifetime. However, there is no established data regarding how sexual assault is experienced or negotiated specifically by Black men. Lack of consistency around sexual consent laws, as well as limited-to-no same-sex focused consent education create additional challenges for Black SGL men to openly consider when and how their boundaries might get compromised. Facilitated engagement in intentional and explicit conversations about interpersonal boundaries may help normalize consent negotiation among Black SGL men and increase their capacity to seek help when their boundaries have been violated.

### GOAL

Participants will experience an increased capacity to define, communicate, and hold space for others to communicate interpersonal boundaries in relationships.

### OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- Identify and articulate three boundaries they regularly assert or wish to assert within their interpersonal relationships.
- Create one strategy for asserting an interpersonal relationship boundary.
- Express one reason why respecting one's own and others' boundaries is important.

### TIME

STEPS 1-4	Introductions and Opening Activity: "What Are My Boundaries?"	25 min.
STEPS 5-6	Brainstorm Activity: "Exploring Boundaries"	7-10 min.
STEPS 7-9	Independent Activity: "Give and Take"	5-7 min.
STEPS 10-11	Independent Activity: "Give and Take, Part 2"	10-15 min.
STEPS 12-13	Closing Activity	15 min.

## KEY TERMS

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*Adapted from PsychCentral (psychcentral.com/lib/what-are-personal-boundaries-how-do-i-get-some)*

**Material boundaries:** boundaries that relate to the giving and taking of items (e.g., money, car, clothes, books, food, toiletries).

**Physical boundaries:** boundaries that focus on one's personal space, privacy, and body. (e.g., openness to handshakes/hug, feelings about loud music, open nudity, locked doors).

**Mental boundaries:** boundaries that apply to one's thoughts, values, and opinions. (e.g., openness to divergent and/or contradictory viewpoints, aversion to constructive criticism).

**Emotional boundaries:** boundaries that establish one's awareness of distance between their own and others' emotional expression (e.g., crying in front of a partner, openness to or avoidance of outbursts). May also refer to boundaries established in determining one's responsibility for managing their own and/or others' emotions (e.g., comfort/discomfort with taking on a therapeutic role in a relationship, blaming or accepting blame when conflict arises).

**Sexual boundaries:** boundaries that refer to one's sexual behavior, including what activities they might be willing/not-willing to participate in, where those activities may take place, when, how, how much, and with whom.

**Spiritual boundaries:** boundaries that encompass one's spiritual beliefs, practices (e.g., church, meditation), and/or sense of connection with a higher spiritual power.

## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

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This lesson is written for 12 participants and one facilitator. While it can be adapted for smaller groups, it should not be used for groups larger than 15 participants. A second facilitator is encouraged for groups larger than eight participants.

## REQUIRED BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE FOR EDUCATORS

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The ideal facilitator for this activity is a peer who reflects the identities of the men participating in the group (i.e., Black, Same gender attracted/ loving, genderfluid, etc.), particularly someone who can effectively address emotional discomfort among participants. Additionally, having professional and/or personal awareness of specific ways that boundary confusion emerges in same-gender-loving relationships is strongly encouraged.

## FACILITATION PREP

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The facilitator(s) should complete the following tasks before the lesson starts:

- ❑ If space allows, arrange participant seating in a circle or semi-circle. Avoid having any participant sit with their back to another participant.
- ❑ Create a list on newsprint or dry erase board titled “**Boundaries**” with two columns beneath, titled “**Benefits**” and “**Challenges**”.
- ❑ Create a list on newsprint or dry erase board titled “**Closing Activity**” with two fill-in-the-blank statements beneath, titled “**An important boundary for me to set is \_\_\_\_\_**” and “**One boundary I commit to honoring is \_\_\_\_\_**”.
- ❑ Place lists out of sight from participants until you are prepared to discuss them.
- ❑ You will likely move between standing in front of the group and walking around it as participants work. If there is more than one facilitator for this session, try to maintain a balance between speakers.
- ❑ For the Opening Activity, be sure to assess participant mobility ahead of time (and in private, if possible) to decide which version will be used. If pre-assessment is not possible, be prepared to do the alternate opening activity, if necessary.
- ❑ If applicable, prepare a list of referral services offered by your agency, and have copies of it ready to distribute to participants at the end of your session.

## MATERIALS

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The facilitator(s) should have the following materials for the lesson:

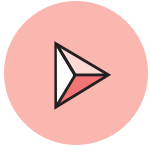
- ❑ Writing utensils (*one for each participant*)
- ❑ Ruled paper (*three sheets for each participant*)
- ❑ Newsprint or dry erase board
- ❑ Two additional sheets of newsprint paper for lists (*see Facilitation Prep*)
- ❑ Permanent or dry-erase markers
- ❑ Colored paper (*one sheet for each participant*)
- ❑ Easel stand or tape (optional)

## HANDOUTS

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Each participant should be provided with the following printed materials:

- ❑ H1, “Give and Take, Part 1”
- ❑ End-of-Session Evaluation



# PROCEDURE

The facilitator(s) should follow the steps in this section to facilitate the session, and use the margin for notes and prompts.



## Introductions and Opening Activity: “What Are My Boundaries?”

### STEP 1

Welcome participants to your session and conduct brief introductions with the group as needed. Review all established group agreements and reaffirm consent from the group. If group agreements have not been completed, please create them at this time (*use the Community Agreements lesson, if necessary*).

### STEP 2



Instruct participants to arrange themselves in a straight line across the room shoulder to shoulder, or in a circle in front of their chairs. Reading the first statement from Facilitator Resource A, “What Are My Boundaries?”, instruct participants to move one step closer to you if the statement applies to them. Wait 3–5 seconds after reading each statement for participants to observe their own and others’ movements. After the time has passed, instruct them to step back to their original position.

### STEP 3

Repeat Step 2 for each of the remaining statements on Facilitator Resource. If there is time, and after all pre-written statements have been read, invite participants to share any additional prompts related to the subject of boundaries that they wish to add. Once all statements have been read, instruct participants to return to their seats.

#### *Alternate Activity:*

Give each participant one sheet of colored paper. For every statement that applies to them, have them raise, and then lower, the sheet.

### STEP 4

Once the opening activity has concluded, proceed through the following Discussion Questions:

1. “What was it like to do this activity?”
2. “As you moved through the prompts what were some of the thoughts that came up for you?”

3. “Were there any prompts that were easier, or more challenging to respond to? If so, why do you think that is?”
4. “Is there anyone who would like to share more about the responses they made to any particular prompt?” (*Feel free to limit or extend the amount of time you give to this question, according to how much time you have for the whole session.*)
5. “Can this activity help us think about our own boundaries, or the boundaries of other people we interact with? If so, how?”



### Brainstorm Activity: “Exploring Boundaries”

#### STEP 5

**Reveal** your prepared list titled “**Boundaries**” (*see Facilitation Prep*). **Instruct** participants to assist in creating a brainstorm list of benefits and challenges related to interpersonal boundaries. **Create** two separate lists according to each category.

#### STEP 6

Once all responses have been shared by the group, **proceed** through the following Discussion Questions:

1. “Looking at this list, would you say that our collective perspective is more common or uncommon? Why or why not?”
2. “What can impact a person’s willingness to accept or negotiate boundaries in a relationship?”
3. “Is there ever a time when negotiating boundaries is not a good idea?”
4. “What’s the best way to communicate a boundary in a relationship?”



### Independent Activity: “Give and Take”

#### STEP 7

**Ask** participants to, by a show of hands, share whether they believe they know what their interpersonal relationship boundaries are. **Explain** to participants that they will now brainstorm an “ultimate list” of relationship boundaries they believe are most ideal for a romantic and/or sexual relationship.

**STEP 8**

**Distribute** a copy of **Handout H1, “Give And Take”** and a writing utensil to each participant. **Read** the instructions on the handout, and then **give** participants 5–7 minutes to complete the form.

**STEP 9**

Once all participants have stopped writing, **proceed** through the following Discussion Questions:

1. “What was it like to do this activity?”
2. “What were some of the thoughts or feelings that came up for you while doing this activity?”
3. “On a scale of 1–10, with 1 being ‘Very Easy’, and 10 being ‘Very Difficult’, how challenging was it to complete this activity, and why?” (*Preface this question by explaining to participants that they need not provide specific information about what they wrote to answer this question, unless they choose to do so.*)
4. “On the same scale of 1–10, how challenging would it be to discuss your list with a potential loved one, friend, or romantic/sexual partner, and why?”

**Independent Activity: “Give and Take, Part 2”****STEP 10**

**Explain** to participants that they will now be challenged to practice communicating their boundaries in a romantic/sexual relationship. **Explain** that this can be done in either one of two ways: written or verbally.

*If they choose to write:*

**Give** participants 2–3 sheets of paper, and then **instruct** them to write a letter to someone either currently in their life or imaginary. In the letter, no more than 2–3 paragraphs, instruct them to express their relationship expectations, the boundaries they discussed in the previous activity, and how they might intend to honor the boundaries of the other person in return.

*If they choose to do the activity verbally:*

**Instruct** participants to prepare a 3–5-minute talk that they would have—again, with someone either currently in their life or imaginary. The talk should proceed in the same way as the letter; however, as an alternative, participants who use the verbal route may also work with another willing participant to discuss their expectations and boundaries using a role play format.

**STEP 11**

After about 10 minutes, reconvene the large group, and invite willing participants to share what they worked on with the larger group. After all volunteers have shared, proceed through the following Discussion Questions:

1. “Any initial comments, questions, or concerns about this activity?”
2. “What would it take for you to feel completely safe to share and express personal boundaries in your romantic/sexual relationships, or in any of your relationships?”
3. “Would you say it is realistic to have your interpersonal boundaries respected in every important relationship? What would it look or feel like to always have your boundaries respected?”
4. “What one lesson, if any, could someone take away from this activity?”

**Closing Activity****STEP 12**

Distribute a copy of the End-of-Session Evaluation to each participant. Allow participants 5–7 minutes to complete the evaluation, and then collect them as they are completed. After five minutes, invite any participants who have not completed the evaluation to do so after the next activity.

**STEP 13**

Reveal your prepared list titled “**Closing Activity**” (see *Facilitation Prep*). Beginning with a volunteer, instruct each participant to respond to the fill-in-the-blank statements you have written on the list.

Once all participants have given responses, thank them for attending, and adjourn the group.





## FACILITATOR RESOURCE A

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### WHAT ARE MY BOUNDARIES?

Directions: See **STEP 2**.

- 1 I believe Boundary setting is an important part of developing relationships.
- 2 I believe individual boundaries can change over time.
- 3 I believe that boundaries can be negotiated when you're interacting with the right person.
- 4 I believe that boundaries should be negotiated when you're with the right person.
- 5 I believe that I have been clear in asserting my boundaries with every friend/hook-up/partner I've ever had.
- 6 I have experienced a moment when I felt that I could not be upfront with someone about my boundaries.
- 7 I have had personal boundaries that have prevented me from connecting with other people in my life.
- 8 I have compromised my values at least once for someone else's benefit.
- 9 I have compromised on my boundaries at least once in a relationship in a way that helped the relationship grow.
- 10 As a general rule, I have firm boundaries around touch and personal space.
- 11 As a general rule, I have firm boundaries about what I will and will not tell others about myself (e.g., health status, SES, Religion, sexual interests).
- 12 As a general rule, I have firm boundaries about other parts of my life that have not been mentioned. *(Invite anyone who responds affirmatively to this prompt to share their boundary area, if they wish.)*
- 13 I have dismissed or disregarded the boundaries of someone else at least once in my life.
- 14 I have had my own boundaries dismissed or disregarded at least once in my life.

