



The 5 Questions Boundary Exercise: Managing Fidelity in Your Relationship by Setting Boundaries

According to Peggy Vaughan, the author of “The Monogamy Myth,” 60 percent of men and 40 percent of women will have an affair at some point in their marriage. The moment we start thinking it can’t happen is when we are most vulnerable. By understanding this startling statistic, we can be encouraged to discuss appropriate boundaries and create an agreement with our partner that can help affair-proof our relationships.

Boundaries can be categorized into two different categories, relationship and personal boundaries. These boundaries make a clear statement about how we want to be treated, what we will tolerate and what we will not tolerate from our partner. Learning to set boundaries is vital to learning how to love and take care of ourselves. It is one of the ways in which we communicate our worth to others. Ultimately, each couple must discuss and agree for themselves what boundaries are appropriate for their relationship.

The 5 Questions Boundary Exercise:

Understanding that you are two different people, with two different sets of values and points of view, you need to be in agreement when it comes to the value you place on your relationship.

For this exercise, you will both need five (5) small pieces of paper and a pen.

Step 1: Each of you will write down five (5) questions you’d like to ask the other person about boundaries. Each question is to be written on a separate piece of paper. When you are done, fold the piece of paper and place it in the container. When both of you are finished, there should be a total of ten (10) questions in the container.

Some examples of boundary related questions are:

- Is it ok to tell a co-worker or friend of the opposite sex, that we are experiencing intimacy problems in the bedroom?
- Is it ok to have an online relationship with members of the opposite sex?
- Can we agree to respect each other’s wishes to stop something that bothers either of us, such as sharing private moments one partner has had with a previous partner?
- Can we agree that losing control of your emotions can scare people, make them feel unsafe, and is unacceptable?
- Is it okay for either of us to go out to lunch or dinner with co-workers and friends of the opposite sex without our partners?

Step 2: Take turns drawing questions from the container. Answer all ten (10) questions to get to know each other's view on each specific boundary issue. Both of you should answer the questions! Set all questions on which you could not reach agreement to the side.

Stop here. Really spend some time discussing boundaries above before moving on to Step 3!

Step 3: Collect all questions that were set aside and take them with you. It's important now that you take the time outside of the visit to have further discussion where there was disagreement. Your goal is to find an agreement to each question. This is the beginning of developing a strong boundaries agreement with which you are both comfortable. Over time, you should revisit your agreement and make changes as necessary.

Activity Take-Away: There is no skill that is more essential to help us relate in a healthy way than setting boundaries. It's important to talk with your partner about what you can do to avoid an affair. This will also help you learn healthy communication skills, how to manage conflict and help you learn to play and laugh together. However, if you don't know how to define and maintain relational boundaries, your relationship will always remain vulnerable.