

# IF THIS WORKS TRAY



What do boundaries mean to you?

Unless clients grew up in an emotionally rich, supportive environment, they often don't have the words even to describe boundaries, much less appropriate ones. The way in which our clients move through the world and bump up against others' needs and wants often leads them into our therapy office.

When discussing boundaries, you want to provide some psychoeducation about what boundaries are and are not, such as "boundaries aren't being mean." This goes for your 7-year-old in your office or your 47-year-old client. We must first know what something is to discuss and learn more about it, which is where the education part comes in for you.

Wondering about how to talk about this?

Go back to the training from Feb of 2024 and you'll see a video and other handouts all about boundaries. Use the resources there to get you started - if you're nervous about introducing this, practice with your friends and family.

Next, after your client understands boundaries cognitively, you want to make it real through the sandtray. Remember, when we put our clients in the sandtray, both sides of the brain can come online, allowing the trauma and real stuff that runs therapy to show up!

First, instruct your client to build a tray about what they learned about boundaries in their family of origin. You can allow them to focus on the most important part from their perspective. Process with them, allowing the client to identify what was actually vocalized vs. what was assumed to be "this is what we do when you're this part of the family."

Next, (this can be in the same session or in the following), have them build a tray about what healthy boundaries look like in their life right now, either with their family of origin or with their current living situation. Highlight what is in the tray and what is not, such as fences, people, or even ways of thinking. Process how they are doing things differently or similarly to what they grew up with, focusing on how they are moving in a positive mental health direction.

Several sessions focusing on boundaries will almost always reap great rewards since they are the blueprint for how we view ourselves in interpersonal relationships.