

ASCO[®]

Resilience Skills Training Program

Session 6: Finding Healthy Boundaries

Facilitator Guide

SESSION 6: Finding Healthy Boundaries

Key points

- Work life and home life competitions happen all the time—they're inevitable.
- What you need is the ability to set boundaries in a way that is healthy, flexible, and realistic. We are looking for balance where we can find it. We want to consider balance between priorities and demands as well as between wants and shoulds.
- One of the big reasons that work life gets pushed forward is our perfectionism—but today we're practicing some skills to deal with that and drawing on the skills we've learned in past sessions. Finding the "good enough" at work can be of service to find more balance in other areas of life.

Timetable & Talking Points:

00:00 – 00:10 **Check-in** = Did anyone have a moment of self-compassion since we met last? What happened? Discuss in pairs for 5 minutes, then ask the group for a couple of examples. Or, simply lead a group discussion.

00:10 – 00:20 **Mindfulness exercise:**

- **Self Pie** = Hand out a paper with a large circle. Ask members to divide the circle into pie pieces that reflect components of their identity, e.g., parent, sister, snow boarder, doctor. Ask that the pieces try and reflect the amount of time spent in each of these areas. Could facilitate by giving some categories to consider from the wheel of life including career, financial, health, family, friends, romance, personal growth, fun & recreation. Then consider one way to increase the lesser pie pieces.
- **Reflect** = Today we're going to be working on ways to set healthy, flexible boundaries between work life and home life. What comes up for you in that realm? What are some examples of work life conflicting with personal life?

00:20 – 00:30 **Learn** = Conflicts, boundaries, perfectionism, and some useful rules!

Why is balancing work-life and personal-life so hard?

- We've gotten into medicine through a dedication to excellence. But, sometimes the dedication can turn into perfectionism.
- Perfectionism is not all bad. Perfectionism can serve us: wanting everything to go just right for your patient is part of being a clinician. But, perfectionism can drive an 'always on, always working' mentality that can undermine your personal life.
- Every career has moments when work-life wants to compete with home life. You can let work-life always win, but the cost is very high—for physicians, it's evident in the high rate of divorce, suicide, and burnout.

How do I know when perfectionism is getting the better of me?

- When you feel weighed down by your goals, instead of motivated and energized by them.
- When you're always dissatisfied with your work, instead of giving yourself credit for small victories.
- When you obsess about tiny imperfections, instead of looking at the big picture.
- When you beat yourself up after every failure and make hard-and-fast rules, instead of looking at failures as inevitable and as learning.

Some useful guidelines

- Try the 80-20 rule. When you're having a moment of work-life and personal-life competition, and need to set a boundary, could you say to yourself, "what's the action that will get me 80% of my goals here?" (And I mean 80% of my work goal AND 80% of my personal goal).
- When you hear yourself in an "all-or-none" position, take a mindful moment. We often give ourselves rules such as, I've got to get everything on my work list done before I leave. That's an all-or-none rule. Try stepping back, and saying "wait, I don't have to follow every rule every time."
- Keep your competing value in mind. What are you managing your work day in the service of—your relationship with your spouse? Your own health? Your responsibility to your kids?
- Sometimes a B+ job is just fine. Notice that at some point on any piece of work, investing more time brings diminishing returns.
- Draw on the other skills we have used: take a mindful moment before you decide, don't expect exact consistency, allow for some compassion towards yourself, and don't catastrophize!

00:30 – 00:50 **Try** = [A writing + pairs exercise] Use the [handout](#) (page 5) to think through a specific example of a work life and personal life conflict and design some ways to have boundaries that serve all the parts of you, that can be flexible, that will help you get to your big goals.

00:50 – 00:55 **Prep** = You finished the last exercise with some ideas to help you work with your boundaries. What can you do to remind yourself, or slow yourself down to think back to all this when you run into a competition? How can you expand into your other identities just a bit more?

00:55 – 00:60 **Check-out** = "One word"

Additional Resources

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A great guide aimed at university students from down under

- http://sydney.edu.au/current_students/counselling/download-docs/learn-to-deal-with-perfectionism.pdf

Article

- https://www.chestnet.org/~media/chesnetorg/Get%20Involved/Documents/archinternmed_2012_Physician_Burnout1.ashx

Handout: Flexible and Healthy Boundaries

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1. Think of a moment from the past week or two when your work life and home life were competing for your time.
2. Look back at what you've written and take a few mindful breaths. Just notice the thoughts, emotions and sensations that appeared as you thought about that work life and home life moment. Just describe, don't judge.
3. Describe your work commitment in a couple of bullets, and then your home commitment.
4. Can you use the "80/20" rule, or the "B+ job is just fine" rule, or the "This is not an all-or-none situation" rule?
5. Discuss with a partner. The next time this work life and home life competition happens, how can you handle it? What's your game plan? Write 1 or 2 things to remember.