

Bulletproof Integrity Group Rules

Adapted from Mark Laaser, *Faithful & True: Sexual Integrity in a Fallen World*, Nashville, TN: 1996.

Building closeness and trust in a group depends on well-defined group rules or boundaries. Boundaries are rules that create safety. A boundary is a way of defining conduct. It is an invisible barrier keeping out dangerous, negative, and destructive behaviors and letting in healthy, positive, and constructive ones.

Most of us have had life experiences in which we didn't feel safe to express our thoughts and emotions. We may have been criticized, judged, or teased. Some of us have participated in groups in which confidences have been violated or where people were angry, judgmental, and blaming.

Whatever our experience, many of us fear participating in a group. We wonder what other people will think. We believe that we need to please them or to prove ourselves. We worry about others gossiping about us and breaking confidentiality.

We want this group to be a much safer place for you, where you can learn to practice being honest and open. You can also try out new and better ways of speaking and relating here.

The following group rules will help us build the kind of trust our group needs.

Group Rules

I will strive to honor and observe the group rules:

1. We practice confidentiality.
2. We aim to be completely honest and make this group safe to be so honest.
3. We welcome feelings of anger, sadness, fear and loneliness.
4. We respect each other and allow for disagreements.
5. We affirm and encourage ourselves and others.
6. We do not put ourselves or others down.
7. We will focus on our own experiences and how we are trying to grow, rather than speaking of others.
8. We do not blame others; we take responsibility for our own actions.
9. We only give feedback when asked.
10. We speak concisely and respect time, so others have a chance to speak.

Your group coach or counselor will help monitor these rules. As the group becomes more comfortable with each other, members will be able to monitor themselves and each other.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is the first rule and the cornerstone of trust in the group. We must agree that we will not share what we hear in the group with anyone outside the group.

You can always share about yourself, however, what you thought and said and learned.

As group members begin to trust each other, the sense of safety will grow.

Safety

Rules 2 through 4 declare that expressing our honest thoughts and feelings is safe. They remind us that emotions are subjective. Our feelings are real to us. Someone else's perception of truth or reality should not prevent us from expressing ourselves.

At the same time, we admit that our perceptions may not be based on reality, so we express it that way: When you say that, this is what thoughts or feelings come up." "This is what seems true for me right now."

We must feel safe to tell who we are and what we feel without worrying about what someone else thinks. Similarly, we are allowed to disagree and we will still give and receive respect.

Support

Rules 5 and 6 reinforce our commitment to be positive and validating to one another. We will not put others or ourselves down since this is unproductive.

Responsibility

Rules 7 and 8 remind us that we are focusing on taking responsibility to improve ourselves. That means not using others' behavior as an excuse to be selfish or irresponsible.

It also means that we don't dwell on discussing what others are doing, which can be a way to avoid facing ourselves. When we speak, we don't talk much about others. Instead, we focus on how we choose to respond to what others are doing.

Feedback

To give feedback is to become a mirror for another group member. Giving feedback means telling another group member only what we see.

Advice or instruction is not feedback (though sometimes advice or instruction is requested).

Getting feedback from other group members will often be vital to us. So often our own perceptions and thinking can be distorted by our faulty beliefs about ourselves and others. Feedback allows us to get a more objective perspective.

Group safety, however, demands that we give feedback only when asked. However vital and wise we think our thoughts and opinions might be, we must be asked for them. Every member of the group deserves the freedom to speak without being lectured to or bombarded with unsolicited opinions.

Time Awareness

Rule 10 also asks that time be shared equally. If you tend to be too talkative, never really getting to the point or never really getting to your true feelings, you will need to learn to be honest and timely, respecting the needs of others.

One suggestion is to avoid telling stories. Just share the basic situation and get to your point.

Questions

- 1. What do you think of these rules for our group?*
- 2. Do you have any other rules you would like to see?*