



B.E.In.G

BOUNDARIES
Enhancing
Individual Growth
TOOLKIT

Gender-Based Violence Prevention

A Project funded by
Women and Gender
Equality Canada through
the Canadian Women's
Foundation



Important Note for the Reader

The basic principles of this Toolkit is that not all suggested activities need to be or should be implemented at once. The reader can go at their own pace. It can also be utilized as a prevention tool.

The Toolkit also provides a list of resources where further support can be found.

Purpose

The purpose of the Boundaries Enhancing Individual Growth Toolkit is to build community capacity and ensure women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities and their allies have the information, tools and support necessary to respond to the increase in violence against this sub-set of individuals exacerbated by the pandemic. It has also been designed as a prevention tool.

Acknowledgement


This Boundaries Enhancing Individual Growth Toolkit was prepared by Vibrant Healthcare Alliance and funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada through the Canadian Women's Foundation COVID-19 Emergency Fund. This Toolkit represents the work of our Peer Support Coordinator Lucy Costa Nyman and her efforts to centralize the experiences of women with disabilities and build community capacity.



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"My boundaries create a safe and peaceful surrounding for myself."

Vibrant Healthcare Alliance

Vibrant Healthcare Alliance (Vibrant) is a not-for-profit multi-service organization with charitable registration status, operating across four sites within the Greater Toronto Area. Vibrant provides healthcare services; health promotion programs to seniors, youths, and people with disabilities; as well as providing supportive housing to people with disabilities operating within an independent living philosophy.

Rationale

The establishment of healthy boundaries defines healthy interpersonal interactions. The erosion of these boundaries, or improperly defined boundaries can lead to interpersonal relationship stressors that can result in violent interactions, especially in relationships including dependent or gender-marginalized individuals. Gender-based violence is a public health issue and is an enduring challenge faced by this sub-set of individuals. The impact on health beyond the direct physical or emotional injury is widespread, long-lasting and can be severe.

Studies have shown persons with disabilities are more likely to experience all forms of abuse which may be attributed to their lack of autonomy in making decisions regarding many aspects of their lives, including their care.

Many times, individuals have multiple barriers which may prevent them from receiving help and support to protect themselves from unhealthy and possibly abusive situations. The reality of being “dependent” on others for essential daily activities increases the likelihood for abuse, including from family members, healthcare professionals and strangers who have legitimate access to their homes and bodies for the provision of intimate personal care or healthcare procedures.

This Toolkit draws on experiences, emerging strategies and practices to educate the reader on creating boundaries and to help mitigate the formation of unhealthy relationships while addressing the psychological and social issues involved in violence against women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities.

Vibrant W.D.A.A.G iT

W.D.A.A.G iT (Women with Disabilities Action Awareness Group in Toronto) is a peer mentoring group at Vibrant Healthcare Alliance operating since 2002.

This collective was formed to fill in a service gap by providing spaces for women and girl identifying individuals with disabilities to develop mentorship, leadership, advocacy and facilitation skills within a peer support environment, creating identity, dignity and pride in uniting.

W.D.A.A.G iT and W.D.A.A.G

W.D.A.A.G is the broader community group for women and girl identifying individuals with disabilities that addresses health determinants through groups, events, workshops, and individual peer support. Fostering peer support spaces for women and girl identifying individuals with disabilities and their allies empowers members, and provides a supportive setting where these individuals are in control of all aspects of their lives, including healthcare. Operating within the guidelines of Independent Living Philosophy, participants are responsible for their own decisions and choices— further empowering themselves.

W.D.A.A.G iT and Take Back The Night (TBTN)

In 2004, W.D.A.A.GiT approached the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre (TRCC) to become involved in the planning of their annual Take Back the Night (TBTN) event and creating a partnership with them. Through volunteers who were trained by women with disabilities within W.D.A.A.G iT and the broader community, the 'A Team' was formed. This ensures accessibility, representation of women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non- binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities within all aspects of this event, and centralizes women with disabilities in a critical role of leadership and advocacy at TBTN building integrity, dignity and unity.

W.D.A.A.G: Reclaims Identity

Women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities believe they have a right to be supported in taking control over every aspect of their lives, including lifestyle choices, healthcare and financial matters.

WDAAG is striving to advocate with and enhance the lives of women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and

other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities through peer support within a non-judgmental environment.

Operating within the Independent Living model, W.D.A.A.G members view disabilities as a part of who we are - not a healthcare issue, while also recognizing and acknowledging that for some of us, our disabilities may/can require medical care.

Virtual Venus/ W.D.A.A.G Connecting Through COVID

Prior to COVID-19

Many of our programs were developed to address isolation for women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals with disabilities.

Since COVID-19

Issues of loneliness and isolation have increased leaving us even more vulnerable.

Communicating and Connecting

New ways of communicating and connecting have entered our daily lives and it has been an adjustment. For most of us, our social networks, sisters, mothers, grandmothers, and friends have gone virtually.

Creating Virtual Venus Worlds

While this type of space brings us together, for others it has left them “spinning” in this virtual universe. Reducing isolation, enhancing safety networks and supporting at this time will bring us together on our virtual journey.

Introduction of Boundaries Enhancing Individual Growth Toolkit

Women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities experience challenges throughout their lives which are not reflected or acknowledged within the broader community.

Their experience of abuse, violence and various forms of trauma are at a much higher rate than Women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living without disabilities.

Along with gender-based violence, they also experience trauma from family members, caregivers, friends, strangers and others, regardless of gender.

With the support of W.D.A.A.G iT Peer Mentors, this Toolkit has been designed to address these issues and support women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities with their journey in recognizing, establishing, and enforcing boundaries as a prevention to experiencing unhealthy relationships and circumstances.



Enhancing Your Skills Around Boundaries Without Self-Judgement

Below are activities for participants to discover, explore and enhance their skills around boundaries and without self-judgements.

Individuals accessing this Toolkit can utilize the following activities to strengthen their boundaries and coping mechanisms:

- Self-Streams
- Self- Streams Insights
- Self-Awareness Strategies
- Gain Limits and Awareness Measures



SS (Self-Streams)

Are participatory activities which participants use to identify and explore boundaries with people and situations within their lives.

SSI (Self-Streams Insights)

Are statements and strategies which participants may find useful and incorporate into their lives.

“Recognizing and respecting my self-worth is the beginning of my new journey.”

.....A woman with disability

SAS (Self-Awareness Strategies)

Are participatory activities which will further increase skills around boundary setting through practice.

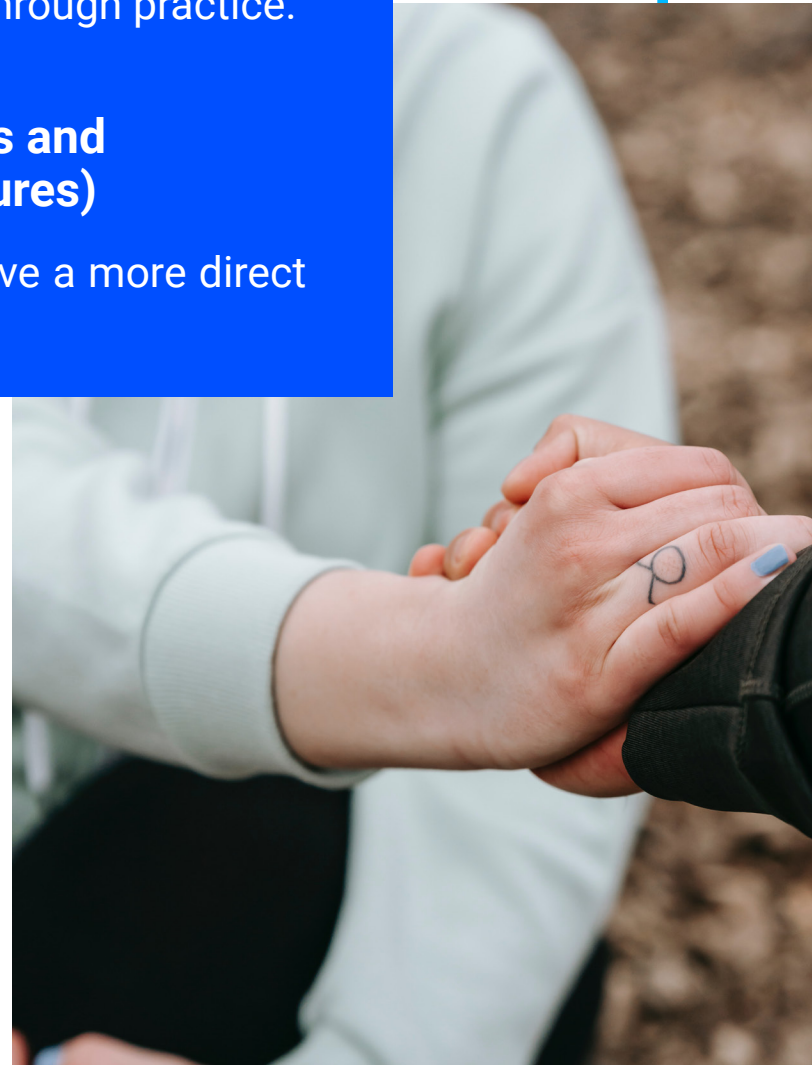
GLAM (Gain Limits and Awareness Measures)

Are interactive activities that have a more direct approach.

W.D.A.A.G Spotlights

Are concrete suggestions/tips for participants to take away and incorporate into their lives.

While utilizing this Toolkit, if at any time you feel you are at risk of hurting yourself, or if someone is hurting you, we encourage you to reach out to someone you trust and/or utilize the resources provided at the end of this document.



“ Resiliency grew, strong through me, while I awaken to being powerful and free. ”



Boundaries

Boundaries and limits in our lives are crucial in keeping us safe. For many women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities, this may not even be on our radar, and therefore we are not taught how to recognize, establish, and reinforce them.

Boundaries are limits to one's personal being (self). This might encompass the following:

- physical
- emotional/mental
- sexual
- spiritual
- social media
- financial
- dating

Please keep in mind that everyone is a unique individual and may utilize components differently in ways which best express themselves.

Boundaries can be like Goldilocks's experience—too hard or too soft. When our boundaries/limits are too hard, it can keep us from establishing positive connections and rewarding relationships.

Communication can be strained, with neither us nor the other person able to relax or be their authentic self—restricting us from being close to people. It is like being surrounded on all sides by a cold brick wall, closing us off to people and experiences that can bring warmth, joy and fulfillment.



When boundaries/limits are too soft, we run the risk of being taken advantage of by people who do not consider our needs/decisions important.

The following may occur:

- We may not be listened to and have people speak over or for us.
- We may be ignored or people may avoid us all together.
- This increases our risk of becoming verbally, physically, sexually hurt and violated.

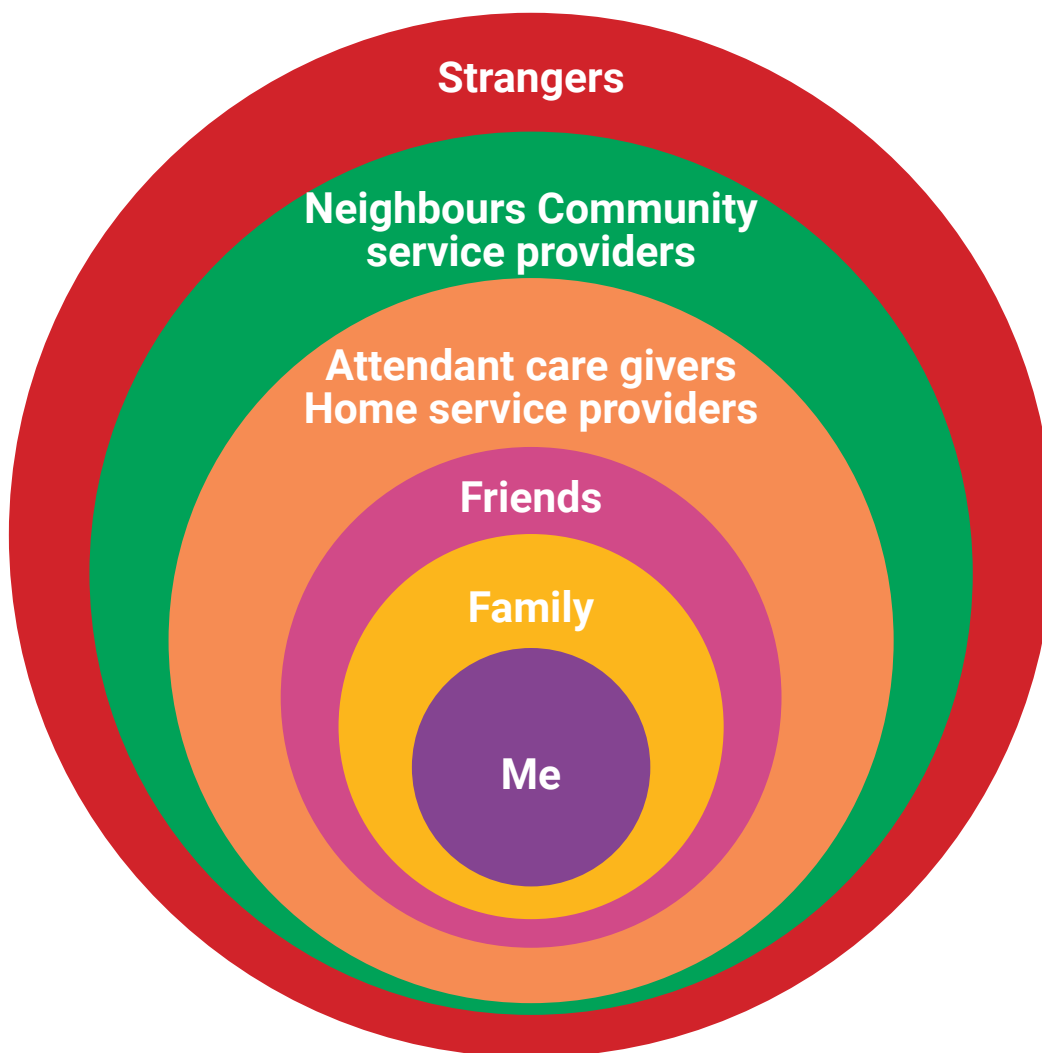
The lack of boundaries/limits in someone's life can be like water being poured and spreading throughout the floor, making it hard to keep your balance and maintain your ground—feeling like your wheels are spinning in place.

What we want is to be in a space/environment where our limits work for us in fostering healthy relationships and interactions.

Having balance in your life and creating the full 'Goldilocks' experience of being/feeling just right!

Social Circles

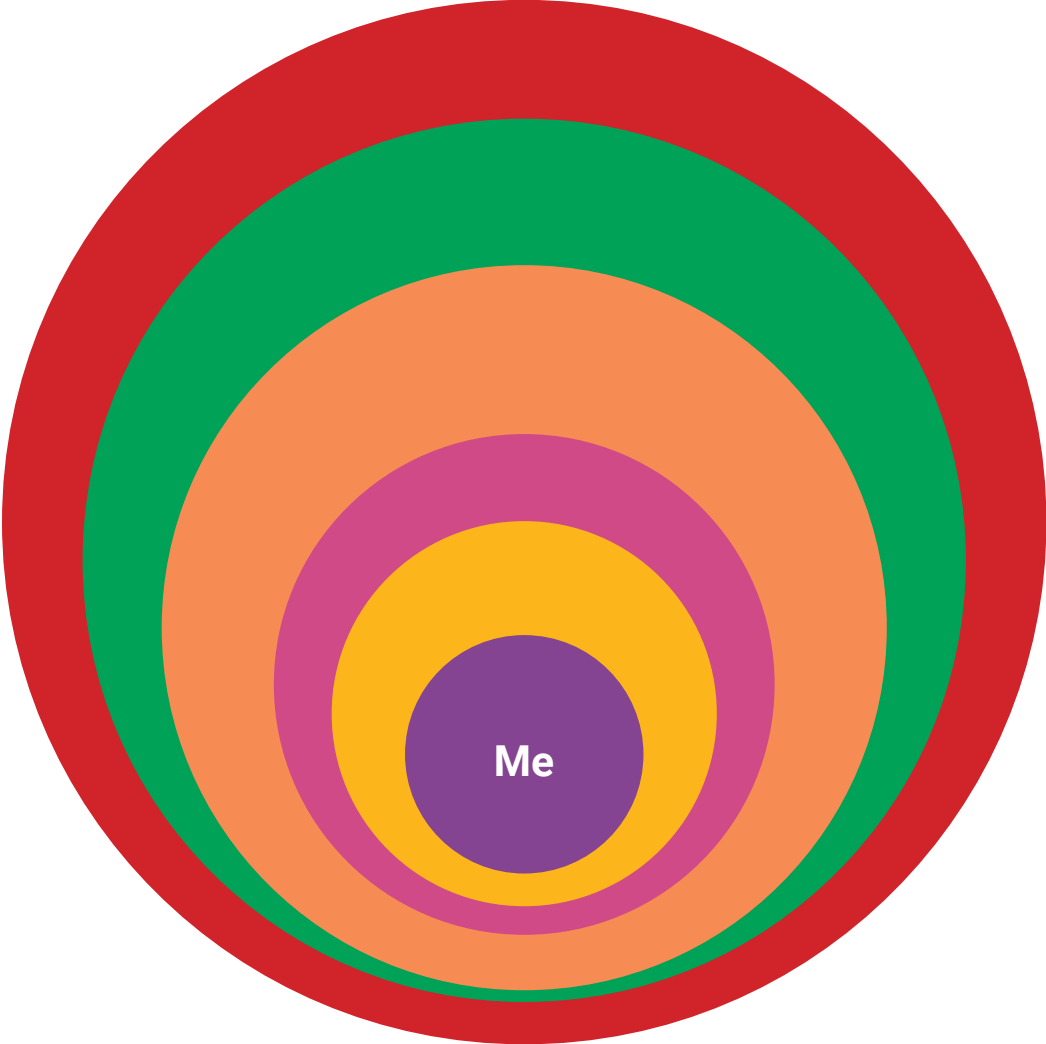
The diagrams below represent your social circles/bubbles and illustrate who is in your life and how close they are to you.



Social Circles/Bubbles Social Circles/Bubbles Social Circles/Bubbles

Friends	Family	Home Service Providers
Neighbours	Personal Support Worker/ Attendance Care	Community Service Providers
Others	Strangers	Others

Build your own Social Circles/Bubbles



Recognizing, Establishing & Enforcing Boundaries

1. Recognize (Notice, Name)

The first step to setting boundaries or limits for ourselves is to define them.

We often do not notice or recognize that our boundaries are not in place. It takes time and attention to identify the things in our lives that do not feel right, or are not working.

Recognizing the issues we face and are dealing with, either with other people or in our environment, takes commitment.

Making the time to recognize or identify these issues or circumstances enables one to take control of the situation.

When we first begin to identify what is required to set boundaries, it can be overwhelming.

Often it will put a “spotlight” on other areas in our lives where we are dissatisfied and/or mistreated.

For women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities, recognizing where boundaries or limits should be created can be scary and intimidating.

This is very common for those who are exploring, recognizing and setting of boundaries or limits must be encouraged to do so without self-judgement.

It will be important to develop strategies which will guide and support this process.



Affirmation



Strength uncovers what is meant to be, revealing a powerful truth which lies in me. It may not be visible; its presence can feel new. Brought in through a moment's rays and captured by few.

Recognizing, Establishing & Enforcing Boundaries

2. Establish (Make, Claim)

Establishing boundaries/limits is the next piece in the puzzle of creating a safe space for ourselves.

Once we recognize/identify the situation in which a boundary needs to be established, we need to:

- Decide what needs to be put in place to make us comfortable within the moment, situation and future interactions we may have.
- This involves bringing awareness to the people in our life with whom boundaries and limits need to be set.
- Inform the individuals of what we need them to do to improve the situation and how we will respond if the behaviour or situation continues.
- This process may take time and patience for everyone involved.

For women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities, this is the time where we can take control in areas of our life where we may feel dissatisfied and/or mistreated.

We should allow for trial and error based on our individual circumstances.



Affirmation



Guided by natural light, a bird sings its plight. The blue jay's song draws me near, feeling my strength, I no longer fear. I won't allow 'them' to clip my wing, my body is not their puppet on a string.

Recognizing, Establishing & Enforcing Boundaries

3. Enforce (Action, Proclaim)

There might be an adjustment period for individuals with whom we have set boundaries/limits, as well as for ourselves.

It is important to allow for this time to respond to missteps [forgetting boundaries].

People in our lives will cross and challenge our boundaries, and may not listen to us.

- Be patient during this time of enforcing boundaries.
- Remember this is a process which will develop over time.

It will be up to us to follow through with enforcing the decisions [boundaries/limits] we have made.

- Take the necessary steps to let people in our lives know the situation needs to be changed. If things do not go the way that we wanted, it is not our fault.

- Continue on this course once the journey has begun and do not fall into the trap of self-judgement

If this behaviour/situation continues after we have addressed it, we can include setting a 3-strike policy (this means reminding them 3 times that they crossed our boundaries before taking actions).

- When people in our lives do not listen to or respect our choices/lifestyle, they are crossing our boundaries. It is important to follow through with the limits we have set, enforcing our boundaries. It may take a few tries, but clear messaging and repetition will support us in establishing our boundaries. Name, claim, and proclaim our boundaries!



Affirmation



The little girl I used to be, has grown beautifully into a 'tree'. Curved limbs unique and strong. With branches reaching out, proud and long.

Setting Boundaries in All Aspects of Life

You may want to consider setting the following boundaries: Physical, Emotional, Mental, Sexual, Spiritual, Social Media, Financial, and Dating.

There is no boundary that is ever 100% set in stone. Boundaries may conflict with other aspects of your life. When this happens, you can change them any time you feel it is necessary.

Physical

Of all the boundaries you have set, your physical boundaries may be one of the most important ones.

Physical boundaries will include:

- your personal space
- your body
- your personal belongings
- how you receive care
- This can also include our personal relationships and the degree of physical closeness we allow

We are responsible for these decisions. If something does not feel right, then it may be time we can consider making a change.



Making changes can take some self observation and time. Identifying what needs to be changed is the first step.

- Is it about the people around you? The items that you own? It could be the way in which someone is providing care for your daily needs.
- It could also be that you're not comfortable with the way the people in your life physically interact with you.
- This may include a romantic partner, family member, personal support worker, or friends.

Once we have identified the source of discomfort in our physical surroundings, this could be an indication that changes need to be made.



What Needs to Change



Making a list either mentally or physically on paper is the most common option, but there are many other ways to come up with ideas. Choose one that feels right.

Once we have decided on an action plan, it is time to discuss those plans with the person or people that will be affected by these changes. For example, if it is a change in routine, a parent or a personal support worker may be impacted. Make sure all individuals who will need to know the boundary are informed of the new boundary and understand it. Ideally, they will be willing to work with the new changes.

It is important to also inform these people that there could be consequences if they overstep the boundary, but we are willing to give them a grace period of a predetermined amount of time. A helpful trick to remember these changes could be setting up mental cues to remember the boundary that has been established.



Remember, we are in charge of the boundaries set and whether or not they are working for us. Communicating by indicating our discomfort is the first step.

One way of communicating our discomfort maybe by saying, "I'm not comfortable with the way this is being done."

It's also important to set boundaries around our personal items in our homes such as clothes, appliances, phones and so on. People must treat these items with as much respect and care as if they were their own. Decide who can touch our personal items, and under which circumstances.

If someone wishes to borrow/use something that belongs to us and we agree, set a time frame in which that person needs to return it. Make sure the person understands that they are being entrusted with an item of value and they will be held to their word. Let them know what the consequences may be if they don't return it, or if they won't listen to us when asked not to touch our belongings without permission.



Emotional/Mental

Another area we may want to set boundaries is our emotional/mental well-being.

When setting boundaries in this area, pick a time when we feel we can focus on the task. Then identify the things that have a negative impact on us. This can be verbal messages/words towards us, violating our privacy, not having our physical or emotional needs met, or having our emotions/concerns dismissed. For example, someone reading our diary or journal without our permission is an invasion of our privacy. Another example is coming into our space without knocking!

When our emotional/mental well-being is affected, it can be difficult to feel empowered in our lives. Even daily activities can be challenging to accomplish. This also impacts our self-respect and ability to perform self-care.

Emotional interactions with people are an essential piece of our day to day lives. Regardless if it's a family member, a romantic partner, a care provider, or a friend. If interactions feel emotionally draining and are not mutually respectful, this can be hurtful, not meet our needs, and have a negative impact on us.

Setting boundaries with other people around our emotional/mental well-being is essential. It is also important to note that a situation might affect us mentally and may not always be externally visible.

The process of setting emotional and mental boundaries will take time and patience from all sides.

Communicating with the individuals in our lives can help develop a mutually respectful relationship over time.

Our thoughts, opinions, and emotions are ours alone and what we share with others is our choice.

Once we have decided what we want to do, we can ask ourselves if it is a positive (helpful) or negative (not helpful) response to this situation.

If we receive a negative response, think about who (a confidante) we might be able to talk to about it so that we may turn a negative response into a positive one. This could be a friend, a teacher, a parent, or a counsellor. It is important to let our confidantes know this must be confidential.



Take a Mental Health Break

Taking a mental break is a self-care practice.

These are things we do for ourselves which foster relaxation and put our minds at ease.

In this Toolkit, we call them Strength Offering Strategies [S.O.S]. These promote self-care and reduce our stress levels.

There are many types of practices which may include things like:

- taking some time to ourselves
- meditation
- reading, or listening to music

These strategies will strengthen and refocus us when feeling overwhelmed.



Sexual

Sexuality is fundamental for all human beings, including women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities.

Society has increased the vulnerability for this population by not providing access to information, assuming we are either asexual (does not experience sexual attraction), heterosexual, or uninterested in our sexuality.

Our bodies have also been medicalized, viewed by multiple people, leaving us with little to no privacy.

This makes it challenging to identify and develop boundaries for ourselves.

Boundaries around our bodies and choices are critical to our self-worth and integrity. The mantra of “My body, my choice” comes to mind and is crucial.

Women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities are encouraged to develop a relationship with our bodies.

This will foster respect, integrity, identity and ownership of ourselves as sexual human beings.



As individuals who rely on other people to provide our personal care, we need to be aware that there will be different boundaries for different people in our lives.

While it may not always be easy deciding who to let get close to us, it is absolutely our right to establish boundaries around our sexuality and bodies.

This enables us to set a standard for how others treat us with the respect we deserve.

When someone says or does something we don't feel comfortable with, communicate it to them if possible. If not possible, reaching out to someone we trust, who will support us in addressing these issues is another possibility. We may also want to consider contacting a neutral person, such as someone from any of the resources listed at the end of this document.

Sexual boundaries are an individual and personal choice, and communication is essential for healthy human interactions. Identify what we are not comfortable with; be clear about what will happen if this doesn't change. Setting boundaries takes practice, courage, and we must never judge ourselves. It's also the only time that the three-strike rule does not/ need not apply and remember sexual abuse is a crime.



Spiritual

For some people, a spiritual belief system is very important. For others, this is not important at all. Either way, this is an individual, personal/private experience, and our beliefs are ours alone. Some people find spirituality in traditional religious practice, others find it in the world around them and their experiences with humanity and nature, while others do not have the belief in a spiritual existence.

We may practice differently than what we were raised in for e.g. no longer going to church every Sunday and that is fine.

For some people, going to religious establishments creates a sense of community while others may see it as an obligation.

Our understanding and relationship with “spirituality” is private and intimate.

Spirituality doesn't just happen in a religious establishment; it can happen all around us.



Social Media

We have the right to be active on social media (Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Instagram etc.).

However, not all social media is 100% safe and confidential for us to use and it's important to determine what would make it as safe as possible.

We may want to decide for ourselves or with the people around us what safety precautions we can take.

Once we have some ideas, it's time to decide what is right for each of us.

- A good first step is to not add people we don't know, and restrict what people can view. The decision is up to each of us.
- Another important note is to not share passwords or login information. We need to determine how and what we share. This is for our benefit and safety. Establish what rules we want to enforce on our pages and what we will tolerate. Decide who will have access to our pages and what kind of access they will have.

- Make sure anyone who can access our social media is a trusted person in our lives, and be mindful of what is posted.
- Once we have communicated our boundaries and what we expect from people to keep ourselves safe online, it is appropriate to also mention what will happen if people betray our trust. It is also very important to stick to our boundaries once they have been communicated.
- We may want to re-evaluate our relationships with people. This may be where we will want to enforce extra boundaries. We may decide to talk to the person who has broken our trust and we may not decide to. How we handle it is our choice.



Financial

For women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities, learning how to manage money, pay bills, and budget is a critical piece to becoming independent.

Often, we hand over our financial power to people we trust. There must come a time when we are in control of our finances.

The following are what we should think about when it comes to finances:

Financial Commitments – budget to be able to afford the essentials - rent, food, bills, and other necessities.

Financial Freedom – budget to be able to afford more than just the essentials.

Financial Security - budget to plan for future comfort and stability.

Rainy Days – budget to allow unexpected events for e.g. the need to purchase a new bed or appliance.

Occasions – budget to be able to afford gifts for birthdays and celebrations (if they are important to us).

Online Banking and Credit Cards - it is critical to secure our online banking and credit card information, including our Social Insurance Numbers.

We may want to talk to our banks about how to ensure this information is safe and secure. Be certain that whoever is supporting us (if anyone) can be trusted.

Financial Goals - we may want to plan for a goal for e.g. a vacation or a new TV. Putting away a small amount of money each month can support us in this goal.



Whatever the goal is, it is important we understand the responsibility of managing our money is ours. Do not get frustrated if this goal isn't reached in the time frame we may have set for ourselves - just reset! If there comes a time where we need to ask for financial support, there should never be any shame in doing so.

Many people at one time or another are in tough financial situations.

The following are suggestions:

1. Ask someone trusted
2. Discuss the expectation/agreement (if any) of paying it back.
3. Be clear and transparent if the expectations or agreements may not be met on time.



Dating

Whether you're entering the dating scene at 16 or 86, there are rules for safety.

In today's world, this includes in-person and virtual dating.

In-Person Dating

Do...

- Be aware of your surroundings - choose a public place that you're familiar with, and have a backup plan if you wish to leave early.
- Tell a friend where you are going so that someone knows where you are.
- Keep your cell phone charged and with you at all times; have a "distress signal" with a friend you trust. Think up a code word or phrase between the two of you, so that if you want to leave that situation you can do so discreetly.
- Make sure your friend knows to meet you at home or to come and get you.

Don't...

- Reveal personal information such as your address, Social Insurance Number, credit card information, and whether you live alone or not. Remember, this is the beginning of you dating this person and less is more.
- Leave your drink unattended
- Leave personal items unattended - purse, bag, cell phone, etc.



Do...

- Plan your ride home - call a ride-sharing service or keep the exact bus fare in your purse just in case you need it. If you have arrived with an accessible transportation system where you cannot leave before a scheduled time, (for e.g. wheel trans) plan a way in which you can occupy yourself, such as talking to a friend over the phone until the ride comes.
- Be cautious with what you say - ask yourself "Am I okay with this person knowing this about me if I never see them again?"

These are things to consider while dating – having fun and staying safe!



Don't...

- Put yourself in a dangerous or threatening situation - trust your instincts
- Go off alone with someone you don't know - if possible, you might consider planning a "group date" with friends - safety in numbers!



Virtual Dating

Whether it's work-related or social, most of our lives are conducted virtually these days (COVID) and this includes virtual dating.

While many of the same rules from above apply in online dating, keep in mind that you won't be able to get the same information or pick up on the same cues as you would with in-person dating.



Do...

- Be aware of your surroundings - chatting online to somebody often gives us a false sense of security, as you might feel at ease at home. If you choose to do a video chat, be mindful of where you are - try not to show any personal items that could indicate where you are. If you're chatting from home.
- Use your screen name or online handle for the first few conversations until you get to know the person better, then you can decide if you want them to know more about you.
- Trust your instincts - just like dating in-person, listening to yourself is just as important. If something doesn't seem right during the conversation, or you get a bad feeling, don't hesitate to get out of the situation.

**Don't...**

- Give out personal information - Social Insurance Number, credit card, address, etc.
- Post revealing pictures - before you get ready to post something on a website, ask yourself, "Is this something I'm comfortable with people seeing?" Also, assess how well you really know the people you associate with on these sites.
- Trust everything people say in online chats - people can stretch the truth or be dishonest on these sites. Not everyone you meet will want to deceive you, but be aware of those who do, and if something doesn't seem right, or ring true, recognize that it probably isn't.
- Have in-person meetings until you feel the time is right (do not be pressured). With the Internet, it may seem to bring everyone closer together; this can be deceiving. As much as you may think you know someone online, recognize that building relationships takes time, and don't rush into things too quickly.

Self Awareness Activities

1. Who Am I?
2. A.I.D. "Bridges"
3. Junk M.A.I.L.(D)
4. Rubber Band Land
5. Rocking the "Boat"
6. Smooth S.A.I.L.
7. Cross-R.O.A.D.
8. Road M.A.P.
9. Red Flags
10. Building Your Own S.O.S



Who Am I?

As women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities, our individuality is informed by life experiences and factors which influence our perception and the way we view the world.

One individual commented: “As a young girl, I was aware of these layers of my identity: a female who was ethnic European and had a physical disability. At a young age, I was attuned to how these influenced my experiences every day. I struggled with living in a society which didn’t value my gender, had little tolerance for my parents’ broken English, and had absolutely no understanding of disability.



My immediate environment (home) indirectly taught me to challenge others and to expect to be treated with respect and dignity. Even though my family held on to ‘societal views’ of gender and ableism, they instilled in me a strong sense of justice; an expectation that I must be treated with respect and dignity. This enabled me to challenge not only others, but also the system.”

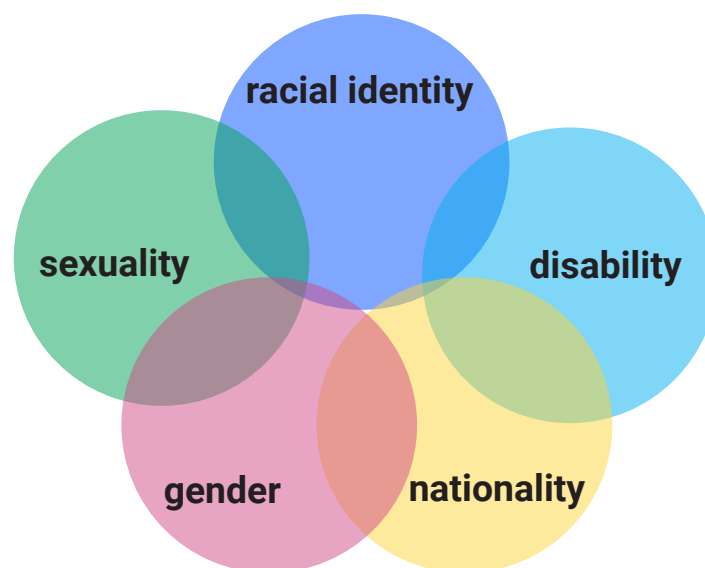
Intersectionality takes into account people’s overlapping identities and experiences in order to understand the complexity of prejudices they face.

“Through negative experiences as a child, mostly with the medical system and ableist attitudes, I often felt I had to be my own ‘cheerleader’.”

Our layers of identities should be celebrated and valued. Many times, it is left up to us to “cheerlead” for ourselves.

Contributing to our uniqueness are: family, disability, race, ethnic identity, gender identity, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status.

It can also be described as the many layers of our identity.



Self-Stream

Consider various ways in which your identify is layered and how it has influenced and shaped your individuality.

For example

Identity	Influence
1. Being a girl	1. Living in a male dominated society left me feeling unequal
2. Being a girl of European descent	2. Felt that I had to work twice as hard to be taken seriously
3. Being a girl of European descent with a disability	3. Felt invisible in society

What makes you who you are

Identity	Influence

We should be proud of our identity with its layers.

Honor all of who you are and the layers that make you an individual.

For example

- Connect with the unique ways your body moves
- Enjoying meals from your culture
- Dancing in your wheelchair



Exercise

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.





Once in a while, spread out those colorful layers, which make you unique.

A.I.D “Brigades”

Assisting, Independence, Devices

Many women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities use various assistive devices (A.D.). Our aid ‘brigade’ (team) may include wheelchairs, canes, crutches, walkers, hearing aids, Augmentative Assistive Communications (AAC), service animals, to name a few examples.

While our ableist* society views A.D.s in a less than appealing light, for some of us, they are an extension of who we are; supporting and enhancing our daily lives. It should be an expectation for the people in our lives to treat our ‘brigade’ with respect.

*ableism is discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities.

Respect, Dignity and Trust

Mutual respect is a two-way street and the foundation of all healthy relationships. People want to be visible, listened to and valued.

For women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities this can be overlooked.

People in our lives should and must treat us with respect, dignity and trust. We also must do the same.



Self-Stream

For the following three (3) words in column, write how you want to be treated, and how you treat others:

Words	You	Others
1. Respect		
2. Dignity		
3. Trust		



Junk M.A.I.L.E (D)

Messages Alter Internal Lasting Dialogue

People in our lives and society have assumptions about us based on false stereotypes which we internalize. As women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals living with disabilities, we receive these messages and “download” them, where they slowly spread undetected creating “viruses.” This filters through our minds and bodies—leaving us with a distorted view of ourselves.

Learning how to sift through our internal dialogue “inbox” without judgment is important. This will allow us to clear out the “junk mail” that has no purpose but to take up space. We can restore ourselves by “deleting” the “viruses” others and society have placed within us over time.

Living in a society that often has negative assumptions of people living with disabilities, we have to learn to challenge people and their messages.

We may have to check-in with ourselves every once in a while and review our inbox and toss out the junk mail in the trash for good.



Self-Awareness Strategy - Choose to Challenge!

Choose a number from 1-5 There are no right or wrong answers.

1. Growing up as a person with a disability, I believed other people knew what was best for me.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Not Sure	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

2. As a person with a disability, I didn't think I would ever be employed.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Not Sure	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

3. Many times it's easier on others when I do not say what I think or want.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Not Sure	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

4. Many times it's easier on others when I do not say what/how I feel.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Not Sure	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

5. It's easier to wait to have my physical needs met rather than ask for assistance/support.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Not Sure	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

6. I don't think I will ever be in a romantic relationship.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Not Sure	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

7. I cannot rely on myself to stay safe.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Not Sure	Sometimes	Often	All the Time



Go through your responses and if you chose 3, 4 and 5, ask yourself the following:

1. How long have I thought/believed this?
2. Where did I receive this message and from whom?
3. Why do I believe this?
4. Does this message make me feel good about myself? If the Answer is NO, choose to challenge it!

Self-Stream Insight

Recognize	the message you received are not facts
Review	what your beliefs are about yourself and where they came from
In-box	identify the messages you have and why you have them
Junk-Mail	delete all messages that do not serve you or bring you value
Trash	Wipe them from the trash



W.D.A.A.G Spotlight

What you do with junk mail (message you receive from people and society):

**RECOGNIZE, REVIEW,
DELETE, WIPE COMPLETELY.**

Rubber Band Land

As women, girls, trans, two-Spirit, non-binary individuals and other marginalized genders living with disabilities, we may often feel like a rubber band - bending, twisting, and stretching.

This can express itself in the following ways:

“Bending”

Doing things that didn't feel natural to my body and was meant to “help” me.

Example. Pretending I was ok after a difficult physical procedure.

“Twisting”

Hiding feelings to protect others or for fear of being labelled “too emotional.”

Example. Not expressing how I really felt.

“Stretching”

Being told I was overreacting or lying to issues or situations which were affecting me.

Example. Not being believed when I was telling the truth made me doubt myself.



Although many times, these situations were unavoidable, without any intention to cause discomfort or harm, I was left feeling scared, invisible, and without any control over my situation (disempowered).

I, L.A.N.D.

We have all lived through challenges and difficult situations.

Much like a plane after going through turbulence and landing is grounded, we can also ground ourselves and feel safe.

Self-Stream 1

The following activity will support you to become grounded (land) by beginning the process of setting boundaries/limits with people in your life:

(L)iving your truth will create opportunities for you to land firmly where you want to be in life - grounded, secure in your decisions/choices and owning them. This is an essential piece to setting boundaries.

Ask yourself...

Do I feel respected?

Yes No



(A)sserting yourself is a part of the process in setting boundaries. Identify clearly, first with yourself and then with the individual you want set it with.

1. What do I want from the other person?
2. How do I want to be treated?
3. What needs to change for this to happen?
4. What will happen if they don't listen to me?

(N)otice after you have set your boundary and communicated it to the individual, whether there has been a change.

If there has not,

- repeat your boundary 2 or 3 times before enforcing the action you have established.
- has the situation improved, has it remained the same or has it become worse since the boundary was set?

Check the response below

Improved

Stayed the same

Became worse

(D)isengage (separate) from the person if their behavior continues. Depending on who they are, it may be impossible for them not be in your life. Work towards limited interaction while reinforcing your boundaries.

Self-Stream 2

Identify three (3) things that can support you to disengage/separate from this person.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Name three (3) people in the community that can support you.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



W.D.A.A.G Spotlight

Live your truth, Assert yourself, Notice if there is a change, Disengage when possible and LAND!

Remember if your safety is at risk, reach out for help immediately.

Rocking the “Boat”

Uncharted Waters

We were often told not to “rock the boat” or “make waves” (saying or doing things that will make “trouble” or change something) in order to keep things the way they are. Individuals who may say this could be parents, service providers, teachers, healthcare professionals, doctors, nurses, or anyone we interact with.

When it comes to asserting ourselves, we must rock the boat! Creating limits for the way we are treated and how care is provided to us is our right. “My body, my choice over who does what, when, and how.” This includes our possessions (things) and the choices we make.

Establish Your Limits

Key pieces to establishing or creating your limit are identifying and communicating it to the person.

1. Identify: I need my parent/attendant to not come into my space without knocking.

2. Make a clear statement of what the limit is, why you are setting it, and what you expect from now on.

Example: “This room is my private space. Please knock and wait for me to respond before entering.”



There may be times when the person forgets and needs to be reminded. This is understandable since what you are probably trying to change has been happening for a long time.

Enforce Your Limits

Often people, including loved ones, will question and resist the limits we have set. It can be as subtle as pretending to forget, creating ripples that turn into waves. Or directly telling us they won't listen to or respect our limits, leaving us drifting with the waves and possibly brewing towards a storm.

People will resist/push back when we first begin establish limits, "testing the waters." It's important for us to remain calm and on course, until reaching the shore.

Self-Stream Insight

1. Be clear with yourself about what your limit/boundary is.
2. Have a way of creating a record of the boundary either by writing it down, voice recording, or another system which will work for you (Identifying an object that can help in remembering until someone you trust can write it out).
3. Practice stating your limit in a mirror, with a friend, or with someone you trust.

Tell the person why you're setting a limit, what it is, and what you expect going forward. Make clear what will happen if they continue to ignore or resist your limit (Must be something you will follow through).



Creating a Smooth 'Sail'

Self-Awareness Illuminating Life

Boundaries prevent us from sailing away in any direction the wind decides to blow (people treating us however they want). We can anchor our boat by asserting boundaries when stormy weather is brewing. Being aware of our reactions will support us to clearly communicate, assert our limits with others and by passing the storm.

Self-Stream

The goal of this next stream is to further practice identifying feelings and reactions you may have when interacting with others; gently rocking your "boat" into balance.

Notice how you feel in the moment when someone is or has disrespected your limit/boundaries.

1. Is your body tense or relaxed?
2. Are your thoughts racing or calm?
3. Is your mind cluttered or clear?



Self-Stream Insight

We are responsible for steering our own ship, boat or yacht.

The way in which we respond to people, issues, and situations can either reduce or add to our stress. The following are relaxation techniques which have been used for centuries. These can further support you in controlling your reactions and responses while you are in a stressful or confrontational interaction.



1. Utilizing the Breath:

- Take a slow deep breath in and count to 5.
- Then breathe out and count to 5.
- Repeat this 5-10 times.

An alternative to breathing is focusing on an object or sound in the moment to help calm down and gather your thoughts.

2. Internal Thoughts:

- Notice if your thoughts are racing or scrambled (this can happen in stressful situations). If they are, slow them down by focusing on what you are experiencing here and now.

An alternative can be focusing on an object or sound in the moment to help calm down and gather your thoughts.

3. Relaxing your Body:

Everyone's bodies are different, which makes you the expert on what is best for yours.

- Relax your body.
- Bring your breath into a rhythm that is right for you.
- Focus on the moment.



Quick Tip

Do not judge or compare yourself to how you think you should be doing in this exercise. It takes time, patience, and practice. You can begin to clear your mind and calm yourself in order to achieve your goal and prepare you for the next storm you may encounter.



W.D.A.A.G Spotlight

Be aware of your breath, focus on an object, and stay in the moment.

Don't compare yourself to anyone else. Don't judge yourself. Be patient with yourself while doing the practice.

Cross-R.O.A.D

Resiliency on Asserting Decisions

As we have discussed above, it can be challenging when boundaries are first established. Enforcing the limits we set for ourselves is important if we want them to be respected. When people in our lives keep pushing our limits after we have stated them 2-4 times, we are at a crossroad.

Crossroads are critical times where we either give in to people around us or enforce our boundaries.



G.L.A.M. (*Gain Limits and Awareness Measures*)

Choose a number from 1-5; 1 being the least and 5 being the most to answer each question. **There are no right or wrong answers.**

1. How many times have I asked/reminded them of what I want/
need/expect?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Not Sure	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

2. Am I feeling stuck in this situation/relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Not Sure	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

3. Do I want to end this situation/relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Not Sure	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

Go through your responses and if you chose 3, 4, and 5, you may want to consider making a change to further enforce your boundaries.



W.D.A.A.G Spotlight

Be resilient, patient with yourself,
and assert your decisions.

Remember if your safety is at risk, reach out for help immediately.

Road M.A.P.

Must Assert Privacy

For many women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender marginalized individuals living with disabilities, privacy is always an issue and in some circumstances, is non-existent. Beginning with our bodies and continuing with people making verbal comments on all aspects of our lives. Lack of privacy extends to personal items and space including the way we choose to live our lives and choices we make.

Privacy is an innate right; it's critical in developing personal growth and vital to our sense of integrity. When it comes to asserting our right to privacy, boundaries should be established with family members, friends, service providers, attendants, etc.



G.L.A.M

Gain Limits, Awareness and Measures

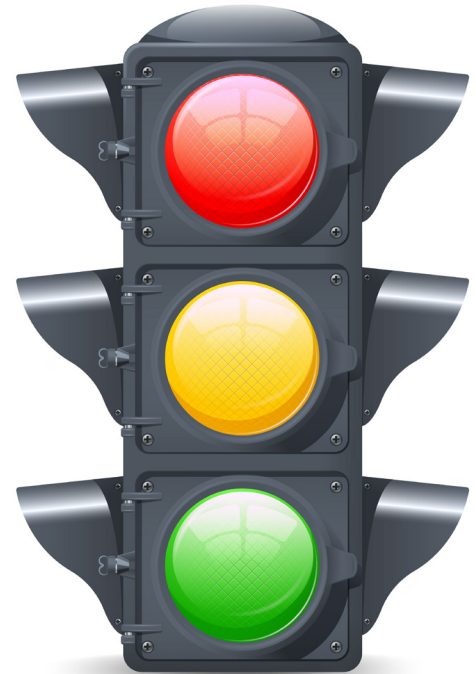
Utilize the traffic light system below by placing each area in your life under one of the lights to indicate where privacy is working for you or not:

Indicators:

GREEN Light - Limits are not needed at this time

YELLOW Light - Explore setting a limit

RED Light - Set limits now



GREEN
(Great)

YELLOW
(OK)

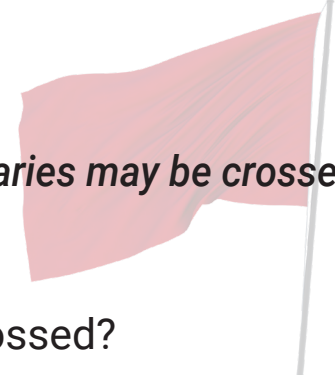
RED
(No)

- Personal Space (Bedroom, Time for Self)
- Personal Items (Cell phone, kitchen utensils, clothes)
- Body (The way your care is provided, who is providing it)
- Lifestyle choices - how you live, what you wear, appearance and people making comments about the choices identified above

If you are in the yellow or red light, you may want to consider connecting with resources/someone for support.

Red Flags

A Red Flag is something that indicates when your boundaries may be crossed



Self-Awareness Strategy

How do I know my limits (boundaries) have been crossed?

Choose a number from 1-5 with 1 being the least and 5 being the most to answer each question. **There are no right or wrong answers.**

1. How many times during my interactions with a family member do I feel uncomfortable?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Not Sure	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

What happens to make me feel this way?

2. How many times during my interactions with a friend do I feel uncomfortable?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Not Sure	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

What happens to make me feel this way?

3. How many times during my interactions with an Attendant/PSW do I feel uncomfortable?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Not Sure	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

What happens to make me feel this way?

4. How many times during my interactions with a service provider do I feel uncomfortable?

- 1 **Never**
- 2 **Not Sure**
- 3 **Sometimes**
- 4 **Often**
- 5 **All the Time**

What happens to make me feel this way?

Go through your responses and if you chose 3, 4, and 5, this is an indicator that your boundaries may have been crossed.



Alternative Self-Awareness Strategy

Everyone should have a sense of what they want their limits (boundaries) to be regardless of whether or not they are in a healthy situation. The following chart provides an alternative way to respond. There is no right or wrong time to create boundaries - it is never too late to start. The chart below will support you in becoming more aware of where you are within this process.

Below are some options of alternative ways to use these exercises.

Pick a color or texture zone to place the responses you gave to the previous questions.

Green Zone

1

All Good

Yellow Zone

2-3

Create Boundaries

Red Zone

4-5

Must Have Boundaries

Or

Smooth

1

All Good

Uneven

2-3

Create Boundaries

Rough

4-5

Must Have Boundaries

W.D.A.A.G & G.A.P

Women with Disabilities Action Awareness Group & Girls Asserting Power

Women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender marginalized individuals living with disabilities are encouraged to create community which will build identity, establish bonds and foster connections.

Through peer support, this group of individuals 16+ with disabilities will forge a collective (group of individuals with common goals) identity which will strengthen all aspects of their lives.

Self-Stream 1

Feel the power of the trunk-your body, the strength of the branches -aspect/layers of yourself, the depth of the leaves- your experiences.

Centre yourself being in your whole body and sitting quietly as a tree, strong, grounded, supported by its roots.

Ask Yourself

1. What does this feel like being in your body?
2. Are you aware of the various layers which make you a unique individual?
3. Are you aware of how your experiences have shaped you?
4. Are you grounded and supported?

Acknowledge and feel your strength. Accept who you are and validate your strengths. This can be done daily wherever you are, in a wheelchair, couch or bed.

Tree Represents YOU



Self-Stream 2

Imagine a garden around the tree (you), different colour flowers and plants (community).

This is W.D.A.A.G & G.A.P Strong!

A united powerful collective group. Much like a growing garden it will take dedication, attention, patience, care and compassion

W.D.A.A.G & GAP Strong will create opportunities for women, girls, trans, two-Spirit, non-binary individuals with disabilities and other marginalized genders living with physical disabilities The following are some ideas for these opportunities:

- Support Circles
- Monthly Connect
- Yearly Workshops



Support Circles

Women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary individuals and other marginalized genders with disabilities can receive individual support within a circle which includes staff plus mentor(s).

Monthly Connect

Connect with others socially on ZOOM.

Yearly Workshop

Identify and be involved in workshops which interests you.

Share your ideas with us! Contact Lucy Costa Nyman
426-486-8666 ext.226 | lucyn@vibranthealthcare.ca



Building Your Own S.O.S

Strength Offering Strategy

Throughout our journey in life, regardless if we have a good solid support system, we should learn to ease our own anxieties and build our internal power by developing strength offering strategies (S.O.S.).

These will guide you and provide courage and strength to you in conjunction with an external support system. S.O.S's are tools you do on your own (or with someone you trust if you need support) which can foster a resilient mechanism in which you can strive.



This section outlines strategies that you can use and modify for yourself:

1. Soothing Stones

Stones with words or images can be used in different ways to foster encouragement, strength e.g. breath, courage, and joy. A few ways these can be used are: physically/mentally/emotionally to calm and guide you.

Pick a stone with a word you either connect with in the moment or want to centralize through the day/week/month.

In The Moment:

We will pick the word relax. You can spend a few minutes holding the stone and focusing on relaxing/soothing your body, mind, and thoughts. Feel the stone as you relax, let it guide you. Focus your thoughts on calming down and just for this moment.

Throughout the Day/Week/Month:

You can utilize the same word throughout your day, week or even month. Explore different ways to relax.

Visually - placing word stone around your home. This can provide visual cues to remind you. It will also assist you with developing a routine.

Alternatives:

You can (or have someone) write out words which inspire and motivate you and place them throughout your home. Set a timer at the same time everyday, reminding you and setting up a routine.



W.D.A.A.G Spotlight

Keep track of how this is working for you. Do not judge or have any expectations of yourself or how this should be. Be patient and kind with yourself.

2. Word Mantras

This S.O.S. is similar to the last one. Choose 3-4 words for what you either want to become or bring more into your life. Then tell them when you wake up and before you go to sleep (this can be done anytime).

Example

You may want to choose peace, strength, and courage when you are going through a challenging time. When you say the words you have chosen either out loud or silently to yourself, feel it in your whole being.



W.D.A.A.G Spotlight

Keep track of how this is working for you. Do not judge or have any expectations of yourself or how this should be. Be patient and kind with yourself.

3. Visualization

Choose an animal that represents a characteristic you want for yourself.

Then silently focus on the animal envisioning having these characteristics.

Example: lion

A lion is known for its **courage, strength,** and **bravery**. These are characteristics I want.

Quietly sit and visualize yourself being **courageous, strong** and **brave**. Feel it, be it!

Where and with whom do you want to express these characteristics?

Quietly visualize yourself with these people or in the situation, being **courageous, strong,** and **brave**. Feel it, be it!



W.D.A.A.G Spotlight

Keep track of how this is working for you. Do not judge or have any expectations of yourself or how this should be. Be patient and kind with yourself.

4. Affirmations

Affirmations are our fourth S.O.S. 1 or 2 brief sentences and/or paragraphs; used to motivate ourselves when we are going through difficult times or want to feel good, supported and/or empowered.

Example

I am **courageous, strong, and brave**. I will thrive through this change with **grace** and **dignity**!

5. Colouring

Colouring has had a new following-Adults! This has become a favourite pastime activity which also reduces stress. Adult colouring books have become readily available.



W.D.A.A.G Spotlight

Keep track of how this is working for you. Do not judge or have any expectations of yourself or how this should be. Be patient and kind with yourself.

6. Journaling

Journaling has been used as an S.O.S for centuries. Writing or talking into a recorder is an effective way to express thoughts, feelings, and anything else you may want to document.

Journaling can be done in a few different ways.

1. Traditional writing in a journal.
2. Speaking into a recorder.
3. Creating art that reflects our emotions/experiences.

This can be an interesting, fun, and insightful daily practice.



W.D.A.A.G Spotlight

Keep track of how this is working for you. Ensure your journal is kept in a safe space if it contains confidential materials. Do not judge or have any expectations of yourself or how this should be. Be patient and kind with yourself.

7. Gratitude List

Being grateful is a practice that sounds easy and can be challenging. If we practice gratitude when things are going well, it may be easier.

When we do it during a rough patch in our lives, it can be hard and even more important to do.

Many people utilize this form of S.O.S and incorporate it into their daily activity.

This can be done throughout the day and at any time. It can be written, verbalized, or we can acknowledge it by thinking and feeling gratitude in the moment.

Gratitude can be simple, like feeling the sun on you. Noticing what you're grateful for is an individual experience and one which can bring joy and greatly reduce stress.

Exercise

- Write or record 3-5 things every day that you are grateful for
- Notice gratitude in the moment and throughout your day
- Acknowledging gratitude when it arises

- When going through challenging times, write or record video at least 3 things you are grateful for.

Develop a routine - notice things, people and experiences you are grateful for.



W.D.A.A.G Spotlight

Keep track of how this is working for you. Do not judge or have any expectations of yourself or how this should be. Be patient and kind with yourself.

Establishing a Safety N.E.T.

Now Execute Transition

Self-Stream:

A Safety N.E.T. is when something or someone is put into place to physically, mentally, or emotionally support you.

- Establish a Safety N.E.T. Team (people you trust to support you in executing your plan).
- Consider people and supports in your life that would be able to help you if or when a situation arises where you want or need to leave. These people can be friends, family or counselor. etc.

Example

Name	Information	Who They Are/Role
Counsellor	Vibrant Healthcare Alliance	Connects me to shelter
Sarah Jones	Friend	Can give items for safekeeping
Eddy	Brother	Has accessible van. Can drive

Your Supports:

Name	Information	Who They Are/Role

Safety N.E.T Plan

Now Execute Transition

Self-Stream Insight:

There may come a time when your safety is at risk, and you need to leave. This safety N.E.T plan is to prepare for this transition and assuming you have time to plan. i.e. basic essentials, contacts, services. Establish a N.E.T Team (people you trust to support you in executing your plan).

Things you'll need	How to prepare	Who to enroll/contact N.E.T Team
<p>Documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health card - Birth certificate - Passport - Social Insurance Number - Credit card - Banking information - Dr. information <p>Clothes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enough for a few days <p>Personal items</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hairbrush - Toothbrush - Deodorant - Medication - S.O.S. tools - Cell phone - Any assistive aids or devices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Find a safe place where you can access them. - If that isn't possible. Photocopy/write down the information. Ask someone you trust to do it. - Pack clothes ahead of time. - Keep them hidden or disguise them as laundry. - Give them to someone you trust. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A trusted friend - Family member - Counsellor - Service provider

Things your children will need	How to prepare	Who to enroll/contact N.E.T Team
<p>Documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health card - Birth certificate - Immunization card - Medical information I.E. Dr. number <p>Clothes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enough for a few days <p>Personal items</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hairbrush - Toothbrush - Medication - Comfort toy/item - Any assistive aids or devices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pack clothes ahead of time. - Keep them hidden or disguise them as laundry. - Give them to someone you trust. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A trusted friend - Family member - Counsellor - Service provider
Things your pet(s) will need	How to prepare	Who to enroll/contact N.E.T Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Documents - Food - Medicine - Food/water bowl - Bags/blanket/clothes/leash 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pack clothes ahead of time. - Keep them hidden or disguise them as laundry. - Give them to someone you trust. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A trusted friend - Family member - Counsellor - Service provider

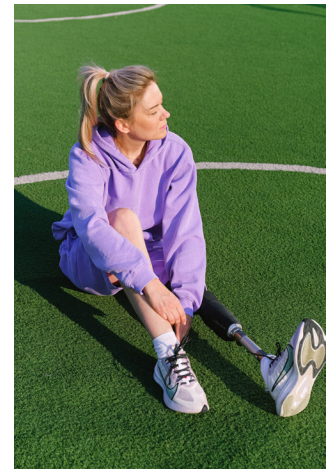
Affirmation



Inner Guidance

I am living in a hopeful future with powerful inner guidance.

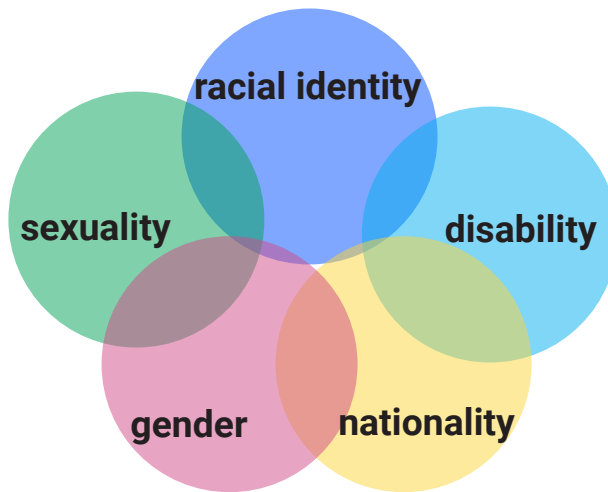
-W.D.A.A.GiT



Boundaries

My boundaries create a safe and peaceful surrounding for myself.

- W.D.A.A.GiT



Cheerleader

Shine the light within you, live your life and become your own cheerleader.

- W.D.A.A.GiT



Endurance

Endurance creates a path to be at peace. I've let go of the past, thriving in its release. That little girl I once was, is no longer silenced. Living in hope of a future with powerful guidance.

-W.D.A.A.GiT

Strength

My inner strength makes me powerful and courageous.

- W.D.A.A.GiT



Resources

Vibrant Healthcare Alliance

Deliver high quality innovative health and social care programs that include primary healthcare services, health promotion and prevention programs, attendant care and personal support and community development initiatives.

Counselling - Booking an Appointment

1. Please call (416) 486-8666 (press 1, followed by 0 to speak with reception) to make a referral (self, agency, other healthcare provider).
2. Request is documented and individual is placed on the referral list. If it is a self-referral, the individual will be provided with a triage appointment. If it is a referral from an agency and/or health care provider, the individual will be contacted to schedule a triage appointment.
3. Once triage is completed, individual will be scheduled an appointment with a counsellor provided that they meet Vibrant's intake criteria.

Peer Support

The Peer Support program provides individual peer support sessions and groups/events including specific events for women, girls, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary and other gender-marginalized individuals with disabilities. For more information, Please contact Lucy Costa Nyman at 416 486 8666 ext. 226 Email: lucyn@vibranthealthcare.ca



Distress and Crisis Lines

Suicide Crisis Helpline

Website: <https://988.ca/>

Call: 988

Hours: 24/7

Text: 988

Who is it for: If you are feeling like you have lost hope and are struggling to cope, if you are dealing with thoughts of suicide, or if you are worried about someone else, 9-8-8 is here for you. When you reach out, a trained responder will listen without judgement, provide support and understanding, and can tell you about resources that will help.

Distress Centre

Website: <https://www.dcoqt.com/>

Call: 416-408-4357, TTY: 416-408-0007 or Text 45645

Hours: 24/7

Who is it for: Anyone in distress. Callers can express their thoughts and feelings in confidence. Callers' issues can include problems related to domestic violence, social isolation, suicide, addictions, mental and physical health concerns. The Distress Centre offers emotional support, crisis intervention, suicide prevention and linkage to emergency help when necessary.

Assaulted Women's Helpline

Website: <https://www.awhl.org/home>

Call: 1-866-863-0511 / TTY 1-866-863-7868

Hours: 24/7

Text the word HOME to 686868

Who is it for: Women in Ontario who have experienced abuse. Support available in a variety of languages.

Fem'aide

Website: <https://femaide.ca/>

Call: 1-877-336-2433

Hours: 24/7

Who is it for: Francophone women. Offre aux femmes d'expression française aux prises avec la violence sexiste, du soutien, des renseignements et de l'aiguillage vers les services appropriés dans leur collectivité.

Gerstein Centre

Website: <https://gersteincentre.org/>

Call: 416-929-5200

Hours: 24/7

Who is it for: Anyone (16 years +) in crisis. Helpline is staffed by crisis workers and offers in-person community visits and a residence where people in crisis can stay for short periods of time.

Kids Help Phone

Website: <https://kidshelpphone.ca/>

Call: 1-800-668-6868

Text: 686868

Hours: 24/7

Who is it for: People under 20 years old across Canada. Free, anonymous and confidential phone and on-line professional counselling and referral service.

Senior Crisis Access Line (SCAL)

Call: 416-619-5001

Hours: Mon-Fri 10:00 am – 9:30 pm; Sat –Sun 10:00 am – 6:00 pm

Who is it for: A specialized service for seniors in the area from Hwy 401 to Lake Ontario to Warden to Islington which provides assistance in stabilizing age-related mental health and addiction crises, risk and safety assessments, immediate referrals to community mobile crisis units, and support for families and caregivers.

Embrave Agency to End Violence

An anti-violence organization providing shelter, counselling and advocacy supports for women, Two-Spirit, gender queer, trans and non-binary folks and their children experiencing any form of violence in the Region of Peel and beyond. We support survivors with and without children.

P.O. Box 45070, Mississauga, ON L G C

Email: info@embrave.ca

Telephone: 905 403 9691

Non-Crisis Phone, Text and On-line Support

The following are phonedlines and online resources to connect with if you need someone to talk to. Some are run by mental health professionals; some are volunteer or peer support based.

Good 2 Talk

Call: 1-866-925-5454

Text: Good2talkon to 686868

Hours: 24/7

Who is it for: Post-secondary students in Ontario

Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youthline

Website: www.youthline.ca

Text: 647-694-4275 hours: 4pm-9:30 pm

Chat: Click the Chat button on the bottom or top of webpage
hours: 4 pm-9:30 pm

Email: askus@youthline.ca

Who is it for: LGBTQ-identifying or questioning Ontario youth ages 26 and under.



Talk 4 healing

Website: <https://www.beendigen.com/programs/talk4healing/>

Available across Ontario: 24/7 for Indigenous women

Talk: 1-855-554 HEAL (4235)

Hours: 24/7

Text: 1-855-554 HEAL (4235)

Chat: Click on live chat option on website

Language: the services are fully grounded in Indigenous culture, wisdom and tradition and are available in the following languages: Oji- Cree, Cree, Algonquin, Inuktitut, Mohawk, Oneida, Odawa, Potawatomi, Micmac, Black Foot, Anishinaabe, Moose Cree, Swampy Cree, English. Access emotional and crisis referral services by calling 1-866-925-4419

Muslim Women's Helpline

Website: <https://nisahelpline.com/>

Call: 1-888-315-6472

Hours: 12 hours/day, 7 days a week

Who is it for: Muslim Women. Nisa Helpline is a non-profit organization launched in 2014 that assists Muslim women across North America seeking confidential, peer-to-peer counselling on a variety of issues.

Mental Health Related Information & Referral Lines

ConnexOntario

Website: <http://www.connexontario.ca/>

Call: Mental Health Helpline 1-866-531-2600 **Hours:** 24/7

Who is it for: Province-wide information and referral services for those with mental health or addiction challenges.

Community and Social Services Hotline

Website: www.211ontario.ca

Call: 211 **Hours:** 24/7

Emergency Shelter Access

Website: www.toronto.ca/community-people/housing-shelter/homeless-help/#shelters

Call: 311, or central intake at 416-338-4766 or 1-877-338-3398

Hours: 24/7

Ontario Legal Line (24/7) Call: 416-929-8400

Telehealth Ontario

Call: 1-866-797-0000 **Hours:** 24/7

Toronto Central Healthline (services available by region)

Website: <https://www.torontocentralhealthline.ca/index.aspx>

Toronto Police Services Non-Emergency Line

Call: 416-808-2222 **Hours:** 24/7

Toronto Tenant Hotline

Website: www.torontotenants.org

Call: 416-921-9494

Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:30 am– 6:00 pm

Low-Cost, No-Cost or OHIP covered Therapy in Toronto

If you are connected to a Community Health Centre or a specialist at a hospital, they may have a social worker or other mental health professional available to provide you with OHIP covered counselling. Speak to your health professional about free options.

Your family doctor can also refer you to groups/classes being run by your nearest hospital that may include Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy options.

PLEASE NOTE: These programs will likely have waitlists.

Across Boundaries

Fee: Free. Click “Access Point Form” on the website to apply services

Website: <https://www.acrossboundaries.ca/>.

Call: 416-787-3007

Find intake forms: <https://www.acrossboundaries.ca/referrals-intake>

Who is it for: Free. Mental health support and services delivered through Anti-Racism/Anti-Black racism and Anti-Oppression frameworks for anyone who has a severe mental illness/severe mental health problem and addictions and is a member of a racialized community (e.g. Black/African, South Asian, West Asian, Arab, South-East Asian, Latin American of Color).

Canadian Mental Health Association

Fee: Free.

Website: <https://www.toronto.cmha.ca>

Call: 416-789-7957

Who is it for: Recovery-focused, community-based services for people living with mental health challenges to live, work and belong in the community.

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Fee: Covered by OHIP- doctor referral needed.

Website: www.camh.ca search for Mood and Anxiety Service to find outpatient programs

Call: 416-535-8501 ext 2

Who is it for: Anyone in need of mood and anxiety treatment. You will meet with a psychiatrist who will determine the best groups and outpatient services for you.

Family Service Toronto

Fee: Free and Low-cost

Website: <https://familyservicetoronto.org/>

Call: 416-595-9618

Who is it for: Family Service Toronto works with individuals and families in Toronto, destabilized by precarious socio-economic circumstances and/ or mental health, to achieve greater resilience and stability in more just and supportive communities.

Gestalt Clinic Low-cost

Website: <https://gestalt.on.ca/low-cost-therapy-clinic>

Call: 416-964-9464 ext 18

Who is it for: Anyone seeking low-cost therapy from students in training who have at least four years of experience.

Hong Fook

Fee: Free

Website: <https://hongfook.ca/>

Call: 416-493-4242

Who is it for: Asian community members who are 16 years and older. An ethno- cultural community mental health agency with a consolidated culturally competent team with services including case management, psychotherapy, psychiatry, peer support, virtual group activities and virtual mental health workshops.

Mood Disorders Association of Ontario

Fee: Free

Website: <https://mooddisorders.ca/>

Call: Tel: (416)486-8046 **Toll-free:** 1-888-486-8236

Who is it for: The Mood Disorders Association of Ontario offers free support and recovery programs to people across Ontario living with depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder. We provide drop-in peer support groups, recovery programs, family and youth clinical support, early intervention for mood disorders and psychosis and online tools focused on wellness and recovery.

Sheena's Place

Fee: Free

Website: <https://sheenasplace.org/>

Call: 416-927-8900

Who is it for: People age 17 and up affected by eating disorders and their friends and family.

WoodGreen Walk-In Counselling (free single session counselling with no appointment needed)

Fee: Free

Website: <https://www.woodgreen.org/programs/walk-in-counselling-wic>

Who is it for: All ages welcome. Parent/guardian consent required for anyone 12 years of age and younger. No OHIP required.

Program dates: Year-round (Tuesday and Wednesday evenings)

In-person sessions: on Tuesdays at 815 Danforth Ave. Walk-in between 4 pm -6:30 pm to book a session (limited spots available). Registration/intake starts at 4 pm and ends at 6:30 pm (or when spots are filled up). Sessions start between 5-7 pm and end between 6:30-8:30 pm based on the intake time.

Virtual sessions: Available on Wednesdays. Phone and Video sessions. Call 416-645-6000 Ext.1990 on Wednesday between 4pm-6:30pm to book – leave a voicemail.

Registration/Intake starts at 4pm and ends at 6:30pm (or when spots are filled up). Sessions start between 5pm-7pm and end between 6:30pm-8:30pm based on the intake time.

Stella's Place

Fee: Free

Website: <https://stellasplace.ca/>

Call: 416-461-2345

Who is it for: Stella's Place provides comprehensive mental health services for 16 to 29 year olds. Services are provided in a positive, peer engaging, non-residential community setting. Services include peer support, clinical, employment, wellness, studio and recovery programs to help young adults learn skills, find connection and be empowered to manage their own health.

Free Self-Directed Mental Health Support

These free online programs can be helpful on their own or as a support to bridge the gap while on waitlists.

BounceBack Ontario

Website: <https://bouncebackontario.ca/>

Description: 905-430-1768

Canadian Mental Health Association

Fee: Free.

Website: <https://toronto.cmha.ca/>

Call: 416-789-7957

Description: BounceBack is a free, guided self-help program that's effective in helping people aged 15 and up who are experiencing mild-to-moderate anxiety or depression, or may be feeling low, stressed, worried, irritable or angry.

Participants receive telephone coaching, skill-building workbooks and online videos to help them overcome these symptoms and gain new skills to regain positive mental health. To receive telephone coaching support, clients must either be referred by their primary care provider (family doctor, nurse practitioner) or psychiatrist, or they may self-refer as long as they're connected with a primary care provider. For those who are not quite ready for coaching, our online videos can provide helpful tips.

BounceBack is not a crisis service, psychotherapy or counselling, but a life-skills program that participants work with to develop coping techniques so they can overcome challenges now or in the future. Typically, participants take three to six months to complete the program.

Autism Ontario

Website: <https://www.autismontario.com/programs-services>

Call: 416-246-9592

Toll Free: 1-800-472-7789

Brain Injury Society of Toronto

Website: <https://www.bist.ca/about/programs-and-services/>

Call: 647-990-1485

Canadian Hearing Society General Support Services

Website: <https://chha.ca/mentorship-program/>

Toll free: 1-866-518-0000

TTY Toll Free: 1-877-215-9530

Canadian Hard of Hearing Association

Website: <https://chha.ca/mentorship-program/>

Call: 1-800-263-8068

Centre for Independent Living in Toronto

Website: www.cilt.ca

Email: peers@cilt.ca

TTY: Dial 711 for Bell Relay Service

Call: 416-599-2458

CNIB Vision Loss Peer Support

Website: <https://cnib.ca/en/programs-and-services/live/peer-support-programs?region=on>

Call: 1-800-563-2642

Down Syndrome Association of Toronto

Website: <https://dsat.ca/dsat-programs/>

Call: 416-966-0990

Diabetes Canada

Website: www.diabetes.ca

Call: 416-363-3373 and ask to be connected to Peer Support

Hydrocephalus Canada

Website: <https://www.hydrocephalus.ca/who-we-are/one-on-one-support/>

Call: 416-214-1056

Toll free: 800-387-1575



Disability Specific Support

Muscular Dystrophy

Canada Website: www.muscle.ca

Call MUSCLE- and ask to be connected to peer support

Post Polio Canada

Website: <https://www.marchofdimes.ca/en-ca/programs/postpolio/Pages/Post-Polio-Support-Groups.aspx>

Call: 1-888-540-6666

Spinal Cord Injury Ontario

Canada Website: <https://sciontario.org/support-services/at-your-service/peer-support/>

Call: 416-422-564

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