

THE BARBED WIRE EXERCISE

PURPOSE OF THE EXERCISE:

This exercise aims to make intimacy, physical contacts and sexuality debatable, to explore boundaries and to come to guidelines that are supported by the team.

TIMING:

45' (maximum)

NEEDED MATERIAL:

A pile of post-it's, felt-tips, big sheets and a flipchart. Copies of the barbed wire.

HOW TO CONDUCT THE EXERCISE:

PART 1: THE PERSONAL BOUNDARY.

(Max. 10 minutes)

Each participant searches for concrete behaviours that he considers troublesome or crossing limits. It may concern different verbal, non-verbal and physical behaviours.

Every kind of conduct is written down on a separate post-it. As many as possible.

- What brings you out of balance? Which behaviour do you think is crossing limits? Which behaviour do you not accept?
- Think back: which situations with troublesome behaviour have you experienced?
- At work, but also out of work.
- Describe the behaviour as concretely as possible.

PART 2: THE PERSONAL VERSUS THE PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARY.

(Max. 5 minutes)

Draw a barbed wire in the middle of the flipchart. The barbed wire symbolizes the professional boundary. Participants do not yet talk with each other. They now think which post-it they will put above or under the barbed-wire if this behaviour were presented at work. Have them write a A (above) or a U (under) in the top corner of the post-it.

- Behaviour under the barbed wire is accepted. Behaviour above the barbed wire is reacted to.
- If this behaviour occurs in the workplace how do you react? Do you let it pass, do you consciously ignore it? Which behaviour do you name or react to? Which behaviour do you sanction?

PART 3: THE BOUNDARY OF THE TEAM.

(Max. 30 minutes)

Divide the group in small groups of three to seven persons. Give them a large sheet of paper with the drawing you will find underneath.

The barbed wire is now the boundary of the team. Behaviour above the barbed wire will now be highlighted. Above the barbed wire there is a new line: behaviour above this line will be sanctioned.

Your assignment is to stick the different post-it's on the different levels. Try to come to an agreement as a group: which behaviours do you consider above or below the boundaries.

The distance to the boundary is important. The higher above the boundary, the more serious you consider the behaviour. And also the other way round: behaviour that is less "harmful" will be put lower on the sheet. Stick post-it's with similar behaviour above each other.

Are you in doubt? Stick it on the boundary itself.

Write down any remarks or nuances on the post-it.

After this session, each group presents its findings to the others. Possible questions:

- Was it easy?
- What did you notice?
- About which behaviour was there the most discussion?
- Were there big differences between the personal, the professional and the team boundaries?
- What are similarities and differences between the different groups?

Try to cluster, if possible, all post-it's on one big drawing. Indicate with a question mark the behaviour about which there is no consensus.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Create a safe and pleasant atmosphere with an ice breaker.
- Set communication rules. (see also Piccasoll, for more info download the document from the 'Background for teachers' segment)
- "Who needs what to be able to talk in a safe way?"
- Give concrete illustrations in your explanation.

REFERENCES:

This exercise is an adaptation of an exercise found in: Icoba (2013). *Tijd voor agressiebeleid. Werkboek voor medewerkers en beleidsmakers*. Brussel: Politeia.

The boundary where behavior is sanctioned



Barbed wire



THE BARBED WIRE
EXERCISE

