Hello, and welcome from wherever you may be joining us for this monthly online seminar. This month's session is titled *Building Happy and Healthy Relationships*, and in today's training we will identify the ways to build and maintain healthy relationships with those around you, with a focus on the importance of boundary setting.

We have three main objectives during today's session. First, we will identify the benefits of having healthy relationships in life. Then, we will begin to understand the foundations of healthy relationships, and finally we will explore ways in which we can set boundaries for respect.

Let's take a look at these two questions to consider. The first question is "why are healthy relationships so important?" The second question is "what is the impact of an unhealthy relationships?" Before we move on to the next slide, take a moment to reflect on these two questions. So, before we move on to the next slide, let's take a moment to reflect on these two questions. Why do you think healthy relationships are so important? Think about what you think a healthy relationship is and what this brings to your life. Now, think about what an unhealthy relationship is and what some of these impacts of an unhealthy relationship would be.

Now let's talk about the importance of relationships in our lives. The relationships we form with other people are vital to our wellbeing. We all need people who we can trust to lift us up when we need it or simply just listen to us when we have something on our minds. Humans have a strong desire to be close to others and form connections. What makes a relationship beneficial is the attunement between people who care about each other. When a person feels supported by a healthy relationship, there is a sense of safety. There is great security in knowing it is okay to share deeper needs, one's self-doubts and concerns. All of these points are important in our day to day lives.

Dr. Brene Brown is a research professor who has spent the past two decades studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy. She has written many books and hosts multiple podcasts. Dr. Brene Brown states "A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all men, women, and children. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong."

Now let's talk about the ten major benefits of having relationships. Practical help. At a basic level, it's helpful to have people you can rely on to be there with an extra set of hands or some expertise. This is true whether you need someone to help you move a

piece of furniture, fix a leaky faucet, or talk through retirement plans. Social support. People are by nature social beings. So, whether we want to celebrate good news or pour out our distress, we feel supported when we believe someone is truly there to offer a listening ear or some sage advice. Also, having a social network, and especially a partner or inner circle of friends, can greatly increase our sense of well-being. Feel valued. When you spend time with people who value you, it can help you to feel more positively about yourself. Help becoming your ideal self. It can be affirming and energizing when your partner or best friend shows that they love you for who you are. When they see you as being like the person you want to be, that can help you to become more like that ideal self. An opportunity to be caring. When you are in a close relationship, you naturally want the other person to feel good. Over time, you will find many opportunities to show caring by celebrating with them during the good times and helping to comfort them through difficulties. Giving in these ways is actually a gift to yourself because it can calm you and reduce your stress. Be part of something bigger than yourself. People have always needed to live in communities for survival, so being part of a community is wired into us. When you meet this need, whether through an intimate relationship, a network of friends, or a more formalized group, you will feel a sense of wellbeing. Reduced stress. The many benefits of relationships include that they reduce stress. This feels good by itself, but it also reduces your risk for health conditions. Encourage healthy behaviors. Partners and close friends often encourage us to exercise, eat healthy, and follow up with medical problems. So, when we have that kind of support, we may be less prone to illness and recover better than those who are more isolated. Longer life. Research has shown that people with strong social connections are much more likely to live longer than people who are loners. Holt-Lunstad, the lead author of one study, explained, "a lack of social relationships was equivalent to smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day." And finally, fun and fulfillment. Having a close friend or partner to share the good times simply feels wonderful.

Now that we know the benefits of healthy relationships, let's talk about how to maintain those relationships. Keep expectations realistic. No one can be everything we might want them to be. Healthy relationships mean accepting people as they are and not trying to change them. Be flexible. It is natural to feel uneasy about changes. Healthy relationships allow for change and growth. Take care of yourself, too. Healthy relationships are mutual, with room for both people's needs. Be dependable. If you make plans with someone, follow through. If you take on a responsibility, complete it. Healthy relationships are trustworthy. Be affirming. According to relationship researcher John Gottman, happy couples have a ratio of 5 positive interactions or feelings for every 1 negative interaction

or feeling. Express warmth and affection! Keep your life balanced. Other people help make our lives satisfying but they cannot meet every need. Find what interests you and become involved. Healthy relationships have room for outside activities. It's a process. It might look like everyone on campus is confident and connected, but most people share concerns about fitting in and getting along with others. It takes time to meet people and get to know them. Healthy relationships can be learned and practiced and keep getting better. Be yourself! It's much easier and more fun to be authentic than to pretend to be something or someone else. Healthy relationships are made of real people.

Next, let's talk about communication and how to communicate properly in your relationships. Take time. Talk with each other. It can't be said enough: communication is essential to healthy relationships. Take the time and really be there. Genuinely listen. Do not interrupt or plan what you're going to say next. Try to fully understand their perspective. Ask questions. Show you are interested. Ask about their experiences, feelings, opinions, and interests. Share information. Studies show that sharing information helps relationships begin.  Let people know who you are, but don't overwhelm with too much personal information too soon. Fight fair. Most relationships have some conflict. It only means you disagree about something; it does not have to mean you don't like each other. Cool down before talking. The conversation will be more productive if you have it when your emotions have cooled off a little, so you don't say something you may regret later. Use "I" statements. Share how you feel and what you want without assigning blame or motives. E.g. "When you don't call me, I start to feel like you don't care about me," versus "you never call me when you're away. I guess I'm the only one who cares about this relationship." Keep your language clear and specific. Try to factually describe behavior that you are upset with, avoiding criticism and judgment. Attack the problem, not the person. Focus on the current issue. The conversation is likely to get bogged down if you pile on everything that bothers you. Avoid using "always" and "never" language, and address one issue at a time.  Take responsibility for mistakes. Apologize if you have done something wrong; it goes a long way toward setting things right again. Recognize some problems are not easily solved.  Not all differences or difficulties can be resolved. You are different people, and your values, beliefs, habits, and personality may not always be in alignment. Communication goes a long way toward helping you understand each other and address concerns, but some things are deeply rooted and may not change significantly. It is important to figure out for yourself what you can accept, or when a relationship is no longer healthy for you.

Setting boundaries is another important part of healthy relationships. Employees who are the happiest and most productive are those who set boundaries. People who set limits gain respect because they show respect for themselves. From 1 to 10, how effective do you think you are at setting boundaries in your different relationships?

Now let's talk about how to communicate your limits. Conduct an audit. Start by becoming more aware of those people and situations that cause you stress and anxiety. Write them down. If you notice yourself feeling angry, resentful, or guilty, that's a sure sign that you may need to reset a boundary or communicate it more clearly. Set limits. Once you have an idea of the areas where you need to focus, start setting limits. One example could be not checking work email in the evenings between 6 and 9 p.m. so you can focus on family time. Communicate clearly. Once you set limits, you need to communicate them clearly and confidently. For instance, if you don't want your colleagues to contact you at all hours, tell them exactly when you will be available for work conversations. If you don't wish to be contacted on staycation or holiday unless it is an emergency, make sure to clearly outline what constitutes an urgent matter. When a boundary gets violated, address it immediately. It's better to reinforce your limits in the moment than to wait. Take time to respond. One trick that may keep you from saying "yes" to that next project is the art of pausing. For example, the next time your manager asks you to take on another task, hit the pause button before responding. This technique will give you a chance to check-in with yourself to determine whether you have a conflict. If needed, buy yourself time and say, "that might work, let me just check my schedule and get back to you." Practice saying no. Peter Bregman, author of *18 Minutes: Find Your Focus, Master Distraction, and Get the Right Things Done* suggests choosing some easy, low-risk situations in which to practice saying no. Say no when your waitress offers you dessert. Say no to the street vendor offering to sell you something. Go into a room by yourself, shut the door and say no out loud ten times. It sounds crazy, but it helps to build your "no" muscle. Prepare for pushback. Once you start establishing healthy boundaries, you can expect others to react negatively. This is a sign that the boundary is necessary and that it's working effectively. It's also helpful to visualize your boundaries getting crossed and imagine how you'll address those situations. That way, when a moment like that arises, you'll be able to handle it rationally versus emotionally.

Things to consider about saying no. What is stopping you from saying no? If you say yes to this, what will you being saying no to? Are you saying no for a valid reason? How can you say no in a gracious yet assertive way? Look at your fears about saying no. Do you

tend not to say no to your boss because you are afraid that you will be fired? Do you tend to be a people pleaser and worry that someone may not like you if you set limits? Look at your reasons for not saying no, even when doing so would be in your best interest. Are your concerns rooted in a real concern, or is it an anticipated fear? An anticipated fear is one that hasn't happened yet. And many times, the anticipated fear is worse than what would realistically happen. And many times, when you say no it sets a healthy precedent, and people are even more likely to respect your boundaries in the future. If you say yes to this, what will you being saying no to? None of us have an infinite amount of time to complete our tasks. Bear in mind that if you say yes to something you will inevitably have to say no to something else. What will have to go? Are you saying no for a valid reason? Often the fear of saying no means that we forget the importance of pushing back and setting boundaries and the reasons we need to say no to another request. Perhaps it is because you already have too much work. Or you have a family time planned that you don't want to miss. Weigh up the consequences of what your life will look like if you keep saying yes to things as opposed worrying about the consequences of saying no. How can you say no in a gracious yet assertive way? Sometimes people confuse saying no with being overly blunt. When your safety is at risk, obviously saying no clearly and firmly is best. However, if you are being asked to work extra hours and you have an important family event, a simple "I can't, but thank you for checking," is appropriate.

To end today's session, let's look at another quote from Brene Brown. "Daring to set boundaries is about having the courage to love ourselves, even when we risk disappointing others."

Thank you for joining us. I hope you took one thing or even many things with you from today's session.  Please remember that your EAP is always available to support you and please do reach out with any questions. Thank you again for joining us today and enjoy the rest of your day!