

Worksheet 9.2: Considering house rules and boundaries that are non-negotiable

ED can cause havoc in a previously well organised and calm household. It can be useful for families to identify certain behaviours that are unacceptable and related non-negotiable house rules and boundaries. Once these have been established, carers will feel more empowered to be firm with the illness when rules are broken, and at the same time compassionate with the person who is being controlled by the ED voice. Remember, however, all adolescent children see that 'rules are meant to be broken' – this is part of normal development.

Facilitator crib sheet

Signpost carers to *SBC*, Chapter 14, p. 246.

When ED comes into household, values and rules previously held by the family are often disregarded. These are examples of unacceptable behaviours that often emerge once ED appears:

- Violence – for example, hurting others, breaking property
- Aggressive displays in public
- Swearing or disrespectful behaviour to family or anyone else
- Lack of respect for other people's needs and property
- Excessive and persistent food wastage

Note: Carers will often mention self-harm including suicidal ideation as unacceptable behaviours because they are so difficult to tolerate. It is important for carers to respond to these with empathy and understanding and not to simply tell Edi they should stop.

- a) As a group write down any other unacceptable behaviours that families with an ED in their midst often experience:

- b) The crap sandwich is useful here: 'I love you, what just happened is unacceptable in this house, I love you unconditionally' (*SBC*, Chapter 4, p. 38). Write down as many phrases such as this that you can think of that might help you to be firm with the illness related behaviours while being calm and compassionate with your loved one.

Every household is different and what is unacceptable in one household might be acceptable in another. In addition, boundaries can change over time. When Edi is very ill they are unlikely to be able to control outbursts and violence. This is the time for carers to keep calm, restate the boundary, and provide unconditional love and support. The crap sandwich is useful here: 'I love you, what just happened is unacceptable in this house, I love you unconditionally' (*SBC*, Chapter 4, p. 38). As Edi's recovery journey progresses, these boundaries are likely to change, possibly becoming more achievable with gentle nudging and plenty of praise from the rest of the family.

Also see:

- *SBC*, Chapter 13, p. 220: Helpful rules for ED behaviours
- *SBC*, Chapter 14, p. 226: Family ground rules
- *SBC*, Chapter 14, p. 230: Clear and consistent rules to eliminate the 'minx'