



# Mastering BAES

Intermediate guide to  
Boundaries, Agreements, Expectations, and Support  
for Polyamory & Ethical Non-Monogamy

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## Debrief Check-List

**As you work through the following pages, please refer back to the Debrief Check-List, perhaps after every section, as a way to check in and assess what you are learning and how you are doing.**

Take some deep breaths, think about your emotional state. Can you identify what emotions you are feeling? It is okay if this is hard for you.

If it feels like too much, put these WORKSHEETS away and do something life-giving instead. Your self-care is important. If you feel energized, great! Keep going.

Reflect on what you've taken away:

- What needs or desires are currently unmet, if any?
- What discussions do you need to have with your pals?
- What growth opportunity can you identify?
- What did you do well?
- What's the next step?

BAES is your key to healthy, fulfilling relationships!

## Instructions

Shrimp Teeth's WORKBOOKS\* are designed to promote self-reflection. They consist of a series of questions to help guide your reflections. Admittedly, some can be difficult. It's best if you answer these questions as honestly as you can and try not to judge yourself too much. There will be answers you don't like and that's okay. We all have areas that could use a little extra work. These questions help you identify those sticky spots — it's nothing to be embarrassed about. When you come across questions that don't apply to your situation, you don't like, or simply don't feel like answering... then don't! This is not a graded assignment; I encourage you to use the tools within these pages that make sense for you! You are in charge here.

To start, here is my golden rule:

### Chill Out & Give Less Fucks

Your pals are human and flawed: they aren't perfect, but they also aren't diabolical. Being able to let smaller things go is a great way to manage your own emotional bandwidth while also forgiving your pal's occasional fuck ups. Remember, you will make mistakes too! Chilling out on the smaller issues will leave space to problem-solve bigger challenges. Try to take a step out of your own head and look at the situation objectively: is this something you can let go? Or is it critical that you address it? Getting out of your own head can be hard! I encourage you to seek out professional help, find a support group, or vent to a friend to find an objective perspective on the situation.

*\*Disclaimer:*

*Shrimp Teeth's WORKBOOKS are educational tools. The content within is not a replacement for seeking guidance from licensed clinicians.*

# Introduction

This WORKBOOK will build off of the Boundaries 101 WORKBOOK and introduce the BAES framework. Boundaries, Agreements, Expectations, and Support are all fundamental skills for navigating polyamory. These practices form the parameters of our relationships. There are four guiding values that encourage healthy relationships: honesty, kindness, abundance, and autonomy. Setting boundaries will only work if you are honest with yourself and others about your needs. Resolving to be kind implies that you are willing to put in the effort to be respectful and mindful, of yourself and others, as you seek beneficial solutions (even when it is difficult). It is important to acknowledge that there are an abundance of resources available to foster the sustainable wellness of everyone involved rather than living out of scarcity, which implies there is not enough love to go around. And lastly, strive to live in an autonomous manner, which means knowing where we begin and end and therefore, where our pals begin and end. These values are the building blocks of creating healthy relationships.

These tools require transparency between pals and were designed for couples who have a genuine interest in maintaining consensually alternative relationship structures.

## **Note On Abuse:**

If there's a pattern of abusive behavior, those dynamics should be addressed with a licensed professional before adopting this framework. Unfortunately, these tools can be more hurtful when a pal is trying to repeatedly hold power over others. Please note the difference between pals making mistakes (which can still be hurtful and we don't wish to minimize this) while acting mostly in good faith versus pals trying to exert control over the others. If there is frequent gas-lighting, coercion, veto-power, stone-walling, or other maladaptive traits in the relationship, BAES will not ultimately give you the guidance you need.

# Love

In *All About Love*, Belle hooks expands on M. Scott Peck definition of love by saying “Love is the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.” In order for this definition to be possible, we must understand ourselves as fundamentally autonomous. Without independence there’s no ability to extend yourself. Creating relationships defines the balance between individuality and connectivity. To paraphrase my therapist, you need the capacity to recognize what is your shit and what isn’t. The goal of a relationship isn’t to meld into your pals. It’s about sharing the joint responsibility of nurturing each other. Love requires reciprocity as well as independence. Boundaries, Agreements, Expectations, and Support create the BAES framework for understanding and negotiating balance within relationships.

The more you and your pals are able to set strong BAES together, the more you maintain your person-hood while creating the conditions under which you’re best able to show up to a relationship. Over-extending yourself for the relationship will obliterate your sense of self and cause resentment and anger in the long run. While under-extending yourself in the relationship can create insecure attachments and dissatisfaction. I believe that the goal of most polyamorists is to share more love, and that starts with understanding how you can extend yourself in a sustainable way to your pals and ask for their healthy extension in return.

My goal in writing this Workbook is to give y’all a few common definitions and communication tools. I believe that by sharing a framework for negotiations with your pals, you’ll be able to ask for more, give more, and deal with occasional rejection in healthier ways. When navigating multiple relationships, understanding how to have productive conflict negotiation conversations can reduce the energy required in polyam.

## Conflict

Conflict is normal. Humans disagree, behave in insensitive shitty ways, get jealous, etc. It happens. You know this. However, the way that you handle conflict has the option of either being generative or creating resentment between you and your pals. There are certain ways of handling conflict that are respectful and can bring you and your pals to better understanding of each other. There's another way of handling conflict that erodes trust and drives a wedge in relationships. Beyond understanding non-violent communication practices, conflict is either productive or unproductive, depending on everyone's ability to understand the balance between their individual responsibility and the needs of their pals or the relationship.

The truth is, no matter how much you love your pals, you will not be able to meet all of their needs. You will not be able to always be exactly who they want you to be. And they won't either. Y'all are different people, and being in a healthy relationship doesn't demand that you morph into your significant others. On the contrary, conflict is worked through healthily when each pal is able to recognize that they are individuals working together to nurture the relationship. When all pals are contributing to the best of their abilities, the relationship is able to find equilibrium and mutual understanding.

It's okay if you and your pals have different abilities to show up in the relationship. Again, the goal isn't to directly match each other, but to feel like everyone is contributing authentically. If you're really good at applying frameworks while your pal is able to be very emotionally attuned, use that to your benefit. Work together on conflict rather than trying to win at conflict. With more pals, it will be chaotic trying to always get your way. I promise that finding resolution with BAES is a much easier long-term strategy to approaching ethical non-monogamy. It requires a lot of learning in the beginning, but makes everything easier later.

# BAES Overview

When facing conflict, you have four kinds of actions for healthy resolution. Setting a boundary, coming to an agreement, clarifying an expectation, or asking for support. These options form the BAES framework:

## Boundaries

Boundaries are guidelines for how you interact with yourself and others. They focus on your needs, actions, and preferences.

“I will...”

## Agreements

Agreements are when two or more people decide to establish boundaries together. They can be the same or be unique to the individual given the context.

“We will...”

## Expectations

Expectations are requests that you make of your pals. They can be requests to set boundaries, for behavior changes, or to uphold certain values.

“Can you...”

## Support

Support is the tangible requests you make of your pals. We can't face our problems alone. We need pals to provide reassurance, motivation, or tap into our love language.

“I need...”



Part 1:

# Boundaries

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# Boundaries

Growing up, no one told me that boundaries could be positive, encourage discussion, be mutually supportive and kind, create security, and uplift individuality. I learned boundaries were punitive tools used to correct behavior. I learned to be scared of people setting boundaries. As it turned out, those weren't really boundaries (at least not the kind I want to have in my relationships). And I'm clearly not alone! Setting healthy boundaries seems to trip people up, especially in non-monogamy.

First, what is a "boundary?" Simply put, a boundary is a guideline for how you interact with yourself and others. Boundaries reflect YOUR needs. Boundaries are flexible and adapt based on context. Boundaries focus on what YOU can do. After all, you can't control how others behave towards you, and it's pretty pointless to try. If you set boundaries for others, they are sure to violate them. Instead, you can focus on the ways you will respond to a situation and interact with others.

Boundaries also hold you accountable. If you set boundaries, stick to them. It's normal to occasionally slip, we are human and make mistakes. But when you violate your boundaries, ask yourself, did this occur because the boundary does not serve its intended purpose, or was it a misstep that can be avoided in the future? Give yourself the chance to re-examine your boundaries as you go.

Setting boundaries isn't always easy! I've set wacky boundaries with my pals when we were first opening up and I tolerated all sorts of nonsense that I wouldn't put up with now. I made mistakes. My pals did too. No one taught us non-monogamy so we figured it out organically. Lots of "figuring it out" was (sometimes brutal) trial and error. Luckily, mistakes don't get repeated too often. Try to hold yourself, and others, with compassion as you navigate learning, setting, and changing boundaries as needed.

## **Why are good boundaries necessary?**

- They define your autonomy from your pals
- They create expectations for how you'll respond to situations
- They give guidelines for how you best show up to relationships
- They create the container for which relationships exist in

### **Good boundaries:**

- Balance your individual needs, your pals needs, and the commitment required to maintain the relationship
- Create security that goes beyond ownership
- Give a level of predictability in your relationships
- Encourage discussion
- Form a procedure for problem solving
- Place individual responsibility for boundary violations

### **Bad boundaries:**

- Exert control or domination in unethical ways
- Are set FOR other people rather than for yourself
- Create fear and defensiveness
- Focus on what cannot be done
- Will be violated
- Place responsibility on others to conform to your expectation of behavior

# Boundaries ARE

## 1. A guideline

Boundaries help define where you start and end. That is, they provide containers for everyone's autonomy. Elaborate on your intentions in the relationship and how you plan on behaving. This is based on how you WANT to conduct yourself with integrity. However, circumstances change and it's not always possible to stick to your boundaries. That's why they are also...

## 2. Flexible and evolving

Give yourself permission to change and to re-examine your boundaries as you grow. Remember, they are just about how you want to act and that changes as you do, too. As you get to know your pals better you might find both of your expectations and needs shifting.

## 3. About your needs

We all have different needs and preferences in the ways we interact with others. It is important to realize your boundaries will be different because your needs are unique to you.

## 4. Normal and healthy

Boundaries are normal. Whether you have explicitly stated them or not, they exist either way. There is a tendency to see boundaries as being a bad thing, but all healthy relationships require strong boundaries. Being deliberate helps point you in a direction of integrity.

# Boundaries ARE NOT

## 1. A rule

Rules are enforced by the threat of punishment if they are broken. That's not the type of interaction that fosters healthy relationships or teamwork. Try to see them in a more positive light. You are CHOOSING the way you want to interact with your pals. That's a good thing.

## 2. Set in stone

As we evolve, so does our understanding of how we relate to others. This means certain boundaries will shift, too. It's important to understand which boundaries are and are not subject to change. For instance, a boundary about communicating honestly with your pals is not subject to change, however the mode employed to communicate (face to face conversations, texting, phone calls, video chat, etc) is based on the condition and may evolve over time to reflect the circumstance.

## 3. A way to control your pals

Boundaries are about YOUR behavior. You cannot control your pals by setting boundaries for them. Pals don't have to do what you want. It's pointless or can result in abusive patterns of behavior. It is better to negotiate agreements, which we get into later!

## 4. About restricting or punishing your pals

Again, boundaries are not a bad thing, they explain how you will show up to relationships in the healthiest and most authentic way. Restricting people's access to you is not the same as explaining your expectations.

## Before setting Boundaries...

Like we established, boundaries are about YOU. Start off by thinking about the following questions to identify some of your needs and how you want to act within the relationships:

1. What are your fears?

2. What are your needs?

3. How do you want to relate to your pals?

4. Do you have triggers or hang-ups?

5. What are some of your limits?

Emotional:

Physical:

Intimacy:

Time:

Energy:

Great! Now it's time to structure them as working boundaries that focus on how YOU will act with integrity. One way I suggest is by starting with "I will." This puts the emphasis on what YOU can do. I went ahead and gave you some common categories on the next page that you'll probably want to address when it comes to setting boundaries in relationships. You can customize the list to fit different relationships. I'll give you some examples later!

If you're getting stuck and don't feel ready to move on just yet to formulating boundaries, or have a specific instance you need help addressing, try answering these additional questions before moving on:

1. What's the situation?

2. What are my feelings about it?

3. What can I change, what can't I change?

4. What outcome do I want & not want?

5. What boundaries can I articulate?

## Your Core Boundaries:

I like to start with a list of boundaries that apply to me, whether I'm in a relationship or not. You can also think of these boundaries as core principles for you to uphold.

### COMMITMENT:

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

### SCHEDULING & COMMUNICATION:

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

### EMOTIONAL INTIMACY:

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

### PHYSICAL INTIMACY:

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

### FRIENDS & METAS:

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

### CONFLICT:

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_



## Your Relationship Boundaries:

Next, I like to make a list of boundaries that apply to specific relationships. These boundaries are more contextual and take into account the different ways I like to interact with specific pals

### COMMITMENT:

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

### SCHEDULING & COMMUNICATION:

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

### EMOTIONAL INTIMACY:

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

### PHYSICAL INTIMACY:

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

### FRIENDS & METAS:

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

### CONFLICT:

I will \_\_\_\_\_

I will \_\_\_\_\_

# Boundaries Case Study

Below are examples from a previous relationship. At the time, my pal identified as monogamous but was dating myself and another pal. She voiced that she ultimately wanted to settle down with only one partner, leading to a lot of tension and discomfort for our entire polycule. I struggled with a lot of feelings of jealousy that were intensified by not knowing the expectations and boundaries for our relationship. Going through this exercise helped me better understand how I intended to show up in the relationship. It also allowed me to create some guidelines for how I wanted to protect my emotional energy in a relationship that had begun to feel exhausting and brought up a lot of insecurities. By asking my pal about her boundaries, I was able to better understand how she intended to show up, which ultimately was not a good fit for either of us based on how we intended to structure our relationships. Non-monogamy was a life-style choice for her, that she was exploring with her primary partner with the intention of closing up, in my case polyam is more of an orientation that I'm committed to even if I have a long-term partner. We didn't align, and that's ok! But better to have been upfront with each other than push a relationship that wasn't ultimately going to work for either of us.

## 1. What are your fears?

- Being misled, lied to, and/or suddenly abandoned
- Being “back burner” to your relationship with your other pal
- Feeling like my emotions are too much for you

## 2. What are your needs?

- I need affection, time, patience, room to grow in this relationship
- I need to be allowed to make mistakes and make adjustments
- I need to feel supported
- I need honesty
- I need clarity about your expectations of the future

### 3. How do you want to relate to your pals?

- To be honest and open; to act with integrity
- To continue working on myself to manage jealousy and insecurities
- To be compassionate and empathetic in my communication
- To give myself space to grow
- To examine and adjust behaviors that need improvement
- To be kind and not reactive to situations. To not be intentionally hurtful. To never be cruel
- To develop meaning and longevity

### 4. Do you have triggers or hang-ups?

- Being compared to your other pal
- Being judged for emoting
- Being penalized for not being perfect
- Gas-lighting
- Having you and your other pals dictate the parameters of our relationship or veto our relationship

### 5. What are some of your limits?

- Being kept in the dark, being manipulated, being a pawn, being cheated on
- Being lied to, being deceived, or cruel intentions
- Being pitted against other people, feeling the need to compete for affection
- Being ghosted
- Any non-consensual intimacy, sexual violence, or breach in agreed safer-sex practices

# My Relationship Boundaries:

These are some of the boundaries I came up with following the previous exercise. Feel free to borrow any that suit you!

## COMMITMENT:

- I will treat you with kindness and respect
- I will act with integrity and reduce harm to the best of my ability
- I will stay engaged in our relationship and not push you away when I feel discomfort
- I will involve you in any major decisions (i.e. new pals, changes of schedule, commitment changes, etc.)
- I will only remain in this relationship as long as I can do so with enthusiasm and commitment and I will let you know if I'm having doubts, need changes, or need to redefine/end our relationship

## SCHEDULING & COMMUNICATION:

- I will make time for you, show up on time when we've made plans, and I will try to give you advanced notice to allow room for other relationships in your life
- I will prioritize giving you attention and affection whenever possible, and communicate to you when I'm not available, or need personal space
- I will not ghost you; I will not disappear
- I will communicate by text in a limited capacity and I will let you know when I need to end text conversations

## EMOTIONAL INTIMACY:

- I will engage in pleasurable interactions that is unique to us
- I will trust you and refrain from making assumptions
- I will communicate my needs/desires and answer your questions with honesty and intentionality. I will get back to you if I can't

- I will be there for you when things are challenging and do my best to provide meaningful support, I will listen and be non-judgmental, and I will strive to hold space for you to grow
- I will give you space to know me and allow you to be part of my life in a meaningful way

## PHYSICAL INTIMACY:

- I will only participate in safe and consensual intimacy, I will get tested every 6 months (or as new potential partners arise), and I will communicate honestly about any changes to our safer-sex practices that may be necessary
- I will explore how to connect physically and sexually with you
- I will not cheat on you; I will let you know before I start seeing anyone else

## FRIENDS & METAS:

- I will treat your other partner(s), friends, and meaningful people with compassion and respect and expect the same
- I will facilitate incorporating you into my life and let you know any relevant arrangements or boundaries established with existing pals that might impact you
- In the event of any conflict between you and my buddy, pals, or friends, I will mediate any necessary conflict resolution

## CONFLICT:

- I will be patient when conflicts arise and work with you to find solutions to our problems
- I will continue to work on my jealousy, I will communicate when I'm feeling insecure, and I will let you know if I need time to process my discomfort
- I will take space and time from difficult conversations as needed to avoid emotional flooding and I will come back and reopen discussions as soon as possible
- I will ground our relationship in care and love

## Boundary Oopsies

I don't set out to deliberately violate my pals boundaries. When my love says "here's my boundary" I wouldn't go and directly behave in a way that disrespected her. However, it's not uncommon that we make mistakes and accidentally encounter a boundary that wasn't explicitly defined previously, unearth a hidden trigger, or realize we need a boundary in the moment. There are instances where we make mistakes. These things happen, I do them mostly accidentally, my pals do them mostly accidentally. I try to extend compassion for these violations because they are mistakes that require redefining expectations to better meet their needs in the future. Even if you're a super-star boundary setter, you will fuck up. Let go of perfectionist ideology, and give each other room to practice and improve. Again, I'm writing this resource for folks who generally behave with kindness and respect to themselves and their pals. If these conditions do not exist, mistakes are usually processed with resentment and a winner-takes-all attitude. Unfortunately, it's not within the scope of this workbook to give guidance on how to deal with circumstances where pals are not acting in good faith.

### **Ethical Consideration:**

Acting with integrity is not optional — it is critical for healthy relationships! Embracing honest communication in all of your conversations with your pals is central to aligning with integrity. By lying/omitting information you are manipulating your pal's reality and depriving them the ability to have their authentic reactions. Honesty also resolves problems that are realistic rather than addressing non-issues in an attempt to hide what's really going on.

## Managing Boundaries in a Polycule

With multiple pals, metas (especially the ones we don't know well or don't have great rapport with), and other friendships and relationships comes the complication of trying to maintain harmony. Listen, I really don't believe it's possible to always be in equilibrium as a polycule. But a lot of the most generative work has been getting to know my pals and metas better and doing boundary work that helps uplift all of us.

In a previous relationship I avoided my polycule, I preferred not dealing with my ex-meta. They were really hard to be around and frankly I didn't have the patience or desire to put in the required work to sustain a relationship. If I'm being honest, I found this meta deeply annoying. But it's really hard to sustain polyamory with this attitude. That's why I also believe that a lot of the longevity of a polycule depends on having members who are somewhat cohesive. It doesn't mean you need to want the same things as your polycule, but having shared philosophies (for example around autonomy, respect, and compassion) can make it easier to align. In my current polycule I WANT to put effort into those relationships, and I believe that even if we are all different people, we share most core values. My polycule feels meaningful and generative even if I'm not best friends with every single meta or meta-friend. Having traditions for all of us helps make everything feel more abundant and nurturing.

What makes your polycule feel balanced or in harmony? For me, it has to do with knowing that everyone feels comfortable being themselves authentically and knowing that conflict will be addressed in supportive ways. Obviously, this isn't always the case as we make mistakes. But for the most part, we are all working towards this goal and strive to stay coherent together.

Part 2:

# Agreements

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# AGREEMENTS

After you've outlined your personal boundaries and communicated them to your pals, you might find that not everything can fit into "I Will" statements. That's okay and normal! Relationships by nature demand compromise — enter, "agreements:" when all pals involved are implementing agreed-upon boundaries. "We will," statements are a great way to start setting healthy agreements. I encourage you to keep in mind some of the general guidelines for boundary setting (i.e. set positive boundaries rather than restrictions whenever possible). But for now, take a moment to identify specific situations in your relationship that require you to come to joint agreements.

## The Three-Level Agreement Check

When you're setting an agreement, I find it's helpful to run a quick check on three levels:

### 1. The Self

How do YOU feel about the agreement?

Does it meet most or some of your needs?

Does it respect your autonomy and feel mostly fair?

### 2. The Relationship (Your Pal)

How does your pal feel about the agreement?

Does it meet most or some of your pal's or relationship's needs?

Does it enhance connectivity and trust?

### 3. The Polycule (Your Meta & Other Pals)

How do your other pals and metas feel about the agreement?

Does it uphold the shared values of everyone in the polycule?

Does it impose power OVER others or give power TO others?

# Training Wheels Vs. Permanent Agreements

I like to think about agreements as either TRAINING WHEELS that provide room and space for positive individual growth or PERMANENT agreements that outline the foundation of the relationship structure. Training wheels are there to help you navigate certain issues that feel particularly difficult for you or your pals to handle. You might need extra time to address some issues (in individual therapy, through journaling, etc.). It's OK to not be 100% ready to jump to permanent agreements yet. Training wheels are exactly as they sound, they are temporary learning tools that will allow you enough time and space to acquire the knowledge necessary. They are meant to be replaced by different boundaries in the long run. Temporary measures can be established to give you space to work on issues, while setting a realistic timeline for check-ins to ensure pals aren't feeling stone-walled or growing resentful. It's important to understand that training wheel agreements may not be entirely "ethical" but are useful towards building more solid boundaries.

## Ethical Consideration:

Some polyam experts discourage people from having "training wheel" agreements, citing that often it's a way for couples to avoid addressing the core issue of the problem. I disagree. We all have lived experiences that make it hard for us to practice polyam in a healthy and secure way. It's okay if you have certain triggers: you're still in the process of learning a skill. I find that allowing pals to collaboratively make a situation less triggering can foster healthy growth when those agreements are made in good faith and with the understanding restricting pals' behaviors is not a long-term solution. It is important to recognize when training wheel agreements are being used instead of dealing with certain problems. In my experience, as you continue to practice, you should need fewer of these sorts of agreements and instead use boundaries and permanent agreements to address conflict.

## Watch Out!

Certain agreements are generally frowned upon even as “training wheels” because they disrespect the fundamental autonomy of each pal or create unethical power dynamics in the polycule that put certain pals at risk. None of these “agreements” would pass the Three-Level Agreement Check from the previous page. Three major watch outs come to mind:

### Vetos

Veto power is when a primary couple has an agreement that they can have final say over other relationships. Usually vetos are applied by one pal to terminate an outside relationship with the intention of protecting the primary. This behavior is unethical because it creates unequal power dynamics and is a manifestation of couple privilege. While ENM can threaten the perceived security of a relationship, it’s not worth practicing if you can’t let go of your entitlement over other people.

### Couple Privilege

Couple Privilege refers to the set of benefits that established monogamous couples are awarded from the dominant culture. It also refers to the practice of primary partners limiting or restricting secondary relationships in order to preserve the established hierarchy. This is generally considered unethical behavior as it holds power OVER the secondaries.

### One Penis Policies (OPP)

When a (usually) cishet man only allows his partner to sleep with other women. This is unethical and seeped in misogyny and queer discrimination. Genital policies on the whole are bad news, but OPPs specifically have a long history and reinforce patriarchal values.

## Before Setting Agreements...

Take some time to think about what the intention of the agreements are. This is the time to chat with your pals and make sure you're all on the same page, trying to work together towards a common goal.

1. What issue needs to be addressed?

2. What is the intended outcome of the agreement?

3. What compromises can be made?

4. What solutions support both individual and relationship interests?

5. Do these solutions infringe on another person or relationship's autonomy?

6. Is this a training wheel or permanent agreement?

## Your Relationship Agreements:

After you've jotted down some thoughts with your pals, go ahead and formulate concrete agreements using "We will" statements. Remember, agreements are basically just boundaries you are all agreeing to. Be clear whether each agreement will be permanent or temporary. For training wheels specify a time line for renegotiating the agreements.

### TRAINING WHEEL AGREEMENTS

We will \_\_\_\_\_ Time line: \_\_\_\_\_  
We will \_\_\_\_\_ Time line: \_\_\_\_\_  
We will \_\_\_\_\_ Time line: \_\_\_\_\_  
We will \_\_\_\_\_ Time line: \_\_\_\_\_  
We will \_\_\_\_\_ Time line: \_\_\_\_\_  
We will \_\_\_\_\_ Time line: \_\_\_\_\_

### PERMANENT AGREEMENTS

We will \_\_\_\_\_  
We will \_\_\_\_\_  
We will \_\_\_\_\_  
We will \_\_\_\_\_  
We will \_\_\_\_\_  
We will \_\_\_\_\_

### Anything we need to notify other pals of

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## Agreement Case Study:

One of the issues that triggers my jealousy is having metas in my home. We all have sticky spots, whether that's around sex, living arrangements, share activities, etc. Humans have a tendency to be possessive, and that's especially true when you're first coming out of a compulsory monogamy framework that reinforces ownership as a cornerstone of security.

When my ex-husband started dating a specific meta, it was difficult for me to be around them, and immediately I noticed I was getting territorial over my living space. I told my pal that I didn't enjoy the energy they brought into the house, and felt like I couldn't relax around them. End of the day, this was just a classic case of spicy emotions over a new person. Still, it would cause conflict because I felt like I just couldn't get my jealousy under control when they were around me. My pal and I discussed this issue and (naively) set the first training wheel agreement: metas were not allowed over in our shared house. It seemed like the obvious solution. But in reality, it quickly created other scheduling problems, and was not sustainable long-term.

My domestic partner and I continued to revisit this conversation over a couple months. I continued to discuss my anxiety around sharing my living space in therapy. It helped me understand the way housing instability as a kid made my jealousy manifest in this way. Eventually, my pal and I came to a 50/50 agreement. We spent half of our time with our other partners and half of our time with each other. We would have metas over when the other was away. It was a compromise that everyone could live with and simply involved some adjustments in scheduling. The goal of the agreement wasn't to force each of us dramatically outside of our comfort levels, but rather, to find a solution that was relatively harmonious and sustainable.

## Example Relationship Agreements:

### TRAINING WHEEL AGREEMENTS

- We will not have metamours in our shared space for the time being
- We will only go on platonic dates for the next two months
- We will check-in with each other once while we're on a date
- We will only have outercourse with our new partners
- We will only have casual sex this year
- We will always be each other's primary partners
- We will only see other pals that respect our relationship

### PERMANENT AGREEMENTS

- We will be transparent with our schedules
- We will encourage honest discussions about intimacy & safer sex
- We will respect each other's individual time with metas
- We will have outercourse or sex with barriers with all pals
- We will allow other relationships to evolve on their terms
- We will be honest with other pals about our commitments to each other
- We will build security through meaningful interactions rather than ownership
- We will work on creating shared values in our polycule

### Anything we need to notify other pals of

- My pal and I are working out agreements around shared space, do you have preferences about when we are at your place and mine?
- My pal and I are opening up and getting used to being sexually non-exclusive. Is it ok with you if we start slow and wait to have sex for a few months?
- My pal and I are fluid-bonded. Let's use protection!
- Can you give me a couple minutes to text my pal to check-in? I will give you my attention once I'm done.
- My pal and I are emotionally exclusive. I'm only looking for casual relationships, is that something you're interested in?

Part 3:

# Expectations

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# Expectations

Boundaries focus on you, agreements are negotiations... what do you do if you need something from your pals? You can't tell your pals what to do, but you can ask for what you want. Expectations are the boundaries you want from pals.

## Keep In Mind:

1. You're always allowed to ask, you're never entitled to get
2. Humans are autonomous: we cannot control them
3. Your needs may not align with your pals'

## Learning each other's boundaries

Defining expectations is the process of learning your pals' boundaries and for them to understand your needs. Getting to know someone means reshaping your expectations of them from your initial projections to the reality. In the beginning of relationships we cherry pick how we view our crushes to match an internal fantasy. This is what fuels NRE (new relationship energy), we're still enamored by who we think our pals are, rather than who they actually are. By getting to know people better, you realize they don't always match all of your initial expectations. Being in a relationship means allowing your expectations to shift to match who your pals actually are rather than who you want or thought they were.

When you're in a relationship, it's also important to be able to voice what you do expect from your pals. It doesn't necessarily mean they will meet you in that request, but it's crucial to ask. "Can you" is the magic phrase for setting expectations. Be curious about what your pals can and can't do for you! Remember, you should not manipulate or force your pals to conform to your expectations, but you can encourage them to meet you halfway through realistic and honest communication.

## You're Always Allowed To Ask, You're Never Entitled To Receive

While agreements are meant to be about the things that you and your pals commit to, expectations define how you want your pal to behave. In the next section we'll be talking about support and discussing how much you can and can't ask of your pals. A similar question comes up around expectations, what are you allowed to expect from your pals? The answer is, technically, anything. Expectations are requests. You can ask for anything, but you're not necessarily entitled to receive those things. You can expect your pal to submit to your every whimsy, always be perfect, and be Princess Bubblegum. But you're not the Ice King; no one owes you shit. People get to decide whether or not they want to meet your requests; that's the process of consent!

It's useful to tell your pals what you expect from them, while understanding they are allowed to reject or change those expectations. Holding in your expectations creates conditions where your pals need to guess what you want. Telling your pals what you expect of them clears up confusion. You need to explain how you want them to behave in situations to make you feel good. Simple example, you're commuting home together, you've had a stressful day, you need to say, "Can you drive and be quiet so I can decompress a little before we get home?" That way your pal isn't stuck noticing that something's wrong and not knowing what to do.

Save the guesswork and just tell pals your expectation of their behavior in the situation. Then your pals can adjust that expectation and tell you whether or not they can do what you want. That is their choice. Maybe your pal is happy to drive, maybe they have a migraine and can't do it even if they want. It's their job to inform you.

## Expectation Entitlement

Being in a relationship means some of your expectations shift to match who your pals actually are rather than who you want or thought they were. Unfortunately, a lot of relationships meet their end over mismatched expectations. When folks are too focused on the outcome or getting what they want they sometimes lose sight of their pal's autonomy. It's easier to maintain equilibrium in multiple relationships when everyone is able to adjust their expectations based on how their pals can and can't show up rather than insisting on always getting their way.

Many folks go into relationships with a lot of expectation entitlement. And to a certain degree, they should! Franklin Veaux, author of *More Than Two*, outlines some of the expectations we are actually entitled to in the Relationship Bill of Rights. For example, you are entitled to choose how much physical intimacy you receive from your pals; receiving is an active choice. However, you are not entitled to dictate how much intimacy your pal must give you, or what intimacy they offer other pals. That is their ultimate choice. It can be hard to know where the line is, but by getting to know someone, you'll most likely find out. Your ability to adjust your expectations to your understanding of your pals is important to the health of the relationship. Here are a couple thoughts to help you match your expectation to your pals:

### Tips For Accepting Your pals:

- Your pals are not perfect
- You cannot force your pals to behave how you want them to
- Your pals won't always meet your needs (and that's ok!)
- Your pals can be enough and still won't be everything to you
- Focus on what needs your pals DO meet
- Create space for needs that are unmet to be outsourced
- Give each other the ability to change and evolve

## Adjusting Expectations

I like to start off by stating my needs, and creating an expectation that relies only on my optimal outcome of the situation. By creating a perfect world scenario, I can get a better understanding of what my actual entitled expectation is. The goal isn't to discard what you want, but rather to allow your pals to input where they can realistically meet you. This is why expectations are requests rather than statements. You're asking your pal if it's OK for them to behave in the way that you want. Sometimes they will be able to meet you exactly where you want them to be, other times they won't. It's OK to feel disappointed if a pal isn't meeting your expectations. But clear communication means you can look for alternative solutions. Remember that the goal is creating relationships where everyone feels like their authentic selves are validated and upheld. This goes both ways. When pals make expectations of you, it's also your job to adjust it for them. You get to let pals know if an expectation is too big.

### Red Lines:

We all have red lines when it comes to other people's expectations of us. If your pal expects something unreasonable from you, or that violates your fundamental needs and well-being, you do not need to accept those expectations. The same goes the other way, as much as you might want something from your pals, there might be red lines that won't be negotiable. For example, raising kids for me is a red line. No matter how much a pal wants a child, I will never be the partner for them to embark on this endeavor with. I'm very transparent with pals about this red line. If having kids is really important to them, I'm OK with them raising children with other partners, or choosing to have a different type of relationship with me, however I will not compromise on my lack of desire to have kids of my own.

## Dealing With Rejection

As we keep saying, your pals don't need to meet your expectations, and they won't always be able to. Still, dealing with the rejection of an expectation can be particularly spicy or hurtful, depending on the context. I like to keep in mind when my pals tell me no that they aren't rejecting me as a person, they are rejecting the specific request. I think too often we believe that pals reject us with the intentions of hurting us, but I suggest we adopt a more compassionate view of our pals. It's useful to assume that your pals do want what's best for you. They may also have their own conflating needs that impair their abilities to meet yours. That's no one's fault, it's part of being individuals. You might want ice cream to stress eat, it might feel like a really big deal to you, and as much as your pal may want to go get it for you, they might be stuck in a work meeting and unable to assist you. Silly example, but you understand. While there are certainly instances where pals don't meet expectations out of spite, because they're being shitty, or whatever, I don't think you've picked a partner who is doing this deliberately often. If you have, get the fuck out, trust me. Remember it's OK if your pals don't meet some expectations, it doesn't mean they don't care about you. Keep communicating and working on solutions together.

## Set Boundaries For Yourself!!

Obviously, sometimes you really need something from your pal and they can't or won't meet you. I understand this does happen. Remember that you ALWAYS have control on your boundaries and behavior. As my friend says, you always have the choice to communicate or to break up. While that's a simplistic way of looking at the situation, it does offer good insight. If a pal is disrespecting a red line, or putting you at risk by not meeting an expectation you can do something about it, including removing yourself. For example, if a pal refuses to use condoms with other pals, you can insist on using barriers together, of only having intercourse, or of not seeing that person. It's your choice!

## Before Setting Expectations...

Take some time to think about what the intention of the agreements are. This is the time to chat with your pals and make sure you're all on the same page, trying to work together towards a common goal.

What is the issue or conflict point at hand?

What are my pals doing? What am I doing?

What do I want my pals to be doing instead?

What could I do instead?

What expectations can I articulate to my pals?

Is this expectation fair and kind?

Is it recognizing their autonomy?

# Your Relationship Expectations:

It can be useful to start with “entitled expectations” that assume your pal will meet your needs 100% and do exactly what you want. Then you can ask them, and make an adjustment on your expectation based on what they can and can’t do for you.

## Entitled Expectations

- Can You \_\_\_\_\_
- Can You \_\_\_\_\_
- Can You \_\_\_\_\_
- Can You \_\_\_\_\_
- Can You \_\_\_\_\_
- Can You \_\_\_\_\_

## Adjusted Expectations

- You Will \_\_\_\_\_
- You Will \_\_\_\_\_
- You Will \_\_\_\_\_
- You Will \_\_\_\_\_
- You Will \_\_\_\_\_
- You Will \_\_\_\_\_

## What will you do/need if your pal can't meet your expectations?

- I will \_\_\_\_\_
- I will \_\_\_\_\_
- I will \_\_\_\_\_
- I will \_\_\_\_\_
- I will \_\_\_\_\_
- I will \_\_\_\_\_

## Expectation Case Study:

I started non-monogamy as cheating, which graduated to don't ask don't tell. At the time, my pal and I expected each other to see other people casually while we were long distance, but expected to build long-term life plans once we were able to live together. When we made that transition, it quickly became clear that we weren't suited for monogamy, and I came out as gay after having identified as bi. This transition marked the end of our don't ask, don't tell policy and forced us to solidify the expectations we had of each other surrounding ethical non-monogamy; conversations that we had largely overlooked previously.

When we started discussing our new ENM expectations, we made the mistake of assuming we needed equality rather than fairness between us. Lots of couples make this mistake early on. My pal expected both of us to eventually each have one other long-term secondary romantic sexual pal because that matched his preferred dating style. However, I was more interested in having many casual relationships outside of ours and would get annoyed when he became closer with his pals. It was only after a lot of discussion that we came to the understanding that we were basing our entitled expectations off of our own projected preferences. By having these conversations, we were able to adjust our expectations. We understood that our polycule harmony would involve him having another long-term pal that acted more as a primary, and I would practice more of a solo style with casual dates.

Since this pal and I did not share a sexual relationship, it wasn't our place to hold expectations over how the other had sex with metas. This poly-Intimate structure helped me realize that I only get to have expectations of my pals in aspects that impact me. If I'm not involved, it's none of my business. And same goes the other way around. This let me release a lot of the anxiety over protecting our relationship from things that weren't actually an issue.



## Example Relationship Expectations:

### Entitled Expectations

Can You get tested every three months and use barriers?

Can You notify me before you start dating new pals?

Can You give me a million dollars in cash?

Can You only have sex with your other pal the way I say is okay?

Can You choose me over your other pal?

Can You commit more time and energy to this relationship?

### Adjusted Expectations

You Will get tested every 6 months or when you have new pals

You Will notify me when you go on dates with new people

You Will buy me a banana. You don't have a million dollars.

You Will make sure we develop unique intimacy based on our desires together regardless of what you do with your other pals

You Will not be able to do that. You don't wish to have a monogamous relationship or hierarchy.

You Will start spending more time together on the weekend when you have more energy to make special plans

### What will you do/need if your pal can't meet your expectations?

I will get tested every 3 months and continue to wear barriers

I will assume you're only seeing me, unless you tell me otherwise

I will hit up other people for cash. Thanks for the banana.

I will try to focus more on our sex life rather than comparing

I will have to break up because I want a monogamous relationship

I will let you take the lead on making plans more often

Part4:

# Support

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## Support

Ethical non-monogamy is challenging (all relationships are!) and you're going to feel spicy from time to time. The last part of our BAES framework addresses how to ask for tangible support from our pals to deal with challenging emotions and situations. As we've established, even the best BAES setter won't always get their way. It's inevitable that sometimes things won't turn out the way you necessarily wanted. Asking for support can be a way to address some of the challenges while you learn and gain experience. Non-monogamy can expand the number of people who we can rely on for support, but that also means having more people depending on you for support. Understanding what you actually need from others, and what you can realistically give others, makes support requests more viable.

Similar to expectations, making support requests is only one half of the equation. Your pals get to agree to offer that support or not. There are certain requests that will be unmanageable for a variety of reasons. Again, this does not mean that your feeling and need is invalid, only that this particular person cannot offer that support. I like to remind folks that offering support can also look like allowing/encouraging your pals to get their needs met through another source. If you can't be there for your pals, how can you support them getting their needs met another way?

## You Can't Do It Alone

There is a fine line between asking for too much or not enough. I'm sure you know what it's like to have people asking for more than you can give them and I'm sure you've made requests that others couldn't meet. At the end of the day, it's important to find a balance between the support you seek from others and the support you can provide yourself. Ideally, you're able to meet a good number of your needs alone. But that doesn't change the fact that you can't do everything alone.

## Asking For Tangible Support

Be realistic about what you actually feel and need to deal. There's nothing more frustrating than wanting to provide support for your pal, but not understanding how to be there for them or what's going on. Vague, convoluted, or unrealistic requests probably won't land you much actual support and most likely you and your pals will both end up frustrated and resentful. The first part of getting your needs met is knowing what you feel and understanding what you want to do about it. I suggest you take a minute to think about the five love languages (check out [5lovelanguages.com](http://5lovelanguages.com) if you're unfamiliar!):

- Physical touch
- Words of affirmation
- Gift giving
- Acts of service
- Quality time

I find that most people rely on words of affirmation. That's awesome if it's your love language, but after awhile those words can fall short. Especially if you're dealing with spicy emotions, it can be helpful to consider certain actions rather than words that can be used to make pals feel better. Branching out and seeing what other ways you can offer support to your pal can have much better results.

## Providing Support

Support is reciprocal. If you count on a pal when you're feeling spicy, they may count on you too. It might not be in the exact same way, but it's important to also provide support in return. This shouldn't be directly conditional. Recognize what your limits are so you know which type of support you're able to offer. It's OK if you can't meet every request. You're not expected to.

## Too Needy, Not Needy Enough

Many folks categorize themselves as either too needy, or not having needs. Both of those states can use some adjustments! I'm chronically under-asking for support (thank you dismissive attachment style!) My therapist, Dr. Liz Powell (I recommend you check out their excellent book, *Building Open Relationships*) likes to remind me that I need to make lots of support requests because my pal won't be able to come through on all of them. Learning to ask for more than what I need (since I chronically under-ask) makes it easier to accept rejection with grace, because I know there will be other opportunities to make requests, some of which my pals will meet!

On the other hand, if you find that you have a tendency to ask for too much (usually correlating with preoccupied attachment styles) then you can practice making more requests from yourself. Learning to meet your own needs, provide yourself with validation, and self-soothe can help you feel like you're not relying on a pal for everything. And keep in mind that providing yourself with support can also rely on external factors, like apps, creative outlets, groups and community, etc.

## Creating Security Together

Don't assume you're the only one dealing with jealousy just because your pals and metas show it differently. We all require support around ENM to a certain degree, and many of us don't have a lot of folks to turn to. Normalize talking about spicy feelings openly and without condemnation in order for support requests to be made. Your ability to create a judgment free environment in your polycule can help folks subside their feelings of insecurity and provide more opportunities to focus on the abundance of love you have amongst all of you. We fall into scarcity, which hinders support requests, when we should cherish the amount of people in our intimate circles.

## Before Asking For Support...

Take some time to think about what you're feeling and needing. The goal is asking for tangible support even if you have intangible needs.

What spicy feelings are you having?

How have your feelings manifested?

What can you do to find calm and abundance?

What do you need help with?

What can your pals realistically do?

Who else can you count on?

What support can you provide yourself?

## Your Support Requests:

ENM can make us feel all sorts of spicy emotions. When we make support requests from our pals, start off with the feeling that you're requesting help managing, state your need, and be open to alternative solutions from your pal if they can't meet that support request.

### Initial Feelings

I feel \_\_\_\_\_  
I feel \_\_\_\_\_  
I feel \_\_\_\_\_  
I feel \_\_\_\_\_  
I feel \_\_\_\_\_  
I feel \_\_\_\_\_

### Tangible Support Requests

I Need \_\_\_\_\_  
I Need \_\_\_\_\_  
I Need \_\_\_\_\_  
I Need \_\_\_\_\_  
I Need \_\_\_\_\_  
I Need \_\_\_\_\_

### Additional Solutions

We Can Also Try \_\_\_\_\_  
We Can Also Try \_\_\_\_\_  
We Can Also Try \_\_\_\_\_  
We Can Also Try \_\_\_\_\_  
We Can Also Try \_\_\_\_\_  
We Can Also Try \_\_\_\_\_

## Support Case Study:

In the beginning of my ENM journey, it was really hard to find the courage to recognize that the discomfort I was feeling was jealousy. It took some time to get used to the feeling of panic, self-doubt, and sadness that I would experience when my pal was away with someone else. I theoretically know this was exactly what I wanted, but the associated emotions were still really hard to handle. I remember getting irritated with my pal when he would come back. I had a hard time reintegrating back into our fun relationship because I couldn't shake the feelings of jealousy that I had been experiencing. It wasn't until many months later that I started getting used to it and accepting it, rather than trying to alter those feelings.

I requested that my pal and I talk about our relationship once a week during "Office Hours" (also called "RADARS" if you listen to the Multiamory Podcast) so we would have a specific time and space for us to discuss our jealousy. I felt really ashamed of being jealous, it didn't feel very feminist of me to be mad that another woman was "stealing my man." And I knew that wasn't how I actually felt when I wasn't experiencing jealousy. I found that by having a specific date and time for my pal and I to talk frankly about our jealousy, it became less shameful. Rather than be irritated because I was trying to suppress those emotions, I learned to just tell my pal I was being jealous. He in turn helped me feel less alone by explaining the ways that he was also dealing with insecurities. It was reassuring knowing that we were able to have conversations about these topics.

With this practice we also learned to hug more frequently. At some point we realized that there was only so much processing that you can actually do. But being able to incorporate another love language when words of affirmation fail us can be a better alternative.



## Your Support Requests:

ENM can make us feel all sorts of spicy emotions. When we make support requests from our pals, start off with the feeling that you're requesting help managing.

### Initial Feelings

I feel angry that my meta is taking all of your time  
I feel annoyed that you had to reschedule our date again  
I feel frustrated by the way you're expressing jealousy  
I feel sad that you didn't include me in your holiday plans  
I feel betrayed that you didn't tell me about your new pal  
I feel angry that you haven't been using protection

### Tangible Support Requests

I Need us to look at our google calendar and see if we can spend additional time together this month.  
I Need you to show initiative by setting up a date night this week  
I Need us to have regular Office Hours to create a structured space to address difficult relationship issues so it doesn't permeate our entire relationship  
I Need us to make upcoming vacation plans together  
I Need a hug and reminder that I'm still important  
I Need us to have another talk about our safer sex practices

### Additional Solutions

We Can Also Try spending a spontaneous night together this week  
We Can Also Try using a new scheduling app together  
We Can Also Try going to couple's counseling  
We Can Also Try scaling back our relationship because I realize I don't have the capacity to commit as much time as you want  
We Can Also Try having brunch so I can meet my new meta  
We Can Also Try going to get tested together

## **You're ready to go!**

Now that you have the BAES structure defined, it's time to go and explore. Be gentle with yourself and your pals. Remember if ENM is becoming un-fun or too stressful, you can always scale back and reach out for help. You're learning a new skill, so don't expect to be great at it the first time around. It's hard to start off with extreme confidence, but you'll grow into it as you give yourself and your pals practice. Enjoy!

## **Extra Resources**

All About Love by belle hooks

The Art Of Loving by Erich Fromm

Building Open Relationships by Dr. Liz Powell

More Than Two by Franklin Veaux

Polysecure by Jessica Fern

Getting It by Allison Moon

The Jealousy Workbook by Kathy Labriola

[www.5lovelanguages.com](http://www.5lovelanguages.com)

For my complete book list please visit:

[www.shrimpteeth.com/book](http://www.shrimpteeth.com/book)

