

# Boundary Setting Exercise

These ten scenarios come straight from real situations doulas face with their clients. Work in groups of three. Each group gets three scenarios. Read each one out loud together, then talk through it using the five questions below. Each group will share one key takeaway with the full group at the end.

For each scenario, work through these questions as a group:

- 1 Does this cross a boundary? Is this a fair ask, or is it too much emotionally, professionally, or personally?
- 2 How would you respond? What is your gut reaction, and is that the right call?
- 3 What feelings does this bring up for you? Guilt, frustration, sympathy, or something else?
- 4 What could happen if you say yes? Could it set a pattern that is hard to undo?
- 5 What could happen if you say no? What might she need instead of what she is asking for?

## Scenarios

### PRE-BIRTH

#### 1. The Client Who Wants to Be Friends

You are three visits in with your client. She has started texting you all day long, but not about her pregnancy. She texts about her relationship, her job, what she ate for lunch. She calls you her "best friend" and tells people "my doula is like family." You like her. She is kind and real. But something feels off, and you know a line is being crossed.

■ *She sends you a voice message at 10pm that has nothing to do with her pregnancy. You listen to it. What do you say back? And what do you say to her at your next visit to bring things back to a professional relationship without hurting her feelings?*

### PRE-BIRTH

#### 2. The One Who Cannot Afford Your Fee

A woman reaches out to you. She is 28 weeks pregnant, low income, and does not qualify for any open scholarship spots. She is scared and says she has no one to help her. She asks if you can show up at her birth for free, no contract, no pay, just as a friend. She says: "I am not asking for much. I just do not want to be alone."

■ *She is waiting for your answer right now. What do you say? And no matter what you decide, how do you make sure she is not left without any support at all?*

## PRE-BIRTH

### 3. The Partner Who Texts You Separately

Your client's husband has been texting you on his own, without your client knowing. He asks for updates after appointments and shares his worries about the birth plan. Once he asked you to "talk some sense into her" about her choice to go without pain medicine. He acts like you are on the same team. It does not feel that way.

■ *Tonight he texts you again asking what you really think about her birth plan. What do you say to him? And how do you talk to your client about this without making her feel like she did something wrong?*

## LABOR AND BIRTH ROOM

### 4. The Client Who Asks You to Lie

You are at the hospital with your client. She is worn out and wants to wait a little longer before letting the nurse do an exam. She grabs your arm and whispers: "Tell them I'm asleep. Please, just give me ten more minutes." The nurse is right there at the door.

■ *You have about five seconds. What do you say to the nurse? What do you say to your client? And how do you help her get some rest without being dishonest or damaging your relationship with the care team?*

## LABOR AND BIRTH ROOM

### 5. The Family Member Who Wants You Gone

Your client's mom shows up at the hospital two hours into labor and decides right away that she does not want you there. She pulls the nurse aside and you hear her say: "I don't know who that woman is, but this is a family moment." Your client says nothing. She just stares at the ceiling when her mom speaks.

■ *Your client has not stood up for you or asked you to stay. What do you do next? How do you find out what she actually wants without making her feel like she has to pick a side while she is in labor?*

## LABOR AND BIRTH ROOM

### 6. The Birth That Goes on Forever

You have been there for 22 hours. You have not had a real meal. You sat up through the night in a chair. Your client is still in early active labor. Her partner went to sleep in the car. She reaches for your hand and says: "Please don't leave me. You are all I have right now." You have a backup doula you can call. But you are exhausted.

■ *You know you need to call your backup. How do you have that talk with your client right now, in this moment, without making her feel like you are leaving her? And what do you say to your backup so they can step in smoothly?*

## POSTPARTUM

### 7. The Client in a Dangerous Situation

At your postpartum visit, you notice some things that worry you. Your client jumps when her partner raises his voice. She looks at him before she answers your questions. When he steps out, she grabs your hand and says "it has been hard," then goes quiet the second he walks back in. She has not asked for help. She has not said anything directly.

■ *He is still in the next room. You have a few minutes alone with her. What do you say? What do you not say? And what is your plan if she tells you something serious before he comes back?*

## POSTPARTUM

### 8. The One Who Stops Paying

Your client owes you the second half of your fee, which was due at 36 weeks. The baby came early and things got hard. Now, six weeks after the birth, she keeps saying "next week" but never follows through. You know she is struggling with money. She knows you know. She has been sending you sweet messages telling you how much you meant to her. The unpaid invoice just sits there.

■ *She just sent you a message saying you changed her life. How do you respond to that message and also bring up the money you are owed, all in the same conversation, without damaging the relationship or letting it go ignored?*

## POSTPARTUM

### 9. The Grief That Pulls You Under

Three weeks ago you were with a client when her baby was stillborn. It was one of the hardest things you have ever been through. She has texted you every day since, sometimes many times a day. You have responded every time. You are not sleeping well. You think about her baby often. She says you are the only one who truly understands. Her next message just came in.

■ *Before you reply, what do you need to do for yourself first? And how do you start to gently connect her with other people who can support her, without making her feel like you are pulling away?*

## POSTPARTUM

### 10. The Client Who Wants to Keep You

Your contract ended at the six-week postpartum visit. Your client has a new baby, a hard recovery, and a mother-in-law who is not helpful. She asks if you can "just keep checking in" without a contract. When you remind her the contract is over, she says: "I am not asking for a doula. I am asking for a friend. Can't you just be my friend?"

■ *How do you respond to that question, directly and honestly? And what help or resources do you make sure she has in her hands before you close out this relationship?*