Bookending Guidelines
By Michele Downey

This is a process we use to call a support person before and after any difficult situation we must say or do. We use this often and frequently especially when using new kinds of behavior such as assertiveness

• Call the other support person and speak in person, whenever possible. If necessary, set up a phone appointment time or a coffee appointment to ensure this time is set aside.

• Tell the person the following pieces of information:

• I am getting ready to do ABC or call/see/speak to XYZ

• The reason this is a problem in the past for me has been the following reasons, behaviors, consequences that have happened...(I relapsed, had a shame spiral, got in a fight, agreed to do ABC that I didn’t want to out of guilt and being manipulated, stuffed my feelings and ended up eating, drinking, acting out, etc.)

• My reason for calling today, seeing this person today, doing ABC today or whenever....is XYZ reason...

• I believe my real and true motive is ............

• And I am open for your feedback on my possible motive that I am not aware of...

• I need to role-play the following scenario.....what would you suggest...

• Then, agree to say a prayer and envision protection and guidance from your Higher Power either by a tangible visualization exercise or include it in the prayer for guidance, protection, healing, clarity, etc. or whatever is the intention or request from your Higher Power..

• You proceed with the plan of action....

• Whatever happens, happens. (You can plan the plan and do the footwork but you can’t plan or control the outcome. You can try to brainstorm and project what could happen (worst case scenario) and
what you could do as an action plan, for good ideas). You never beat yourself up for what is obviously not within your power to control. This may need some time for you to believe, experience or get feedback over a time period.

• Then you call back the same person, as soon as is feasibly possible to discern both the content and process of what occurred. (Content is the actual discussion, or factual contents of the situation, dialogue or circumstance. Process is how you dealt with it, what occurred that wasn’t directly said, the non-verbal communication, your thoughts, your “take” on the situation, etc.)

• You review realistically how well you felt you did, in light of:

• Your past experiences with this type of situation…

• Your turn-around time (the faster the better) with any problems like guilt, shame spiraling, distorted thoughts, etc.

• You review your victories or relapses…

• You request “gate” feedback from your bookending partner.

• “What I heard was….What I saw was….I felt….I can appreciate…..My feedback is….My experience has been……..My suggestions are…………My brainstorming/negotiations might be…………

• End with a prayer of gratitude for the opportunity to grow and the challenge that you have just completed.

• If you have time, you can cement this experience better by actually writing about this in your journal and sharing this with your important support people.

• Include your own perceptions, experiences, feelings about the process of bookending, if you want. This will be useful feedback for your bookending partner.

• Congratulate yourself for a job well done!!!!!!