



**Healthy Boundaries Reader
2025**

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Introduction

This document has been developed by NICRO at the request of our beneficiaries. It is being made available to the general public as part of our crime and violence prevention service. Individuals and organisations may make use of this document for non-profit and educational purposes.

This reader contains explanatory notes, examples and educational content, as well as guidance and advice.

The goal of this reader is to provide educational information on healthy boundaries in relationships, so that affected people can make more informed choices about their current and future situations.

This reader can also be used on conjunction with the following readers and workbooks, available from NICRO Resources page on our website.

- Peer Pressure Workbooks for Teens
- Managing Difficult People Guide
- Emotional Intelligence Workbook
- Developing Resilience Workbook
- Co-Parenting Workbook
- Toxic Relationships Reader

What are Healthy Boundaries?

Healthy boundaries are clearly defined emotional, physical, and psychological limits that protect your well-being while respecting the autonomy of others. They help you maintain a balanced sense of self in relationships and ensure mutual respect, safety, and clarity.

Characteristics of Healthy Boundaries

- **Clear and Assertive:** You express your needs calmly and confidently.
- **Consistent:** You uphold them regularly to reinforce their importance.
- **Respectful:** They honour your needs *and* others' rights.
- **Flexible:** You can adapt boundaries where appropriate without compromising your core values.

Why Healthy Boundaries Matter



Examples of Poor Boundaries in Different Contexts

Below is a table listing **examples of poor boundaries** across four key relationship settings: **work, family, friends,** and **romantic relationships**.

Examples of Poor Boundaries

Work

- Saying “yes” to every request, even when overloaded or off-duty
- Allowing a manager or colleague to speak to you disrespectfully without objection
- Taking on others’ responsibilities out of guilt or fear of conflict
- Answering work emails or calls during personal time because you feel you “have to”
- Accepting credit theft or blame without speaking up

Family

- Letting relatives make decisions for you as an adult (e.g., where to live, who to date)
- Feeling obligated to attend every family event, even at the cost of your well-being
- Not being allowed privacy or personal space in your own home
- Accepting criticism or guilt-tripping under the guise of “that’s just how family is”
- Being financially exploited or emotionally manipulated by a family member

Friends

- Constantly giving support but not receiving it in return
- Being pressured into activities or situations you’re not comfortable with
- Tolerating gossip, betrayal, or backhanded comments without addressing them
- Always adjusting your schedule or plans to suit theirs
- Feeling afraid to say “no” or express a differing opinion

Romantic Relationships

- Sacrificing your needs or values to avoid conflict or “keep the peace”
- Allowing jealousy or control to dictate who you see or talk to
- Accepting emotional, verbal, or physical abuse as “normal” or excusable
- Feeling guilty for wanting time alone or time with friends/family
- Not being able to express dissatisfaction or needs without fear of emotional backlash

What Happens to Us if We Don't Have Healthy Boundaries?

If you don't have healthy boundaries, the effects can be far-reaching and damaging—mentally, emotionally, and even physically. Below is a structured breakdown of the consequences:

Without healthy boundaries:

- You lose control over your time, energy, and emotional space.
- You're more vulnerable to exploitation and toxic dynamics.
- Your mental health and self-respect deteriorate over time.

Setting boundaries is not a luxury—it is essential. It's how you protect your well-being while maintaining respectful and functional relationships.

1. Emotional Exhaustion and Burnout

- a. Constantly giving in to others' demands or neglecting your own needs leads to depletion.
- b. **Example:** Always saying "yes" at work or in relationships leaves you drained, resentful, and overwhelmed.

2. Loss of Identity

- a. When you accommodate others too much, you begin to lose sight of your own values, wants, and limits.
- b. **Example:** You agree with others to avoid conflict, even when it goes against your beliefs.

3. Increased Resentment

- a. Overextending yourself and being taken for granted builds quiet resentment, which can explode later.
- b. **Example:** You help a friend repeatedly without reciprocation, then lash out from bottled-up frustration.

4. Toxic Relationship Patterns

- a. A lack of boundaries attracts controlling, manipulative, or dependent individuals.
- b. **Example:** A partner invades your privacy or demands your constant attention, and you feel unable to say "no."

5. Anxiety and Stress

- a. Constant people-pleasing and conflict avoidance can create chronic anxiety and inner tension.
- b. It can also cause you to lose sight of who you are as you tend to adapt your personality so that others would find you more pleasing.
- c. **Example:** You worry excessively about upsetting others or being disliked.

6. Low Self-Esteem and Self-Worth

- a. Failing to protect your needs teaches your subconscious that your feelings and limits don't matter.
- b. **Example:** You feel invisible, unimportant, or used in personal or professional relationships.

7. Poor Decision-Making

- a. Without boundaries, you may allow others to influence or override your decisions.
- b. **Example:** You allow family or peers to push you into choices that don't align with your values or needs.

8. Enabling Dysfunction

- a. Without boundaries, you may unintentionally enable others' unhealthy behaviour—like addiction, laziness, or abuse.
- b. **Example:** Covering for a colleague's repeated failures because you feel guilty saying no.

Why Do Some People Refuse to Respect the Boundaries of Others?

People may refuse to respect others' boundaries for a range of psychological, emotional, and behavioural reasons. In many cases, this refusal is not about ignorance but a reflection of entitlement, control issues, or unhealthy relational habits.

Consistently disregarding someone's boundaries is a sign of disrespect—whether conscious or not. The underlying causes don't excuse the behaviour, but understanding them can help you respond more effectively and protect your well-being.

1. Control or Power Dynamics

Some individuals disregard boundaries to maintain dominance or control in the relationship.

- *Example:* A partner insists on knowing your whereabouts at all times, despite being told it makes you uncomfortable.
- *Example:* A manager constantly pressures you to work late, even after you've said it's affecting your health.

2. Sense of Entitlement

They believe they are owed access to your time, energy, or resources, regardless of your feelings.

- *Example:* A family member demands money or favours and becomes hostile or withholding when you refuse.
- *Example:* A friend shows up uninvited, assuming they're always welcome.

3. Lack of Emotional Awareness or Maturity

They may not have the self-awareness or emotional development to understand how their actions affect others.

- *Example:* Someone continues making inappropriate jokes even after being asked to stop.
- *Example:* A person overshares or invades personal space, unaware it's inappropriate.

4. Learned Behaviour or Family Conditioning

They grew up in environments where boundaries were either non-existent or consistently violated.

- *Example:* A person raised in a controlling household may see invasive behaviour as “normal” or “caring.”
- *Example:* They mimic dysfunctional dynamics learned from parents or caregivers.

5. Manipulation or Gaslighting

Some use boundary violations as a tactic to destabilise, confuse, or control others.

- *Example:* A partner dismisses your requests for space by calling you “selfish” or “cold.”
- *Example:* A colleague consistently dumps their workload on you and frames your refusal as being “not a team player.”

6. Insecurity or Fear of Abandonment

They may cling to people or push limits out of anxiety, needing constant reassurance.

- *Example:* A romantic partner becomes angry when you make independent plans, fearing rejection.
- *Example:* A friend gets upset if you set time limits or don't reply immediately to messages.

7. Narcissism or Self-Centredness

They simply don't consider your needs important and expect the world to revolve around them.

- *Example:* A person interrupts, talks over you, or ignores your clearly stated limits.
- *Example:* They react defensively or with outrage when you assert yourself.

8. Testing Your Limits

Some push boundaries to see what they can get away with. If there are no consequences, they continue or escalate.

- *Example:* Someone keeps asking favours despite repeated no's, hoping you'll eventually give in.
- *Example:* A partner gradually increases controlling behaviour, ignoring early objections.

Dealing with the “Family First” Scenarios

Dealing with “Family First” Scenarios can be especially challenging when you're trying to set healthy boundaries, assert independence, or protect your well-being—particularly in cultures or environments where family loyalty is expected to override personal needs.

What “Family First” Often Means in Toxic Dynamics

In toxic or emotionally immature family systems, *“family first”* is often code for:

- “Don’t question us.”
- “Keep quiet about dysfunction.”
- “Your individual needs don’t matter.”
- “You owe us access to your time, money, or emotional labour.”

COMMON SCENARIOS AND HEALTHY RESPONSES

You’re Guilt-Tripped for Prioritising Your Own Life

What they say: “After everything we’ve done for you, you can’t even come to this family event?”

Response:

“I appreciate what you’ve done for me, but I need to make choices that support my well-being too. Missing this doesn’t mean I don’t care.”

You’re Expected to Tolerate Disrespect Because ‘It’s Family’

What they say: “You can’t just cut off your brother—he’s family.”

Response:

“Being family doesn’t give someone a free pass to treat me poorly. Respect is a basic requirement in all my relationships.”

You’re Pressured Into Financial or Emotional Sacrifice

What they say: “Family helps each other—are you saying you won’t support your parents?”

Response:

“I believe in supporting family, but not at the cost of my mental, emotional, or financial health. I help where I can within healthy limits.”

Your Autonomy Is Undermined

What they say: “We know what’s best for you—you should listen to your family.”

Response:

“I value your input, but I need to live my own life and learn from my own decisions.”

You’re Told You’re Selfish for Setting Boundaries

What they say: “Ever since you started therapy, you’ve become selfish and cold.”

Response:

“I’m working on being healthier, not selfish. Boundaries protect my peace—they’re not an attack on you.”

KEY PRINCIPLES WHEN FACING “FAMILY FIRST” PRESSURE

1. Boundaries Are Not Betrayal
2. Setting limits does not mean you've turned your back on family. It means you're refusing to sacrifice yourself to maintain dysfunctional dynamics.
3. Obligation Is Not the Same as Love
4. Love offered from a place of guilt, coercion, or fear isn't love—it's control.
5. You Can Love People From a Distance
6. If family members continually harm you, distance is not disrespect; it's survival.
7. Being Related Does Not Equal Entitlement or Obligation
8. Blood relations do not grant anyone the right to mistreat, manipulate, or use you.

HOW TO ENFORCE BOUNDARIES WHEN MET WITH “FAMILY FIRST” PUSHBACK

- **Stay calm but firm.** Don't justify or over-explain. Your “no” is enough.
- **Repeat your boundary if needed.** “As I said, I won't be attending.”
- **Avoid the bait.** Don't get drawn into arguments meant to derail your point.
- **Set consequences.** “If this continues, I'll leave the conversation.”
- **Follow through.** Boundaries without consequences are just suggestions.

Why Setting Healthy Boundaries Is Not Selfish or Unfair

Setting boundaries is a fundamental part of maintaining respect, dignity, and well-being in any relationship. It is important to understand that boundaries are not about controlling or limiting others, but about protecting yourself and fostering healthy interactions.

Setting boundaries is a necessary, fair, and respectful way to maintain balance in relationships. It is an act of self-care, not selfishness, and is essential for fostering healthy, sustainable connections based on mutual understanding and respect.

1. BOUNDARIES PROMOTE MUTUAL RESPECT

- Boundaries clarify what behaviour is acceptable, encouraging respect on both sides.
- They create a framework where both people feel safe and valued, rather than overwhelmed or disregarded.
- Boundaries Support Personal Well-Being
- Everyone has limits to what they can tolerate emotionally, physically, and mentally.
- Setting boundaries ensures your needs are met and prevents burnout, resentment, or harm.

2. BOUNDARIES ENHANCE RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

- Clear boundaries reduce misunderstandings and conflicts by setting expectations.
- They allow relationships to thrive on trust and honest communication.

3. BOUNDARIES ARE A FORM OF SELF-RESPECT, NOT SELFISHNESS

- Taking care of your own needs is essential; neglecting them can lead to unhealthy dynamics.
- Prioritising your well-being does not mean disregarding others—it means valuing yourself equally.

4. BOUNDARIES DO NOT RESTRICT OTHERS' FREEDOM

- You are responsible for your own limits, not how others choose to respond.
- Healthy boundaries invite others to respect your space and choices without forcing them to change against their will.

Types of Healthy Boundaries With Examples

| Boundary Type | Definition | Example Statements |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Emotional Boundaries | Protect your feelings and emotional space. | "I'm not comfortable discussing that topic right now." |
| Physical Boundaries | Define personal space and physical touch preferences. | "Please don't touch me without asking." |
| Time Boundaries | Safeguard your time and energy. | "I can't stay late; I've made plans after work." |
| Mental Boundaries | Respect your right to your own thoughts, beliefs, and values. | "I understand your view, but I see things differently." |
| Material Boundaries | Set limits on how your possessions are used or shared. | "I don't lend out my car, sorry." |
| Digital Boundaries | Control over your online presence and access to your digital life. | "Please don't go through my phone." |

Examples of Healthy Boundaries in Different Contexts

1. Work

- Saying "no" to tasks that exceed your capacity or are outside your role.
- Leaving work on time and not checking emails after hours unless it's an emergency.
- Requesting respectful, professional communication—regardless of seniority.
- Not tolerating gossip or being drawn into office politics.
- Delegating tasks when appropriate rather than taking on everything yourself.
- Setting limits on your availability (e.g. "I'll respond to emails during working hours.")

2. Family

- Politely declining intrusive questions about your personal life.
- Choosing not to attend family events that harm your mental health.
- Asking for your privacy to be respected in your home or personal choices.
- Enforcing limits around financial assistance (e.g., "I'm not in a position to lend money.")
- Refusing to be involved in or mediate family conflicts- peace does not need to be kept, true peace just is.
- As the person who is keeping the peace, is not at peace.
- Maintaining your autonomy in adult decisions (e.g., career, relationships, parenting).

3. Friendships

- Letting friends know when you need time or space to recharge.
- Declining invitations or requests without guilt.
- Voicing your needs clearly (e.g., "I don't find that joke funny—please don't say it around me.")

- Expecting mutual support, not one-sided emotional labour.
- Avoiding friends who consistently cross your boundaries or manipulate you.
- Communicating your limits around time, energy, and topics of conversation.

4. Romantic Relationships

- Maintaining your own interests, friendships, and routines outside the relationship.
- Communicating when something bothers you instead of suppressing it.
- Asserting your need for emotional and physical safety at all times.
- Refusing controlling behaviour, including monitoring or isolating you from others.
- Being honest about your limits and expectations in intimacy, finances, and future plans.
- Saying “no” without explanation or fear of conflict when something doesn’t feel right.
- People in your life who need boundaries, will often have the strongest negative reaction to you setting boundaries.
- If you are scared or intimidated by this- as it can be daunting at first- role play with a trusted person in your life first.

Knowing Your Core Values is Crucial to Developing and Maintaining Healthy Boundaries

Linking your **boundaries** to your **core values** is one of the most effective ways to ensure that the limits you set are not only consistent but also deeply meaningful. When boundaries are rooted in values, they become easier to defend, harder to compromise, and more authentic to who you are.

WHY LINK BOUNDARIES TO CORE VALUES?

- **Clarity:** You understand *why* the boundary matters—it's not arbitrary.
- **Confidence:** You're more likely to enforce it, even under pressure.
- **Consistency:** It helps you avoid guilt or confusion when others push back.
- **Integrity:** Your choices align with who you are and what you stand for.

EXAMPLES OF CORE VALUES AND LINKED BOUNDARIES

| Core Value | Boundary Example |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Respect | "I don't tolerate being interrupted or spoken to in a condescending tone." |
| Honesty | "I'm not comfortable continuing this conversation if we're not being transparent." |
| Independence | "I decide how I spend my time, even if others in my family disagree." |
| Peace of Mind | "I don't engage in arguments that escalate or become emotionally abusive." |
| Fairness | "I won't keep giving support in a one-sided relationship—it needs to be reciprocal." |
| Health (Mental/Physical) | "I won't sacrifice sleep or self-care to meet unrealistic work demands." |
| Loyalty (To Self and Others) | "I will remove myself from situations where people gossip or backstab." |
| Authenticity | "I will speak up when something bothers me rather than pretend everything is fine." |

HOW TO IDENTIFY YOUR VALUES AND ALIGN YOUR BOUNDARIES

Step 1: Identify Your Core Values

Ask yourself:

- What do I need to feel emotionally safe?
- What behaviours do I refuse to accept from others?
- What principles am I unwilling to compromise?

Write down your top 5-10 values (e.g., respect, truth, loyalty, calm, freedom, fairness).

Step 2: Spot Where Your Values Are Being Violated

Look at areas in your life where you're uncomfortable, angry, drained, or resentful.

Ask: *Which of my values is being disrespected here?*

Example:

- You feel exhausted after every family gathering → value of **emotional safety** is being violated.
- You dread team meetings where you're constantly interrupted → **respect** is being trampled.

Step 3: Set the Boundary Based on That Value

Frame your boundary to reflect what protects the value.

Value: Time & Energy

→ "I'm only available for one meeting per day outside scheduled hours."

Value: Kindness

→ "If the tone of our conversation becomes hostile, I'll step away."

COMMUNICATE BOUNDARIES WITH VALUE-BASED LANGUAGE

Using values in communication can help diffuse defensiveness:

- “I value honesty in my relationships, so I need us to be upfront with each other.”
- “Because I care about our relationship, I’m setting this boundary so it can stay healthy.”
- “Respect is important to me—this behaviour doesn’t align with that.”

Setting Healthy Boundaries

Here is a step-by-step guide to set and manage healthy boundaries.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR BOUNDARIES CLEARLY

- Reflect on what behaviour you find acceptable and what you don't.
- **Examples:**
 - "I need honest communication without yelling."
 - "I am not comfortable with being interrupted."
 - "I require time alone to recharge after work."

STEP 2: COMMUNICATE YOUR BOUNDARIES CALMLY AND CLEARLY

- Use "I" statements to express your needs without blaming.
- **Example phrases:**
 - "I feel disrespected when I'm interrupted, so I need us to let each other finish speaking."
 - "I need some quiet time after work to decompress, so I won't respond immediately to messages."
 - "I'm not okay with being criticised harshly; please speak to me respectfully."

STEP 3: OBSERVE THE OTHER PERSON'S RESPONSE

- Healthy relationships respect boundaries. Notice if they listen and adjust behaviour.
- If they respond positively: "Thank you for understanding my need for space."

STEP 4: ENFORCE YOUR BOUNDARIES WHEN THEY ARE IGNORED

- Remind them firmly but respectfully if they cross your limits again.
- **Example phrases:**
 - "I've asked that you don't raise your voice when we talk. Please respect that."
 - "I need you to stop interrupting me; it makes it hard to communicate."
 - If necessary, limit or pause interactions:
 - "Since my boundary isn't being respected, I need to take a break from this conversation."

STEP 5: TAKE CONSEQUENCES SERIOUSLY

- If the person continues to disrespect your boundaries, consider appropriate consequences.
- **Examples of consequences:**
 - Reducing time spent together.
 - Seeking support from others or professionals.
 - Ending the relationship if toxicity persists and harms your well-being.
- **Example statement:**
 - "I've communicated my needs clearly multiple times. If this continues, I will need to distance myself to protect my well-being."

STEP 6: PRIORITISE YOUR WELL-BEING

- Maintain boundaries consistently; don't compromise your mental or physical health.
- Seek support from trusted friends, family, or professionals when needed.
- Remember, respecting your boundaries is a sign of self-respect and strength.

Summary Example

- **Boundary:** "I need respectful communication without yelling."
- **Set:** "Please speak calmly when we discuss issues."
- **If ignored:** "I'm asking again for calm communication. If this continues, I will step away from the conversation."
- **If still ignored:** "Since you are not respecting my boundary, I'm taking a break from this relationship until respectful communication is possible."

Boundary Asserting Phrases

General Boundaries

- I'm not available for that right now.
- That doesn't work for me.
- I need time to think about this before responding.
- I'm not comfortable with that.
- Please don't speak to me that way.
- I've made my decision and I'm not changing it.
- I need you to respect my space.
- That topic is off-limits for me.
- I won't be engaging in this conversation any further.
- Let's revisit this when we're both calm.
- I just prefer not to.
- It's not something I want to get into.
- That's just my decision.
- I don't feel comfortable discussing it.
- I've made up my mind.
- I don't think it's something I need to explain.
- I'd rather not get into it, thanks.
- It's just how I feel right now.
- I don't see any need to explain further

Workplace Boundaries

- I can't take on additional tasks at the moment.
- Let's stick to work-related topics during work hours.
- Please speak to me respectfully, even when there's disagreement.
- I prefer to keep my personal life separate from work.
- If you have feedback, please share it constructively.

Family Boundaries

- I understand you have strong opinions, but this is my choice.
- I need you to stop commenting on my personal life.
- I won't tolerate being guilted into compliance
- I'm not discussing that with you.
- If you continue, I will need to leave the conversation.
- I understand that this is difficult for you but I also need to honour my limits

- This is not an attack, this is a boundary/limit I have, it does not mean I love you any less.
- If the relationship is going to continue in this way, we may need to look at just communicating over text for a while/ or take a break for a while.

Friendship Boundaries

- I'm not comfortable with how you're speaking to me.
- I need some space right now. It's not personal.
- I'm happy to support you, but I also need support in return.
- Please don't involve me in drama or gossip.
- I value honesty, but I also expect kindness.

Romantic Relationship Boundaries

- I need some time alone to clear my head.
- I won't accept being controlled or manipulated.
- I expect mutual respect in this relationship.
- I'm allowed to spend time with friends and family.
- This behaviour is unacceptable and needs to stop.

Saying No to Requests Boundary Phrases

Simple and Direct “No” Statements

- “No, I’m not available.”
- “No, that doesn’t work for me.”
- “Thanks for thinking of me, but I’ll have to pass.”
- “I’m not able to commit to that.”
- “That’s not something I can do right now.”
- “I appreciate the offer, but I’ll decline.”
- “I’m saying no so I can honour my priorities.”
- “I don’t have the capacity for that.”
- “I’ve got other commitments I need to focus on.”
- “No, I’m keeping my schedule clear.”

If You Want to Be Polite but Firm

- “Thanks for asking, but I’ll have to say no.”
- “I’m flattered you asked, but I can’t help this time.”
- “I hope you understand, but I need to decline.”
- “That’s not something I’m comfortable with.”
- “I’m taking a step back from new commitments.”

If You’re Saying No to Emotional or Time Drains

- “I’m protecting my time and energy, so I’m saying no.”
- “I’ve learned I need to put limits on what I take on.”
- “I’ve got a full plate and can’t take this on as well.”
- “I need to prioritise rest right now.”

If You Need to Decline Repeated Requests

- “I’ve already said no, and that hasn’t changed.”
- “Please don’t keep asking—I’ve been clear about my decision.”
- “I’ve explained my reasons. I’d like that to be respected.”

Boundary-Asserting Phrases for Specific Situations

When someone invades your personal space or privacy:

- "I value my personal space. Please don't do that again."
- "That's private. I'm not comfortable discussing it."

When you're asked to take on more than you can handle:

- "I'm at capacity. I can't take this on without renegotiating other priorities."
- "That's outside my scope. You'll need to reassign it."

When a colleague speaks to you disrespectfully:

- "I expect to be spoken to professionally. Let's continue when that's possible."
- "This tone is not acceptable. I'm ending this conversation now."

When Your Boundaries Are Framed as a Personal Attack

- "Having boundaries doesn't mean I'm shutting you out—it means I'm taking care of myself."
- "This isn't about controlling you. It's about protecting my own space."
- "I'm setting this boundary because I need to—not because I'm angry or punishing anyone."

When work-life boundaries are crossed:

- "I don't take calls outside work hours unless it's an emergency."
- "I've signed off for the day. Let's discuss this tomorrow."
- "I've completed my scheduled hours for the day. I'll pick this up during my next shift."
- "I'm committed to work-life balance and won't be available for unpaid overtime."
- "I can help within my contracted hours, but I won't be extending beyond that today."
- "I'm on my lunch break and will return to this when I'm back at my desk."
- "I'm currently on leave and not available for work matters."
- "Weekends are personal time—I'll address this during the workweek."
- "Just because others choose to overextend doesn't mean I will."
- "Respecting my boundaries doesn't make me less committed—it makes me sustainable."

When relatives overstep decisions in your life:

- "I appreciate your concern, but this is my decision to make."
- "I'm not asking for advice on this—just letting you know what I've decided."
- "This choice reflects what's right for me, even if it's different from what you would do."
- "I hear your opinion, but I'm doing what aligns with my values."
- "I need space to make and learn from my own choices."
- "This is not open for discussion."
- "I'm not changing my mind."
- "Please respect that this is a personal matter."
- "I've made my decision and would appreciate your support—not your input."

- "I'm not looking for approval—I'm informing you of my direction."
- "I'm comfortable with the outcome of my decision, whether it works out or not."
- "I'm not going to justify this further."
- "You're entitled to your opinion, but the final say is mine."
- "I understand you don't agree, but I need you to accept it."
- "This is my life, and I'm responsible for what I choose."
- "You're entitled to your opinion, but I'm going to do what's right for me."

When a Friend Minimises or Dismisses Your Feelings

- "I need my feelings to be taken seriously, even if you see things differently."
- "It's okay for us to disagree, but I need you to respect how I feel."
- "When you brush off what I'm saying, it makes me not want to share."

When guilt or manipulation is used:

- "I won't be made to feel guilty for putting my needs first."
- "If you continue trying to guilt-trip me, I'll have to end this conversation."

When friends cross emotional boundaries:

- "I want to be here for you, but I also need space to recharge."
- "It's important we both feel heard. This friendship can't be one-sided."
- "I care about you, but I'm not in the right space to process this right now."
- "Can we talk about something lighter? I'm feeling emotionally overloaded."
- "I can't always be available on demand, even though I want to support you."
- "I need some space today—I'll check in with you later when I have the capacity."
- "I'm allowed to say no or ask for space without being made to feel guilty."
- "Friendship shouldn't come with emotional strings attached."
- "I can't meet every expectation—and I need you to be okay with that."

When You're Pressured to Spend Money or Do Something Risky

- "That's not in my budget, and I'm not going to stretch myself for it."
- "I'm not comfortable with that plan, so I'll sit this one out."
- "Just because you're okay with it doesn't mean I have to be."

When You're Guilt-Tripped into Saying Yes

- "Saying no doesn't mean I don't care—it just means I have limits."
- "I'm not responsible for your feelings about my boundaries."
- "If I say yes out of guilt, I'll end up resentful—and that's not healthy for either of us."

When you're pressured into things:

- "I don't want to do that, and I won't be changing my mind."
- "No thanks. I said no, and I need you to respect that."
- "Thanks for the invite, but I'm not up for it. I'll catch you another time."
- "I need to honour my downtime right now—it's nothing personal."
- "Just because I'm free doesn't mean I'm available. I'm taking time for myself."
- "I see it differently, and I'm okay standing by that."

- “We can disagree and still respect each other—I won’t change my view to make others comfortable.”
- “I’m not going to pretend to agree just to keep the peace.”

When your autonomy is challenged:

- “I’m allowed to make choices without needing approval.”
- “You don’t have to agree with my decision, but you do need to respect it.”
- “I’ve made this decision after careful thought, and I’m standing by it.”
- “You don’t have to agree, but I do expect you to respect my choice.”
- “This is my life, and I have the right to choose what’s best for me.”

When controlling behaviour appears:

- “I won’t accept being monitored or questioned about who I spend time with.”
- “This behaviour is not okay. If it continues, I’ll need to reconsider this relationship.”

When they test your boundaries repeatedly:

- “I’ve been clear about my boundary. If it continues, I’ll have to step back.”
- “This isn’t negotiable. If you keep ignoring my limits, we won’t be able to continue.”
- “I’ve already said no. Please respect that.”
- “I’m not going to explain myself again. My decision stands.”
- “I’m not looking for approval. I’m informing you of my decision.”

Final-stage boundary enforcement:

- “I’ve communicated this boundary multiple times. If you continue to ignore it, there will be consequences.”
- “I care about this relationship, but if my boundaries aren’t respected, I’ll have to distance myself.”

Healthy Boundaries Worksheets

POOR BOUNDARIES SELF-ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

Purpose: To help you recognise where you may have unhealthy or ineffective boundaries, so you can begin building stronger, more respectful limits in your relationships and daily life.

Section 1: Common Signs of Poor Boundaries

Check all that apply to you:

- I often say “yes” when I want to say “no”
- I feel guilty when I prioritise my own needs
- I avoid conflict at all costs, even if it means tolerating disrespect
- I over-share personal information with people I don’t trust
- I let others dictate my time, schedule, or energy
- I feel responsible for other people’s emotions or problems
- I rarely ask for help, but I often feel resentful when others don’t support me
- I tolerate inappropriate behaviour to “keep the peace”
- I downplay my feelings or opinions to avoid upsetting others
- I feel emotionally drained after interacting with certain people
- I feel uncomfortable asserting myself or expressing my needs
- I fear rejection if I don’t comply with others’ expectations

Section 2: Reflection

1. Which three checked boxes feel the most relevant to you right now?

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2. How do these patterns affect your well-being or relationships?

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3. Where in your life do you most struggle to set boundaries? (Tick all that apply):

- Work
- Family
- Romantic relationships
- Friendships
- Social media
- Time and energy
- Emotional availability

Section 3: Self-Awareness Check

Answer the following prompts honestly:

- I struggle to say no when...
- I feel most resentful when...
- I feel most taken advantage of by...
- I feel drained after...
- I want to be more assertive in situations where...

Section 4: Insight and Intention

1. What is one unhealthy boundary pattern you are ready to change?

2. What might be getting in your way of setting that boundary? (Fear, guilt, pressure, etc.)

3. What would it look like to set a healthy boundary in that area?

4. What is one small boundary you will practise this week?

Closing Thought:

Recognising poor boundaries is not a failure—it's the first step in reclaiming your time, energy, and self-respect. Boundaries are a form of self-care, not selfishness.

CORE VALUES AND BOUNDARIES WORKSHEET

Part 1: Identify Your Core Values

Think about what matters most to you in relationships and life. Below are some examples—feel free to add your own.

- Respect
- Honesty
- Independence
- Peace of Mind
- Fairness
- Health (Mental/Physical)
- Loyalty
- Authenticity
- Trust
- Compassion
- Boundaries
- Growth
- Security

Write your top 5–10 core values here:

Part 2: Reflect on Boundary Violations

Think about recent situations where you felt uncomfortable, stressed, or resentful. These feelings usually signal a boundary being crossed.

| Situation or Relationship | What Happened? | Which Core Value Was Violated? | How Did It Make You Feel |
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Part 3: Set Boundaries Based on Your Core Values

For each value you identified and violation you noted, write a boundary statement that protects that value.

| My Core Values | Boundary Statement |
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Examples of Boundary Statements

- “I need to be spoken to respectfully.”
- “I will not engage in conversations that become hostile.”
- “I am not available outside working hours unless it’s urgent.”
- “I expect honesty and transparency.”
- “I need space when I feel overwhelmed.”

Part 4: Communicating Your Boundaries

Use the space below to draft how you might express your boundaries clearly, calmly, and respectfully. You can use value-based language to strengthen your message.

Example: “Because I value respect, I need us to avoid raising our voices when we disagree.”

My boundary communication examples:

Part 5: Plan for Enforcement

Boundaries require follow-through. Write down the consequences you will enforce if your boundaries continue to be disrespected.

HEALTHY BOUNDARIES WORKSHEET

Section 1: Understanding Boundaries

What Are Boundaries?

Boundaries are limits you set to protect your time, energy, values, and well-being. They help define what is acceptable and unacceptable in your relationships and interactions.

Section 2: Self-Assessment

Answer the following questions honestly:

1. Do you often say "yes" when you want to say "no"? Yes No
2. Do you feel guilty when you put your needs first? Yes No
3. Do people take advantage of your kindness? Yes No
4. Do you feel drained after spending time with certain people? Yes No
5. Do you avoid conflict by giving in to others' demands? Yes No

If you answered "yes" to most questions, you may benefit from stronger boundaries.

Section 3: Identifying Your Personal Limits

List some behaviours or patterns that make you feel uncomfortable, drained, or disrespected:

What are your non-negotiables? (Things you will not tolerate):

Section 4: Boundary-Setting Goals

Examples:

- "I want to say no without feeling guilty."
- "I want to protect my weekends as personal time."
- "I want to stop explaining myself when I decline requests."

Write your own:

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Section 5: Boundary Statement Builder

Use the structure below to build your own boundary statements:

"I feel [emotion] when [situation]. I need [boundary]."

Examples:

- "I feel overwhelmed when I get work calls after hours. I need time to unplug in the evenings."
- "I feel anxious when people expect immediate replies. I need time to respond at my own pace."

Your turn:

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Section 6: Practice Saying “No”

Write 3 ways to say no firmly but respectfully:

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Section 7: Enforcing Boundaries

If someone doesn’t respect your boundary:

- Restate it calmly.
- Repeat only once.
- If ignored again, implement a consequence (e.g., limiting contact, ending conversation).

What consequence will you use if someone repeatedly crosses your boundary?

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Section 8: Reflection

After you set a boundary, ask yourself:

- Did I stay true to my needs and values? Yes No
- Did I communicate clearly? Yes No
- How did it feel to stand up for myself? _____
- What would I do differently next time? _____

BOUNDARY LADDER TOOL

Purpose: To plan and apply progressively firmer responses when your boundaries are not respected, without overreacting or shutting down.

Instructions:

1. Choose a situation where your boundaries are being ignored.
2. Use the ladder to create **three escalating responses**:
 - Step 1: Polite / gentle reminder
 - Step 2: Firm, assertive reinforcement
 - Step 3: Clear consequence and action



Example 1: A Colleague Sends After-Hours Emails Expecting Immediate Replies

Step 1 – Polite Ask:

"Just a heads up—I'm offline after 6pm to maintain work-life balance. I'll reply during office hours."

Step 2 – Firm Reminder:

"I've mentioned before that I don't check messages outside of work hours. Please respect that boundary."

Step 3 – Consequence:

"If you continue contacting me outside of hours, I'll wait until the next workday to respond, regardless of urgency."

Example 2: A Family Member Gives Unsolicited Advice About Your Life Choices

Step 1 – Polite Ask:

"I know you mean well, but I'd appreciate it if you could let me figure this out on my own."

Step 2 – Firm Reminder:

"I've asked you not to give advice on this. I need space to make my own decisions."

Step 3 – Consequence:

"If this keeps happening, I'll need to limit how much I share with you going forward."

Your Turn: Fill in Your Own Scenarios

Situation: _____

Step 1 - Polite Ask:

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Step 2 - Firm Reminder:

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Step 3 - Consequence / Action:

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Situation: _____

Step 1 - Polite Ask:

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Step 2 - Firm Reminder:

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Step 3 - Consequence / Action:

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Situation: _____

Step 1 - Polite Ask:

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Step 2 - Firm Reminder:

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Step 3 - Consequence / Action:

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Tips for Using the Ladder:

- **Remain calm and consistent.** Don't let others provoke you into escalating too fast.
- **Stick to your script.** Repetition shows you're serious without over-explaining.
- **Follow through.** If you name a consequence, act on it. Otherwise, your boundary loses credibility.

TRIGGER LOG WORKSHEET

Purpose:

To help you recognise recurring situations, people, or behaviours that make you feel uncomfortable, resentful, overwhelmed, or violated—so you can begin to set appropriate boundaries.

Instructions:

Complete this log as soon after a triggering event as possible. Use it to observe patterns and plan more effective responses over time.

Trigger Entry #1

- **Date/Time:** _____
- **What happened? (Describe the situation briefly):**

- **Who was involved?**

- **What was said or done that triggered you?**

- **How did you feel in the moment? (tick all that apply):**
 Angry Anxious Guilty Powerless Resentful Ashamed Sad Confused Drained Pressured Other: _____

- **What did you do or say in response?**

- **Did you assert a boundary? If not, why?**

- **What would you like to have said or done differently?**

- **What boundary is needed in this situation?**

- **Next time, I will...**

Trigger Entry #2

- **Date/Time:** _____
- **What happened? (Describe the situation briefly):**

- **Who was involved?**

- **What was said or done that triggered you?**

- **How did you feel in the moment? (tick all that apply):**
 Angry Anxious Guilty Powerless Resentful Ashamed Sad Confused Drained Pressured Other: _____

- **What did you do or say in response?**

- **Did you assert a boundary? If not, why?**

- **What would you like to have said or done differently?**

- **What boundary is needed in this situation?**

- **Next time, I will...**

Trigger Entry #3

- **Date/Time:** _____
- **What happened? (Describe the situation briefly):**

- **Who was involved?**

- **What was said or done that triggered you?**

- **How did you feel in the moment? (tick all that apply):**
 Angry Anxious Guilty Powerless Resentful Ashamed Sad Confused Drained Pressured Other: _____

- **What did you do or say in response?**

- **Did you assert a boundary? If not, why?**

- **What would you like to have said or done differently?**

- **What boundary is needed in this situation?**

- **Next time, I will...**

Patterns and Insights (fill in after 3-5 entries):

- **Are the same people frequently involved in these triggers?**
 Yes No → Who? _____
- **Are there common settings or themes (e.g., being interrupted, being overworked, receiving unsolicited advice)?**

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- **What feelings come up most often?**

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- **Which boundaries seem to be most often crossed? (e.g., time, emotional, personal space, autonomy)**

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Action Plan:

- **Three clear boundaries I need to establish are:**

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- **One small step I will take this week to honour my boundaries:**

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"What I tolerate teaches others how to treat me. What I reinforce becomes a habit—for them and for me."



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