Developing Personal Boundaries
Welcome!

Ever wonder if personal boundaries might be part of the problem in your life? You might not think about it as boundaries, but maybe you find yourself thinking:

- Whose life is this? Not the one I imagined!
- I spend all day doing everything for everyone else, and again there's no time for me at the end of the day.
- Why do I keep getting hurt or taken advantage? I promise myself it won't happen again, but somehow it always does.
- Is my name ‘someone’? You hear ‘someone will do that’ and you know you’re going to be the one who ends up doing it – whether you want to or not?
- Or maybe on the other side of things, you find yourself struggling to connect in meaningful relationships, stressed out about making sure everything goes according to plan, and wonder why no one ever measures up to your expectations?

If any of this sounds like you, it might just be boundary issues that are the problem. And if you're still reading, I'm betting you're ready to do something about it.

Join me for Developing Personal Boundaries

We’re going to be diving deep into personal boundaries and how having the right boundaries can help you to keep creating a life you love. During this program, we’re going to explore:

- What healthy boundaries really are and how to set them for yourself
- Why saying no to others is really about saying yes to yourself
- How boundaries are so much more than just learning to say no
- Why having clear boundaries can help you to have closer relationships
- How to enforce your boundaries without feeling like a bitch

Let’s get started.

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Boundaries are a container. Everything inside the container is what you are available for in life. Everything outside the container is what you are not available for.

When you have clear and healthy boundaries, on the inside of that container are people and experiences that you are consciously allowing into your life. You might not always love every minute of it. It might not always be pleasurable. But when things are happening that don’t feel great, you have a sense of why they are happening and what benefit it will bring.

On the outside of the container are the people and experiences that you are consciously keeping out of your life. The people who don’t have your best interest at heart. The experiences that you don’t have the time, energy, or interest to participate in.

When your boundaries are not very clear or unhealthy, the things you let into that container can get mixed up. If your boundaries are too soft, you let in people who treat you disrespectfully. You let in people who take advantage of your good heart. You say yes to situations that make you uncomfortable because you didn’t have a boundary that let you say no.

If your boundaries are too hard, you put up walls that keep out the good stuff along with the bad. It is more difficult to get close to people, to have meaningful relationship. You miss out on opportunities because you were so busy saying no that you didn’t notice you could be saying yes.

Those healthy boundaries create beautiful opportunity to keep out the people and situations that you are not available for while simultaneously being open and vulnerable enough to build deep relationships and to be actively choosing activity that you love. This is what I call living life on purpose.

There are spaces in this guidebook for you to make notes for yourself of anything that stands out for you as you listen. If you are the kind of person who benefits from taking notes, please use this space to help you keep all of your learning in one place.
What Are Boundaries?

Let’s start with the basics. Over the next few minutes, we’ll be exploring what boundaries are…and what they are not. Personal boundaries are the rules you have for yourself for how you conduct your life and how you expect others to interact with you.

I imagine personal boundaries as a container. Everything inside the container is what you are available for in life. Everything outside the container is what you are not available for. The container itself is the rules.

Boundaries help you to be able to say no when you mean no. On the other side, boundaries help you to say yes when you mean yes - to open yourself up and be vulnerable with the right people, to intimacy and close relationships of all types.

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Flexible Boundaries & Fixed Boundaries

Boundaries are rules that are non-negotiable. Yet at the same time, there is flexibility in boundaries. This might seem like a paradox.

Flexible Boundaries

These boundaries can change. While the boundaries might flex depending on the circumstances, they are still non-negotiable when they are present. Boundaries can be flexible based on:

- Relationship to the person – your boundaries with your employer are different than your boundaries with your romantic partner
- Situation – your boundaries at home are different than your boundaries at work
- Depth of relationship – your boundaries with a new friend are different than your boundaries with a life-long friend
- Other situations unique to your life

Fixed Boundaries

These boundaries are true no matter what. Across all situations, with all people, these are your personal boundaries. They often have to do with looking after your own health and safety.

What is consistent between flexible and fixed boundaries is that they are true boundaries. When you have healthy boundaries, there are no excuses for allowing someone to violate the boundaries that do exist.

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3 Types of Boundaries

Hard Boundaries

These boundaries are the ones that keep you at a 'safe distance' from others. Being overly protective, not being willing to ask for help, and not feeling really connected to people are all signs of hard boundaries.

Soft Boundaries

These boundaries keep you too close or too attached to others. Oversharing, having a hard time saying 'no' because you fear rejection or anger, and being overly involved in others’ problems are all signs of soft boundaries.

Healthy Boundaries

These boundaries allow for deep and meaningful connection with the right people, taking on activity in life that feels good and helps you live the life you want while comfortably saying no to everything else. Knowing and valuing your own opinion, being confident in speaking up for what you believe in, and understanding and communicating your wants and needs comfortably are all signs of healthy boundaries.
More About Boundaries

On the surface, boundaries can seem relatively simple. What you are available for (your YES) and what you are not (your NO). But let’s dive a little deeper.

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The first step in making your boundaries healthier is to notice the boundaries you already have. Whether you are aware of them or not, you do have boundaries already. You may have some boundaries that are too hard. Some that are too soft. And I promise you there are also some that are just right.

Spend a week actively noticing your boundaries. Make notes for yourself on this page (make extra copies if you run out of room!) about the boundaries you have now.

Remember! This is not an exercise in judgement. What you discover is neither good nor bad. Don’t beat yourself up for the boundaries that are too hard or too soft. Change starts by acknowledging what is and that is all you are doing here.

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Clarifying Your Boundaries

To make your boundaries healthier, the next step is to clarify what your boundaries really are. There are 7 general types of boundaries that most boundaries that most people have fit into.

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Setting Your Boundaries

Now that you have some clarity of what your boundaries are, it’s time to figure out what to do with them.

When it comes to setting your boundaries, there are 2 steps:

- Setting boundaries – how and when you communicate your boundaries in the beginning
- Holding your boundaries – being consistently and consciously aware of those boundaries and being prepared to take action if someone comes close to crossing your boundary or if it is crossed outright

Different Boundaries for Different Situations

Not all of your boundaries are going to be relevant in every situation. The boundaries you set for an argument are going to be very different than the boundaries you set for an intimate conversation with your beloved. You might be able to say yes to volunteering for something during a time of year when your schedule is light and need to say no to that same request when your time commitments are more involved. The core boundaries don’t go away or change, they just aren’t all relevant in any given moment.

Review your list of boundaries. Discern for yourself what kinds of situations each boundary may be relevant to. By knowing what boundaries are important in different kinds of situations, you are better prepared to set and hold them.

Different Boundaries with Different People

Not all of your boundaries are going to be relevant to all of the people in your life. Some boundaries will be common across all people you encounter. These are the boundaries that form the basis of how you expect to be treated in the world. Some boundaries will be specific to different kinds of people in your life. The boundaries you have with your work colleagues, people in associations or organizations you belong to, friends, extended family, immediate family, children, and romantic partner will be different.
Review your list of boundaries. Discern for yourself what kinds of people each boundary may be relevant to. By knowing what boundaries are important in different relationships, you are better prepared to set and hold them.

**Communicating Your Boundaries**

In most relationships and in society as it is at this time, communicating your boundaries usually only happens when someone is coming up against that boundary. In each culture and in each grouping of people, there are generally accepted (and usually implicit) rules of engagement for how we interact with one another. When those rules of engagement are being respected, it is generally not necessary to communicate boundaries, especially in more professional, formal, or distant relationships (i.e. at work or at extended family gatherings). In most healthy nuclear families, it is not necessary to communicate boundaries because you have grown into those boundaries together.

But then there are all of the other relationships you have and all of the other situations in which boundaries will need to be communicated. That communication can happen at 3 different times:

- At the outset of a situation.
- When someone appears to be coming close to one of your boundaries.
- When someone has crossed your boundary.

**At the Outset**

When you are being asked to make a decision is the most frequent time you have the opportunity to communicate a boundary. Is this decision (and the following action) something you want to say yes to? Or is it something you want to say no to? What are you available for in this situation? At the outset of a decision, you can answer with:

- Yes!
- Maybe. I will do this if (state the conditions that turn this into a yes).
- No.
This is a simple way of declaring your boundaries. It also helps you to make active and intentional choices about what you do (or don’t do) with your life. When you make active and intentional choices, you begin living life on purpose. Living a life you love.

**Approaching a Boundary**

You are in a situation in which it looks like one of your boundaries might be crossed. Rather than waiting for it to be crossed, speak up for yourself! They key here is to give the person the benefit of the doubt and not go on the attack. It could look something like this:

- Hey, I feel like maybe we are about to...(fill in the blank). I have a need to...(state your boundary).
  
  *(Hey, I feel like maybe we aren’t being totally honest with the client here. I have a need to let them know about this so that we’re being completely transparent.)*

- I like to...(state your boundary). I was wondering...(fill in your question).

  *(Do you remember that book you borrowed from me? I like to keep track of my things and I was wondering if you were done with it yet?)*

- I don’t really like... (fill in the blank). I want to...(state your boundary).

  *(I don’t really like that for our travel schedule. I like to make sure I have enough rest every night, so even while we’re driving I’d like to make sure we stop and sleep somewhere each night. That way, we have plenty of energy to enjoy our vacation when we get there.)*

**When a Boundary is Crossed**

When a boundary is crossed, it’s important to address it as soon as possible. Sometimes this can be done immediately. Sometimes it’s best to have a cooling off period so that you can have a calm and rational conversation about it. Whenever the time is right, talk about the boundary that was crossed. The way to do this is to name the boundary that was crossed, how you expect to be treated in future, and what the consequences will be. Consequences are sometimes immediate and sometimes what will happen if the boundary is violated again.
• I don’t like when (describe the behavior). Please don’t do it again. Next time I will (describe the consequence).
(I don’t like when you call me names when we argue. Please don’t do it again. Next time I will walk away from the conversation and we can address it when we have both calmed down.)
• I noticed that (describe the behavior). You know that (describe the boundary). If it happens again (describe the consequence).
(I noticed that when you returned the car the gas tank was empty. You know that in order to use the family car, you are responsible for your own gas. If it is returned empty again, you won’t be able to use it again for 2 weeks.)
• It’s not OK when (describe the behavior). Because of that (state the immediate consequence).
(It’s not OK that you pushed me. Because of that, this relationship is over.)

Communicating Boundaries in Close Personal Relationships

Whether it’s a new romantic partner, someone who is becoming a close friend, or a business partner, there are situations where communicating your boundaries upfront can be really beneficial. When you are open and honest about your boundaries, are open to listening to the other person’s boundaries, and you are both committed to honoring each others’ boundaries to the best of your ability, the relationship becomes stronger as a result.

So, how do you communicate those boundaries?

It’s best for the conversation to be a 2-way street. Invite the person to have a conversation with you about boundaries. Use the appropriate categories of boundaries as a framework to talk about each of your boundary needs. It may be helpful to write them down so you both can refer to your boundaries as time goes by.

Be sure to agree on how you want to communicate your boundaries when they are being approached or crossed. Having a plan makes future conversations easier to have.

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What happens if your boundaries don’t align?

When you communicate your boundaries and listen to the boundaries of another, ideally you are both able to accept and honor each others’ needs. What happens when your boundaries are in opposition to each other?

A boundary is a boundary. Period. If it’s truly a boundary it is non-negotiable.

Only you can figure out what happens in a given situation when boundaries are meeting opposite needs. There may be a middle ground. There may not. Whatever the resolution, it is important that both parties give their enthusiastic consent to what is agreed upon. It is not acceptable for either party to compromise their boundary in order to keep the peace.

Reflections on Boundaries

Consider the following questions to help you personalize how you will set and hold your boundaries.

How will I set my boundaries?

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What am I already doing to hold my boundaries?

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What do I need to do differently to hold my boundaries?

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What will I do if someone is approaching my boundaries?

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What will I do if someone crosses my boundaries?

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How do I want to communicate my boundaries to the people I am closest to?

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Enforcing Boundaries

So far, you’ve clarified what your boundaries are and made a plan for how to set and hold those boundaries.

Then comes the final step of enforcing those boundaries.

Enforcing boundaries already begins in the previous section of what to do when someone crosses your boundary. That first time someone crosses a boundary, it almost always results in a second chance. What happens if the boundary gets violated again?

As a quick recap, when someone first crosses a boundary, you: name the boundary that was crossed, describe how you expect to be treated in future, and state what the consequences will be if it happens again.

Enforcing the boundary means enacting the consequence. Sometimes, that can feel scary. It feels scary because you don’t know what the outcome will be. It feels scary if your boundaries are too soft because at this moment you are more comfortable in giving in to keep the peace rather than standing up for yourself.

Here’s the key to making this work.

The other person’s response to your enforcement is not your responsibility.

A young child might have a temper tantrum, kicking and screaming on the floor. An emotional tween might burst into tears and complain about how unfair it is. A teenager might yell that they hate you and storm out of the room. As they grow up, they will (hopefully) learn how to manage themselves more appropriately.

Grown adults will sometimes have reactions that you don’t like either. But I’m going to say it again. The other person’s response is not your responsibility.

What is your responsibility is enforcing your boundaries. As you enforce your boundaries, the people in your life will either get with the program...or they won’t.
The Role of Self-Love

It is the strength of your self-love that you draw on to be able to name, hold and enforce your boundaries. If you find it difficult to have healthy boundaries, consider looking inside of yourself first. Is your sense of self-love greater than your self-critic? Can you look in the mirror and confidently say I Love You to yourself? If not, what do you need to do to make that happen?

4 Steps of Enforcement

Be Confident

You have the right to enforce your boundary. You are worth it. You deserve to live a life you love, and that means having your boundaries respected by the people in your life. Take a deep breath and be confident in what you deserve in this situation.

Remind

Remind the other person (and yourself) of the consequence. Do this simply as an explanation, not to blame, shame, or dredge up every argument you’ve ever had on the topic.

- The last time (describe behavior) I said that if it happened again, I would (describe the consequence). It’s happened again.
  
  (The last time you returned the car without gas, I said you would not be able to drive it again for 2 weeks. It’s happened again.)

- I am not available for/to (describe behavior).
  
  (It is not OK to call me names when we argue.)

Enact

Enforce the boundary by following through on the consequence.

- Sometimes the consequence has very clear parameters, like the example of returning the car with no gas.
  
  (Because it’s happened again, you cannot use the car for 2 weeks.)
Sometimes the consequence has less clear parameters, like the example of being called names during an argument. What clarification do you need to offer while enacting the boundary?

(I’m going to go for a walk now. When I come back we can resolve this disagreement, but I need you to apologize for the name calling first.)

Resolve

What needs to happen to resolve this situation? Unless the consequence is a permanent break in the relationship, there is an end to the consequence. When it is over, how do you find peace between you and move forward? It is important to find resolution at the end of the consequence so that you can move forward together in a healthy way.
Practice, Practice, Practice

That’s it. 3 steps to having healthy boundaries:

• Clarify what your boundaries are
• Set and hold those boundaries
• Enforce boundaries when they are violated

What comes next is to practice, practice, practice. Whether it’s strengthening boundaries that have been too soft, relaxing boundaries that have been too hard, or enacting all new boundaries that help you to live a life you love, it’s going to take practice.

For that practice to be successful, it is helpful to reflect daily on your boundaries and how you did in holding or enforcing those boundaries. As you become more comfortable with your healthy boundaries, this reflection can become less frequent. You can use these questions to guide your reflections:

• What boundary did I notice?
• How did I do in holding that boundary? OR How did I do in enforcing that boundary?
• What did I do well?
• What would I do differently another time?

Be sure to celebrate your successes along the way!

Revisit your list of boundaries as you practice. Are you living within your boundaries? Are there boundaries that you wrote down that are actually preferences? Are there boundaries you learned you had and want to add to the list? Working with your boundaries on a regular basis will help you to keep them strong and healthy now and into the future.
Thank You

Thank you for joining me in this deep exploration of personal boundaries.

My intention in this program has been to offer you a learning opportunity that will help you to clarify what your boundaries are, understand how to set and hold those boundaries, and to know what to do should your boundaries be crossed. As you do this work in your life, my hope is that you find rich life experience that brings you great joy.

The process you learned here today is something that will take time to implement. I’ll be sending you a link to the replay when we are finished and I hope you will come back to it again to deepen your learning. Take some time to begin these exercises today and take action to set and hold healthy boundaries for yourself too.

Because you deserve it.