

Boundaries Protect Your Wellbeing

A practical coaching guide to recognising your limits, communicating them clearly and protecting your time, energy and emotional space.

Boundaries are not walls

A healthy boundary helps you recognise what you have capacity for, what you need, what feels acceptable and what you will do when a limit is crossed. Boundaries can protect time, rest, concentration, privacy, finances, physical space, workload and relationships. They are not a way of controlling another person; they clarify your own choices and actions.

Why boundaries matter

When we repeatedly override our own limits, stress can accumulate quietly. We may become over-committed, resentful, exhausted, irritable or disconnected from what we actually want. Clearer boundaries can make commitments more realistic, protect recovery time and create more honest relationships. A boundary can be firm without being unkind and flexible without disappearing.

Signs your wellbeing may be asking for a boundary

- You say yes automatically and regret it later, or agree before checking your capacity.
- You feel responsible for preventing other people's disappointment, anger or discomfort.
- Messages, calls, interruptions or repeated requests create dread or tension.
- You sacrifice rest, meals, appointments, family time or recovery to meet other people's needs.
- You over-explain ordinary needs because a simple no feels unsafe, selfish or unacceptable.
- You notice shutdown, irritability, resentment, headaches, muscle tension or exhaustion after repeatedly pushing through.
- You keep helping long after you have stopped having the emotional or practical capacity to help.

A person-centred perspective

Carl Rogers placed great importance on congruence - becoming more able to live in a way that is consistent with what we genuinely experience. In coaching, boundaries can be understood as part of that congruence: noticing your internal experience and allowing it to inform your choices rather than automatically performing the role other people expect.

"The good life is a process, not a state of being. It is a direction, not a destination." - Carl R. Rogers, On Becoming a Person (1961).

Healthier boundaries do not require perfection. Growth can involve noticing one signal earlier, delaying one automatic yes, or choosing one clearer sentence than you would have used before.

Coaching reflection

Think of one recent yes that did not feel like a genuine yes. What did you notice in your body? What were you afraid might happen if you said no? What did saying yes cost you afterwards? What would a more sustainable response have looked like?

Recognising Your Limits Earlier

A boundary is often easier to communicate when you notice the signal before reaching complete overload. The aim is not to wait until you are angry, exhausted or unable to continue.

The boundary coaching check-in

Area	Questions to ask yourself
Body	Am I tense, restless, heavy, tired, nauseous, holding my breath or becoming overstimulated?
Emotion	Do I feel pressure, dread, guilt, resentment, irritation, anxiety or a sense of being trapped?
Capacity	If I say yes, what will I have to push aside? How much recovery will this require?
Choice	Am I choosing freely, or trying to prevent somebody else's reaction?
Need	Do I need time, information, quiet, support, predictability, rest, privacy or distance?
Limit	What am I genuinely willing and able to offer? What is outside my capacity?

Why guilt does not necessarily mean the boundary is wrong

A new boundary can feel wrong simply because it is unfamiliar. If you have learned to be the fixer, peacekeeper, organiser, carer or endlessly reliable person, changing the pattern may produce guilt. Ask yourself: **Have I acted harmfully, or has somebody simply experienced disappointment?** Disappointment is not the same as harm. Guilt is a feeling to explore, not automatic proof that you have done something wrong.

Neurodivergence and boundaries

Autistic and ADHD people can face additional boundary pressures. Masking may hide overload from others and sometimes from ourselves. Rejection sensitivity can make another person's disappointment feel especially intense. Interoceptive differences may mean

hunger, tiredness, pain or stress are noticed late. Processing time can also be essential before answering a request. "I need time to think before I answer" is a valid boundary.

Boundary, request or preference?

Preference: what you would like. **Request:** what you ask another person to do. **Boundary:** what you will do to protect your limit. "Please don't shout at me" is a request. "If shouting starts, I will pause the conversation and return when we can speak calmly" describes an action you control.

Clear language you can actually use

- **Need time:** "I need to check my capacity before I answer."
- **Say no:** "I'm not able to take that on."
- **Offer less:** "I can help with this part, but I can't do the whole thing."
- **Repeated pressure:** "I understand you're disappointed. My answer is still no."
- **Workload:** "I can complete this today, but the other task will need to move."
- **Need space:** "I want to continue this conversation, but I need a break first."

A boundary does not become stronger because it is longer. Over-explaining can accidentally turn a limit into a negotiation.

Putting Boundaries Into Practice

The five-step boundary plan

1. Notice

Identify the repeated situation and the earliest physical or emotional signal that tells you something is not working.

2. Name

Decide what you are protecting: energy, safety, dignity, concentration, privacy, money, recovery time, predictability or choice.

3. Choose

Define what you can offer and what you cannot. Make the limit realistic enough that you can maintain it.

4. Communicate

Use a short, clear sentence. You can be warm without apologising for having a need.

5. Follow through

Decide what action is within your control if the pattern continues. Consistency helps a boundary become understandable.

Coaching worksheet - one boundary to practise

The situation: _____

What happens now? _____

What do I notice in my body/emotions? _____

What am I trying to protect? _____

What am I willing to offer? _____

What is outside my capacity? _____

The sentence I want to practise: _____

If the limit is ignored, what action will I take? _____

What support would make this easier? _____

Different settings need different boundaries

At work. Boundaries may involve workload, priorities, breaks, availability, communication methods, reasonable adjustments and expectations outside working hours. Where power is unequal, it may be safer to document requests, clarify priorities in writing or seek appropriate workplace support rather than treating the issue as a simple communication problem.

With family. Long-established roles can make change uncomfortable. A parent, adult child, sibling or wider family member may be used to a particular version of you. Their surprise does not mean the new limit is unreasonable. Repetition may be more useful than a long defence.

In intimate relationships. Healthy boundaries sit alongside mutual respect, negotiation and care. They should not be used to punish, threaten, isolate or control. If you are frightened of someone's reaction, feel coerced, or believe setting a limit could place you at risk, prioritise safety and specialist support.

Online and by phone. You can decide when you read messages, whether notifications remain on, which conversations you engage with and how quickly you reply. Availability is not an obligation simply because technology makes contact possible.

After setting a boundary

You may feel relief and discomfort at the same time. Give yourself time before deciding the boundary was a mistake. Review what happened: Was the wording clear? Was the limit realistic? Did you follow through? What did you learn about your capacity? Boundaries are skills that become more natural through practice.

Reflection, Resources & Further Support

Questions for deeper coaching reflection

- Where in my life do I feel most able to say what I genuinely need? What makes that relationship or environment safer?
- Where do I automatically become the fixer, rescuer, peacekeeper or person who never causes difficulty?
- Which boundary would create the biggest improvement in my wellbeing if I practised it consistently for one month?
- What do I believe a “good” person should always do for others? Is that belief sustainable and reciprocal?
- What would change if I treated my energy as something valuable rather than endlessly renewable?
- Whose disappointment am I most afraid of, and what meaning do I attach to that disappointment?

A message from Maggie

If boundaries have always felt difficult, I want you to remember that saying no does not erase your kindness. Many of us learn to measure our worth by how useful, available or accommodating we can be. We can become so skilled at noticing everybody else's needs that our own signals are only heard when we are completely depleted.

Start smaller than you think you need to. Give yourself time before answering. Notice the tension in your body. Practise one sentence. Allow somebody to be disappointed without immediately rushing in to remove the feeling. A boundary is not about caring less; it can help you care in a way that does not require abandoning yourself.

Books for further exploration

Carl R. Rogers - *On Becoming a Person* (1961). A foundational person-centred text exploring authenticity, growth, acceptance and the process of becoming more fully oneself.

Nedra Glover Tawwab - *Set Boundaries, Find Peace* (2021). Practical discussion of identifying, communicating and maintaining boundaries in everyday relationships.

Anne Katherine - *Boundaries: Where You End and I Begin*. An accessible exploration of personal limits, responsibility and relationships.

Cloud & Townsend - *Boundaries*. A widely known boundaries text written from a Christian perspective; readers may wish to consider whether that framing suits them.

Useful resources and support

Coaching can help with recognising patterns, rehearsing language, identifying values and turning insight into practical action. Therapy may be more appropriate when boundary difficulties are strongly connected with trauma, fear, abuse, coercion, attachment wounds or experiences that need deeper therapeutic processing. Workplace concerns may also require HR, occupational health, a union, Access to Work or specialist employment advice depending on the situation.

If a relationship involves intimidation, coercive control, threats or fear, boundary-setting advice alone may be unsafe. Seek specialist domestic-abuse or safeguarding support and consider a safety plan.

When boundaries are repeatedly challenged

Some people respond to a new boundary by testing it. They may ask again, minimise your reason, become irritated, use guilt, or act as though the limit is negotiable. This does not automatically mean you communicated badly. You can repeat the same short sentence, reduce explanation and return to the action you control. A useful coaching question is: **What will I do if the other person does not agree?** A boundary needs an action, not just a hope that somebody else will change.

What healthy flexibility looks like

Healthy boundaries are not rigid rules applied without context. Capacity changes. Relationships change. Sometimes you may choose to stretch because something matters deeply to you; at other times you may need a firmer limit because your reserves are low. Flexibility is healthiest when it is a conscious choice rather than a pattern of abandoning your own needs under pressure.

A seven-day boundary experiment

Day 1: Notice one automatic yes. **Day 2:** Delay one answer. **Day 3:** Practise one short no. **Day 4:** Protect one block of recovery time. **Day 5:** Notice what guilt says and what the facts say. **Day 6:** Repeat a boundary without adding a new explanation. **Day 7:** Review what changed in your energy, resentment, anxiety and sense of choice.

References & clinical notes

Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*. Houghton Mifflin. • Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68-78. • Tawwab, N. G. (2021). *Set Boundaries, Find Peace*. TarcherPerigee.

This coaching resource is educational and reflective. It is not a substitute for individual medical, psychological, legal, safeguarding or crisis advice.