

Chapter 12

Boundaries

Boundaries are one of the most misunderstood aspects of healthy relationships. Many people imagine boundaries as rigid lines that separate us from others. They may picture conflict, rejection, or confrontation. But boundaries are not walls. They communicate where one person ends and another person begins. They allow individuals to remain connected while also respecting their own needs, limits, and energy.

For people who have spent years maintaining harmony through self-abandonment, boundaries can feel unfamiliar or even uncomfortable. You may worry that setting a boundary will upset someone, you may fear disappointing others, you may feel guilty for saying no. These reactions are understandable. If your nervous system learned early in life that maintaining safety and connection required emotionally denying, compromising, or losing yourself, asserting limits and setting boundaries can feel risky.

Healthy boundaries do not destroy relationships. In fact, they help relationships remain stable and compassionate. Without boundaries, emotional responsibility becomes unbalanced.

One person may carry more of the emotional weight. One person may give more time, attention, or energy than they can comfortably sustain. This imbalance leads to exhaustion, resentment, and confusion. Boundaries help restore balance. They allow you to care for others without losing yourself in the process.

A boundary might sound like:

- "I'm not available for that right now."
- "I need some time to think about it."
- "I can help for a short while, but not all evening."
- "I'm not comfortable with that."

These statements are not acts of rejection but expressions of honesty. They help other people understand what you can realistically offer.

For someone who is used to saying yes automatically, even small boundaries can feel significant. You may notice discomfort when you first begin practising them, but this discomfort does not mean you're doing something wrong; it simply means you're doing something new. Over time, boundaries begin to feel natural.

Expressing limits does not automatically lead to conflict or rejection - relationships can remain stable even when you occasionally say no. Most importantly, boundaries help you recognise that caring for others does not require abandoning your own needs. Boundaries allow both connection and self-respect to exist at the same time.

Reflection Exercise

Where Do You Need Boundaries?

Take a few moments to think about situations where you feel stretched, drained, or uncomfortable. These moments often reveal places where a boundary might be helpful.

Situations where I often feel overwhelmed include...

In these situations, I usually respond by...

Examples might include:

- saying yes automatically
- helping even when I feel tired
- staying longer than I want to
- taking responsibility for solving the problem

What might a healthy boundary look like in this situation?

How might you express that boundary in a calm and respectful way?

Practice Exercise

One Small Boundary

Choose one small situation this week where you could practise expressing a boundary.

Situation:

Boundary I could express:

Sentence I might use:

Final Reflection

How do you imagine it might feel to express this boundary?

Learning to set boundaries takes time particularly if you've spent years prioritising harmony over personal limits. But each boundary you express strengthens your ability to remain connected to others while also remaining connected to yourself. This balance allows relationships to become healthier, more honest, and more sustainable for everyone involved.