

Setting a Boundary

Decide where your limits are, and how to say so calmly

Boundaries are the limits we set for ourselves: on our time, our workload and our emotional availability. They are not walls, and they are not a punishment for anyone. They are what allow you to keep caring about people and your work without being worn out by it.

Emotional boundaries matter as much as practical ones. You can understand and care about how someone feels without taking responsibility for fixing it. Their feelings remain theirs.

IF SOMEONE NEEDS HELP NOW

If there is an immediate risk to life, call **999**. Samaritans are available free, 24 hours a day, on **116 123**. In England, NHS 111 (option 2) connects to an urgent mental health service.

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Where are your boundaries weak?

How often does this happen?

0 = never, 1 = sometimes, 2 = often, 3 = most of the time

	0	1	2	3
I say yes, then resent it	☐	☐	☐	☐
I answer messages outside working hours when I do not need to	☐	☐	☐	☐
I drop what I am doing to deal with someone else's urgent request	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other people's moods affect mine for the rest of the day	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel responsible for calming someone down or cheering them up	☐	☐	☐	☐
I take on work that belongs to someone else	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel guilty when I put my own needs first	☐	☐	☐	☐

Healthy boundaries are flexible. They let you get involved when it is right to, and step back when the other person needs to take responsibility for their own situation.

Decide your limit

EXERCISE

One boundary

1. The situation where I most need a boundary:

2. What I am willing to do:

3. What I am no longer willing to do:

4. What it costs me when I do not hold this boundary:

Plan what to say

Acknowledge

"I can see this matters and is urgent for you."

State the limit

"I can't take this on today without missing the deadline on X."

Offer what you can

"I could look at it on Thursday, or help you find someone sooner."

Hold it

Say it calmly, once. You do not need to justify it at length.

EXERCISE

My words

1. What I will say, in my own words:

REMEMBER

When someone is disappointed by a boundary, that is not proof the boundary was wrong. You can be kind about their disappointment and still hold the line.