

# Healthy Boundaries

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*“Daring to set boundaries is about having the courage to love ourselves, even when we risk disappointing others” Brené Brown*

Creating healthy boundaries is important for our physical and emotional health. This is especially true for those living with chronic illnesses. We have more constraints around our energy and our ability to give to others. On a positive, chronic illness can allow us to go inwards, to clarify our values, what is important and how we want to be treated by others. These insights form the foundation for boundary setting. This handout will discuss what boundaries are, why healthy boundaries are important and how to create them. Creating healthy boundaries is empowering!

## So, What is a Boundary?

*“A boundary is a limit or space between you and the other person; a clear place where you begin and the other person ends . . . The purpose of setting a healthy boundary is, of course, to protect and take good care of you” (IPFW/Parkview Student Assistance Program. n.d.).*

An easy way to think about a boundary is to think about a fence around your home. The fence prevents people from wandering into your garden and clearly defines your space. Personal boundaries, just like the fence around the house, define where you end, and others begin. They are determined by the amount of physical and emotional space you allow between yourself and others.

## Why Should I Set Boundaries?

Each person's boundaries are a reflection of their individuality and uniqueness. Importantly, for those of us with a chronic illness, setting healthy boundaries can allow us to preserve our precious energy, live within our energy envelope and support pacing. Not setting clear boundaries can lead to resentment and anger as we try to meet other people's needs before meeting our own.



Figure 1.

Healthy boundaries can help us to feel at ease, in control and respected. They also give us time and space to recharge, recentre and reflect.

## Setting Healthy Boundaries Allows you to...

- Practice self-care, self-esteem, and self-respect
- Communicate your needs in a relationship
- Make time and space for positive interactions
- Set limits in a relationship in a way that is healthy
- Protect your emotional and physical space from intrusion
- Have equal partnerships where the power is shared

## Self-compassion and Boundaries

Self-compassion provides the foundation for setting boundaries. This means developing a healthy solid relationship with yourself and connecting with your inherent self-worth. With this baseline of self-esteem, you naturally become clearer about your own needs and will be better able to set appropriate and healthy boundaries.

Ask yourself:  
What matters to me?  
What am I willing to do?  
What am I not willing to do?



Figure 2.

## How to Create Healthy Boundaries

1. Be Assertive. Assertiveness means communicating your boundary in a firm but kind way.
2. Use your no as a complete sentence. This can be daunting at first and can take practice.
3. You can also set boundaries for your time and energy without announcing it e.g. not answering texts or phone calls after a certain time
4. Reach out for support if you are struggling to implement or maintain a boundary



## Selfishness vs Self Responsibility

Feelings of selfishness or guilt can surface when we begin to assert our boundaries. We can feel guilty when we prioritise our own needs over others and begin to ruminate whether this will affect the relationship. This is not surprising given the nature of our society, reflected in sayings like “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” and “toughen up”.

Remind yourself you have a right to self-care and looking after you is your priority. Furthermore, when we do have the capacity and choose to give to others, we do it from a place of authenticity - without feeling depleted or resentful. Setting boundaries is a skill, which gets easier the more you practice. The more you practice, the less guilt you will feel. People will also become more accustomed to your boundaries.

If you are dealing with a person who is threatening to you, it may not be safe to attempt to set explicit boundaries. Seek professional help to create a safety plan.

## When Setting Boundaries

- Be respectful, calm and clear
- Use as few words as possible and be firm
- Do not apologise or justify
- Start with smaller boundaries and work up to harder ones
- Practice, this is a process, start with people who will be on your team
- Learning to set boundaries takes time

## Encountering Resistance

You are not responsible for the way another person reacts to your boundaries. If a person is not used to you setting boundaries they may be surprised, shocked or upset. Waking up to a boundary can be a problem for some and you may start to feel some resentment from them. This is a good sign! Be prepared for this and plan your response rather than reacting.

## Hurt vs Harm

If people react negatively when you set a boundary, this does not make you 'bad' or 'wrong'. The question is when you set the boundary did you hurt or harm them?

- Hurt means temporarily hurting a person's ego/feelings/putting their nose out of joint
- Harm means damaging their spirit at a fundamental core level

## 9 Boundaries I Have Set to Live my Best Life

by ME/CFS recovery blogger Liz Calson

1. I set my own pace.
2. I say "no" without an apology or detailed explanation.
3. I say "goodbye" when I'm ready to go.
4. I ask for what I need.
5. I remind myself that other people's energy (and what they say or do) cannot affect me.
6. I wait to respond.
7. I carve out time for what's important to me.
8. I don't hold myself responsible for taking away someone else's pain.
9. I do all the above with a recovery mindset.

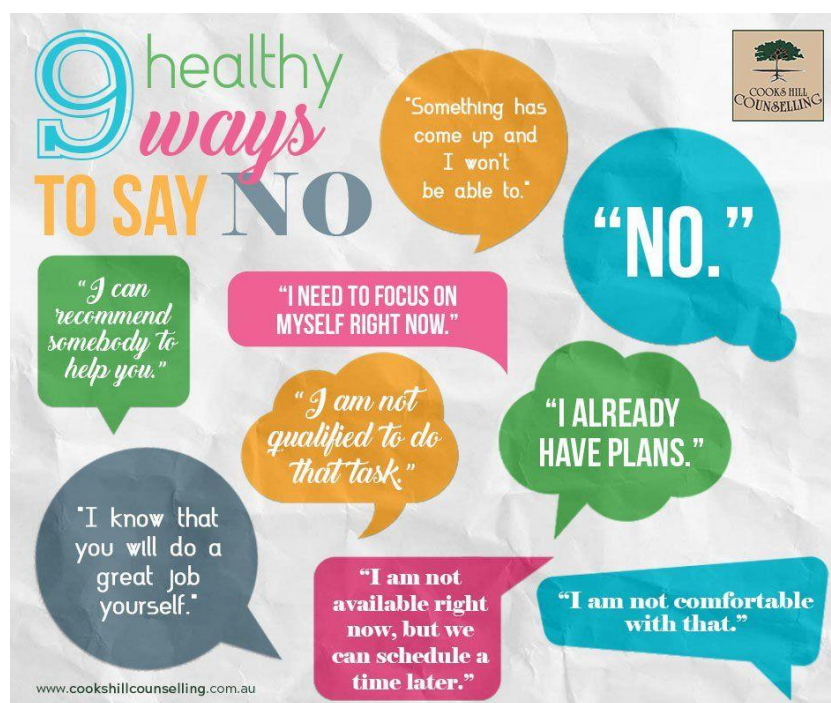


Figure 4.

[How to Say No: 3 Steps for People Pleasers | Science of People 2-minute video](#)

- Ask people to text or email you their request so you can get back to them
- Don't offer an explanation
- Offer an alternative

## And Finally...

Be respectful of other people's boundaries. Often people will give you verbal and physical cues about their limits. Notice their body language. Ask questions if you are not sure, e.g. Would you mind if I called you at 7 pm? May I ask you a personal question?

We have just scratched the surface of boundaries. If you are interested in learning more the course below is fantastic, you can take it in bitesize chunks, pause and rewind, all from the comfort of your own home. The concepts and information are accessible and easy to understand. Thank you to Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend for making this available online. They have also published a book if you prefer this format.

## Further Resources

[Boundaries DVD series available on YouTube by Dr Henry Cloud & Dr John Townsend](#)

Boundaries Session 1. What is a Boundary

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXk1oQg-8hk>

Boundaries Session 2. Problems and Symptoms

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDy3AzvuiVk>

Boundaries Session 3. Law of Boundaries Part One

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZthm-J\\_vNY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZthm-J_vNY)

Boundaries Session 4. Law of Boundaries Part Two

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3iMNkF2cRs>

Boundaries Session 5. The Myths About Boundaries

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1wJ2b4dBtA>

Boundaries Session 6. A course of Recovery

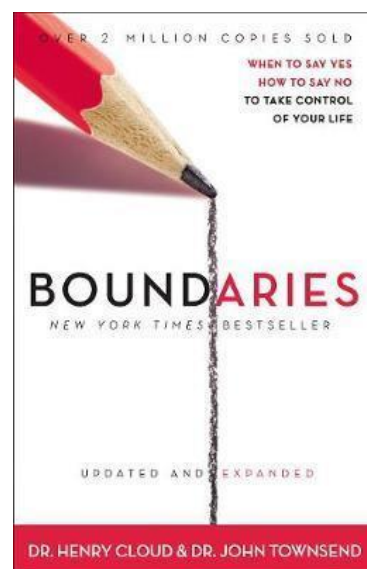
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKUOzm2BnFO>

Boundaries Session 7. Resistance to Boundaries

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjuDzgOlv8I>

Boundaries Session 8. Measure Your Success

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETbeLnF5BYI>



## References

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Selva, J. (2021). *How to set healthy boundaries: 10 examples and pdf worksheets*. PositivePsychology.com. <https://positivepsychology.com/great-self-care-setting-healthy-boundaries/>

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## Image Credits

Figure 1. <https://www.healthyplace.com/blogs/livingablissfullife/2016/08/a-relaxed-mind-is-a-happy-mind>

Figure 2. <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/set-boundaries#how-to-communicate-and-set-your-boundaries>

Figure 3. <https://www.canadianhomeinspection.com/home-reference-library/interior-of-property/mould-in-basements/helpful-tips-png-700/>

Figure 4. [The Gentle Art of Saying No for a Less Stressful Life \(lifehack.org\)](https://lifehack.org)