

A PRINTABLE SELF-HELP PACK

Boundaries Workbook

Learn where your limits are, say no without the guilt spiral, and protect your time, energy, and peace — one page at a time.

INSIDE THIS PACK

- Understand what boundaries really are (and what they are not)
- Map the six types of boundaries in your life
- Audit where your limits are leaking — and pick your priorities
- Word-for-word scripts for saying no with kindness
- A values-based decision tree for tough asks
- A planner for difficult conversations, plus a two-week practice log

A printable self-help workbook based on assertiveness and cognitive behavioral (CBT) principles.

How to Use This Workbook

Welcome. If you often say yes when you mean no, feel responsible for everyone's feelings, or end most days with nothing left for yourself — this workbook is for you. Boundaries are not walls, and they are not selfish. They are instructions you give other people for how to treat you. And like any skill, they can be learned.

Getting started

1. **Print what you need.** Print the whole pack or just the pages you want. Worksheet pages (like the decision tree and conversation planner) are meant to be reused — print as many copies as you like.
2. **Start with the education pages.** Knowing what boundaries actually are — and why saying no feels so hard — makes every tool that follows easier to use.
3. **Do the audit before anything else.** The Boundary Audit shows you where your limits leak most. Work on one or two areas, not all of them at once.
4. **Borrow the scripts.** The saying-no scripts are meant to be stolen word-for-word until your own words come naturally. Practice out loud — seriously. Your mouth needs the rehearsal more than your mind does.
5. **Plan the big conversations.** For high-stakes situations, use the Difficult Conversation Planner before you talk.
6. **Track for two weeks.** Small boundary moments count. The practice log helps you see progress your inner critic will try to ignore.

A few gentle reminders

- Guilt is not proof you did something wrong. When you first set boundaries, guilt usually means you did something *new*.
- People who benefited from your lack of boundaries may protest the arrival of them. That is normal, and it usually settles.
- These tools are self-help, not therapy. If boundary struggles connect to a relationship where you feel afraid, controlled, or unsafe, please reach out to a qualified professional or a support line — that is bigger than a workbook.

I am starting this workbook on (date):

One place in my life that needs a better boundary:

Understanding Boundaries

Part 1: What a Boundary Really Is

A boundary is a limit you set on what you will do, accept, or be responsible for. It is not about controlling other people — it is about deciding what *you* will do when your limit is crossed.

A boundary has two parts:

1. **The limit:** "I don't answer work messages after 8 pm."
2. **Your action:** "So I turn off notifications at 8."

Notice that neither part requires anyone else's permission or agreement. That is the secret most people miss: a boundary is something you *hold*, not something you *win*.

What boundaries are NOT

- **Not ultimatums.** An ultimatum tries to force someone to change. A boundary states what you will do either way.
- **Not punishment.** Boundaries protect your energy; they are not tools to make someone suffer.
- **Not walls.** Walls keep everyone out. Boundaries are more like doors — you decide what comes in, and when.
- **Not selfishness.** You cannot pour from an empty cup, and resentment is the tax on every yes you didn't mean. Clear boundaries are actually a gift to your relationships: people know where they stand with you.
- **Not one-time announcements.** Boundaries are maintained through repetition. Expect to restate them — calmly, like a broken record.

Signs your boundaries need attention

- You say yes automatically, then feel dread or resentment
- You feel responsible for other people's moods
- You over-explain and apologize for having needs
- You are exhausted but cannot point to what you did for yourself
- You avoid people because you cannot face saying no to them
- Your time gets treated as endlessly available — because it always has been

Which of the signs above feels most familiar?

The sign I recognize most:

Where it shows up most:

You teach people how to treat you by what you allow, what you stop, and what you repeat. Boundaries are the lesson plan.

Understanding Boundaries

Part 2: The Six Types of Boundaries

Most people think of boundaries as just saying no to requests. But limits exist in six distinct areas — and most of us are strong in some and leaking in others.

1. Physical boundaries — your body, personal space, touch, rest, and health.

Sounds like: "I'm not a hugger, but it's great to see you." / "I need to sit down and eat before we keep going."

2. Emotional boundaries — separating your feelings from other people's feelings; not absorbing every mood in the room.

Sounds like: "I care about you, and I can't be your only support with this." / "I'm not able to take this on today — can we talk tomorrow?"

3. Time boundaries — how your hours get spent; protecting rest, family time, and focus.

Sounds like: "I can stay until 3, then I have to leave." / "I don't take calls during dinner."

4. Material boundaries — your money and possessions; what you lend, give, and spend.

Sounds like: "I'm not able to lend money." / "You're welcome to borrow the car Saturday, but I need it back by 6."

5. Mental boundaries — your thoughts, values, and opinions; the right to disagree without a fight.

Sounds like: "We see this differently, and I'm okay leaving it there." / "I'm not discussing my vote at work."

6. Digital boundaries — availability, messages, social media, and being reachable.

Sounds like: "I turn my phone off at 9." / "I don't check email on vacation — I'll reply when I'm back."

Rigid, porous, or healthy?

For each type, boundaries can be **too rigid** (nothing gets in: isolation, never asking for help), **too porous** (everything gets in: overcommitment, oversharing, absorbing others' problems), or **healthy** (flexible but firm: you choose, based on your values and capacity).

Most people are not one style everywhere. You might be rigid at work and porous with family — or the reverse.

Where am I most porous? Where am I most rigid?

Most porous with:

Most rigid with:

The Boundary Audit

Find the leaks before you patch them

You cannot fix every boundary at once — and you don't need to. This audit shows you where your limits are holding and where they are leaking, so you can spend your energy where it matters most.

How to use it: for each area, rate how well your boundaries are working right now, from 0 (constantly crossed, high resentment) to 10 (solid, I feel respected). Then note the person or situation that tests this area most.

The audit

Boundary area	My rating (0-10)	Who or what tests it most?	One recent example
Physical (body, space, rest)			
Emotional (feelings, moods)			
Time (hours, availability)			
Material (money, things)			
Mental (opinions, values)			
Digital (messages, reachability)			

Reading your results

- **Your two lowest scores** are your leak points — that is where resentment is quietly collecting.
- **Your highest score** is proof you already know how to hold a boundary. You are not starting from zero; you are transferring a skill.

My priorities

The ONE boundary area I will work on first:

The specific limit I want to set there:

What holding this boundary would give me back:

Resentment is a smoke alarm. It doesn't mean you're a bad person — it means a boundary is on fire somewhere. Follow the smoke.

Why Saying No Feels So Hard

It's not weakness. It's wiring — and learning.

If no were easy, you would not need this workbook. For many of us, the difficulty is a mix of old lessons and honest fears. Naming yours is half the work.

The common reasons

- **You learned it early.** Many people grew up where love and approval flowed toward being agreeable, useful, and low-maintenance. Saying yes became a survival skill. It made sense then — it may be costing you now.
- **Fear of conflict.** If disagreement in your world ever meant yelling, silence, or punishment, your nervous system may treat every no like danger.
- **Fear of being disliked.** "If I say no, they'll be upset, and if they're upset, I'm not safe / not good / not loved." The chain is usually invisible until you write it down.
- **Guilt confusion.** You may have learned that disappointing someone equals harming them. It doesn't. People can feel disappointed *and* be perfectly okay.
- **Identity.** "I'm the reliable one. The helper. The strong one." Saying no can feel like breaking character in a role you've played for years.

Three truths to carry into every no

1. **A no to them is a yes to something else** — your rest, your family, your focus, your sanity. You are always saying yes to something. The question is what.
2. **Discomfort is not damage.** You can feel guilty and still have done nothing wrong. The guilt of new boundaries fades with repetition; the resentment of constant yeses only grows.
3. **Clear is kind.** A slow, reluctant, resentful yes serves no one. A clean, warm no lets people plan, ask someone else, or adjust — it treats them like adults.

When I imagine saying no to someone, the feared story in my head is...

Has that feared story actually come true before? What really happened?

You are not responsible for managing other people's disappointment. You are responsible for being honest and kind. Those are different jobs.

Scripts for Saying No

Borrow these words until your own arrive

A good no is short, warm, and clean. No fake excuses (they invite negotiation), no essays of apology (they signal doubt). Use these word-for-word, or adjust the tone to fit you. Check the ones you could actually imagine saying.

The simple no

- ☐ "No, I can't take that on right now."
- ☐ "Thanks for thinking of me — I'm going to pass."
- ☐ "That doesn't work for me."

The warm no (relationship intact, door open)

- ☐ "I'd love to another time — this week I'm at capacity."
- ☐ "I care about this, and I can't give it the attention it deserves right now."
- ☐ "I'm honored you asked. My plate is full, so it's a no from me this time."

The delayed no (buys time, breaks the automatic yes)

- ☐ "Let me check my week and get back to you tomorrow."
- ☐ "I don't say yes to things on the spot anymore — I'll confirm by Friday."

The partial yes (you set the size of your yes)

- ☐ "I can't run the event, but I can help for one hour on setup."
- ☐ "I can't lend that much, but I can send \$20 as a gift."
- ☐ "I can't talk tonight, but I'm free Saturday morning."

The broken record (for people who push — same sentence, same calm tone, no new reasons)

- ☐ "I understand, and my answer is still no."
- ☐ "I hear you. It's still a no."

The no for repeat offenders (a boundary with your action attached)

- ☐ "I've mentioned I don't discuss my weight. If it comes up again, I'm going to change the subject."
- ☐ "I can't be the emergency plan every weekend. Going forward I'm available one Saturday a month."

Make them yours

A request I keep saying yes to (but want to decline):

My script, in my own words:

When I'll practice saying it out loud (date/time):

Tip box: "Rehearse out loud three times. In the moment, your mouth will find rehearsed words far faster than clever ones."

The Values-Based Decision Tree

For when you honestly don't know if it's a yes or a no

Not every request deserves a no — the goal is a *chosen* yes, not an automatic one. When you are unsure, walk the request through this tree. It replaces "What will they think of me?" with "What do I actually want my life to look like?"

First, name your anchors:

My top 3 values or priorities this season (examples: family dinners, health, finishing my course, financial stability, recovery, rest):

1.

2.

3.

The tree

The request:

1. **Does saying yes serve one of my top 3 values?** If NO → decline. If YES → continue.
2. **Do I actually have the time and energy — without stealing from sleep, health, or the people at home?** If NO → decline or offer a partial yes. If YES → continue.
3. **Would I say yes if I knew the person would not be upset either way?** (*This isolates fear from choice.*) If NO → it's a fear-yes; decline. If YES → continue.
4. **Will future-me — the one who has to actually do this — thank present-me?** If NO → decline. If YES → continue.
5. **Am I saying yes freely, without resentment attached?** If NO → renegotiate the size of the yes. If YES → **accept it, wholeheartedly.**

My verdict

My decision (check one): ☐ Full yes ☐ Partial yes — my terms:

One sentence on why:

If it's not a clear yes by step 5, it's a no wearing a costume.

Difficult Conversation Planner

Plan it on paper so you don't improvise it in adrenaline

Some boundaries need more than a one-line no — they need a conversation. This planner uses a four-part assertive formula: describe, express, specify, and outcomes. Fill it in before the talk. Bring it with you if you want; there are no style points for memorizing.

The conversation I need to have, and with whom:

Step 1 — DESCRIBE the facts (no blame, no mind-reading)

Stick to what a camera would record: actions, dates, frequency.

When you... (specific behavior, not character):

Step 2 — EXPRESS how it affects you ("I" statements)

"I feel..." not "You make me..." — feelings can't be argued with; accusations always are.

I feel... / It affects me by...

Step 3 — SPECIFY the boundary (one clear, doable request)

Small and concrete beats sweeping and vague.

Going forward, I need... / I will be...

Step 4 — OUTCOMES (what you'll do, either way)

Not a threat — just clarity about your next move if the boundary is or isn't respected.

If this works:

If it keeps happening, I will:

Prepare for wobble moments

The pushback I most expect to hear:

My calm reply (broken record welcome):

My steadying move if I get flooded (pause, breathe, 'let me think about that'):

Tip box: "Pick the moment: private, unhurried, and not mid-argument. A hard conversation at the right time is half as hard."

Caution note : "If you fear for your safety when imagining this conversation, that is important information. Please involve a professional, a support line, or someone you trust rather than navigating it alone."

After the No

Guilt and pushback are part of the process — plan for both

Setting the boundary is step one. Keeping it standing when guilt arrives (from inside) and pushback arrives (from outside) is step two. This page is your maintenance kit.

The guilt check

When guilt shows up after a boundary, run it through these three questions:

1. **Did I break a real value of mine — or just someone's expectation of me?**

2. **Was I honest and respectful in how I said it?**

3. **Would I judge a friend for doing exactly what I did?**

If your answers are "just an expectation," "yes," and "no" — that feeling is not guilt about wrongdoing. It is the discomfort of growth. It fades with repetition.

Common pushback — and steady replies

- **Guilt-trip:** "After everything I've done for you..." → "I appreciate what you've done, and my answer is still no."
- **Minimizing:** "It's not a big deal, you're overreacting." → "It matters to me, and that's enough."
- **Testing:** they simply ignore the boundary → calmly repeat it, then follow through on your stated action. The follow-through *is* the boundary.
- **Sulking or distance:** → allow it. Other adults are allowed to feel disappointed; you are allowed to keep your limit. Both can be true at once.

My steadying lines

The sentence I'll repeat to myself when guilt hits:

A person who supports my boundary-setting, who I can debrief with:

Short-term discomfort, long-term respect. The people who value you will adjust. The ones who only valued your yes were never valuing *you*.

Two-Week Boundary Practice Log

Reps build the muscle — record yours

Boundary-setting is a skill, and skills grow with repetitions. For the next two weeks, log every boundary moment — the smooth ones, the wobbly ones, and the ones you missed. Missed reps are data, not failures.

How to use it: one row per boundary moment. "How it landed" = their reaction. "How I feel now" = yours, once the adrenaline settled.

The log

Date	The situation / request	What I said or did	How it landed	How I feel now (0-10)

Halfway check-in (end of week one)

The boundary moment I'm most proud of so far:

The moment I wish I'd handled differently — and what I'd say next time:

End of week two

What's getting easier?

Whose reactions surprised me — in a good way?

The boundary I'm ready to set next:

Progress in boundaries looks like: shorter apologies, faster recoveries, smaller guilt, and a calendar that finally has your name on it somewhere.

Pocket Boundary Cards

Cut them out. Keep them close.

For the moments when someone is waiting for your answer and your old autopilot yes is warming up. Cut along the dashed lines. Wallet, desk drawer, phone case, mirror.

<i>"Let me check and get back to you."</i>	<i>"No is a complete sentence. Warmth is optional garnish, not an apology."</i>
<i>"Every yes spends something. What am I spending, and did I choose it?"</i>	<i>"Their disappointment is uncomfortable — not dangerous. Both of us will survive it."</i>
<i>"I can love someone and still not hand them my evening, my wallet, or my peace."</i>	<i>"Guilt after a healthy boundary is a growing pain, not a verdict."</i>

Cut along the dashed lines.

Weekly Boundary Reflection

Keep the practice alive after the workbook ends

Use this page once a week — print a fresh copy each time. Five minutes on Sunday protects the whole week.

Week of:

1. This week's boundary health

Overall, my limits were respected this week (circle one): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My energy at week's end (circle one): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. This week's moments (check all that apply)

- ☐ I said a clean no
- ☐ I used a delayed answer instead of an automatic yes
- ☐ I offered a partial yes on my terms
- ☐ I repeated a boundary calmly (broken record)
- ☐ I followed through on a stated action
- ☐ I protected time for rest or something I love
- ☐ I said yes freely — and it felt good

3. Reflection prompts

Where did resentment show up this week? What boundary is it pointing at?

One boundary moment I handled better than I would have a month ago:

One yes I gave this week that I truly meant:

4. Looking ahead

The boundary that needs my attention next week:

My script for it, in one sentence:

Boundaries are not a project you finish. They are a practice, like brushing your teeth — small, regular, and quietly life-changing.

A Closing Note

If you have worked through even a few of these pages, you have done something genuinely hard: you have started renegotiating agreements that were made silently, some of them years ago.

Expect wobble. Expect a guilt echo after your early nos. Expect one or two people to push, sulk, or test — and expect most people, sooner than you think, to simply adjust. The version of you with boundaries is not colder. She is more honest. He is less resentful. They have energy left at the end of the day for the people and things they actually chose.

Keep the practice small and steady:

- One audit every few months — leaks reopen quietly
- One script rehearsed out loud before each hard conversation
- One weekly reflection, five minutes, most Sundays

And one last reminder, for the days the old autopilot yes sneaks back: a missed rep is not a relapse. Notice it, learn what triggered it, and take the next rep.

Your time, energy, and peace are not community property. They are yours — and now you have the paperwork to prove it.

The most important thing I learned about myself in this workbook:

The boundary I promise to keep practicing:

Please Read: Important Information

About this workbook

This workbook is an educational self-help resource. It shares general information and skills drawn from widely used assertiveness, communication, and cognitive behavioral (CBT) approaches.

It is not psychotherapy, counselling, medical care, or mental health treatment. Using this workbook does not create a therapist-client or any other professional relationship with its creator. It is not a substitute for assessment, diagnosis, or treatment by a qualified physician, psychologist, psychotherapist, counsellor, or other licensed professional, and it is not intended to diagnose or treat any condition.

Everyone's situation is different. If difficulty with boundaries is significantly affecting your daily life — your relationships, work, sleep, or mental health — please reach out to a qualified mental health professional. Seeking help is a sign of strength.

One important caution: these tools assume relationships that are basically safe, even when they are difficult. If you feel afraid, controlled, or unsafe with someone in your life — or if setting a small limit has ever led to threats, intimidation, or harm — please do not rely on a workbook for that relationship. Reach out to a professional or one of the support lines below. Your safety comes first, always.

If you need help now

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 911 (Canada and the US) or go to your nearest emergency department.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (Canada and the United States)

- **Call or text 988** — free, confidential, available 24/7

United States — Crisis Text Line

- Text **HOME** to **741741** (24/7)

Canada — Kids Help Phone (for young people)

- Call **1-800-668-6868** or text **CONNECT** to **686868** (24/7)

If you are experiencing abuse or feel unsafe in a relationship

- **Canada:** ShelterSafe network — **sheltersafe.ca** or call **1-800-363-9010**
- **United States:** National Domestic Violence Hotline — call **1-800-799-7233** or text **START** to **88788** (24/7)

You do not need to be in crisis to reach out.

Content was developed with the assistance of AI tools and reviewed for general accuracy; it reflects widely accepted psychoeducational principles rather than individualized advice.