

SETTING BOUNDARIES THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

This worksheet was developed using eight short steps to identify one's communication and interpersonal limits. The eight steps include identifying a specific situation, past pattern identification, identifying personal boundaries and responsibilities, understanding your own boundaries, identifying your support system, preparing for boundary testing from others, and a short summary of your plan.

This worksheet is to be used along side a therapist or mental health provider.

If a relationship involves abuse, coercion, or ongoing harm rather than ordinary friction, boundary-setting on its own may not be enough — safety planning with a licensed clinician is recommended in those situations.

1) NAME THE SITUATION

Often times we can be uneasy about a future situation or event but struggle to identify/pinpoint the exact cause of our unease. Take a moment to identify the exact person, event, situation, or behavioral pattern involved that is responsible for your discomfort.

What upcoming event, conversation, or behavior pattern is coming to mind?

Is there an individual that is making you particularly uncomfortable when thinking about the event? Describe your typical interactions with this person.

On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate the dread you are feeling about this situation right now? Why did you choose this number?

2) SPOTTING THE PATTERN

Next take a moment to mark anything below that has shown up in past events. This is not a diagnostic scale but rather a way to see a pattern on paper instead of just feeling it.

- ☐ Dreading an event or call days or even weeks ahead.
- ☐ Feeling relief, not disappointment, when a plan falls through.
- ☐ Replaying an argument in your head with someone who isn't in the room.
- ☐ Agreeing to something and regretting it almost immediately.
- ☐ Physical tightness (jaw, chest, stomach) tied to one person or event.
- ☐ Resentment that builds slowly and comes out as irritability or distance.
- ☐ Feeling responsible for keeping someone else's mood in check.
- ☐ Struggling to say plainly what you actually need.
- ☐ Feeling wiped out after time with certain people, more than the visit itself.
- ☐ A sense that you're the only one holding a relationship together.

How many did you mark? What does this tell you?

3) SORTING WHAT'S ACTUALLY YOURS

A more useful boundary setting skills is by identifying what is your responsibility vs the responsibility of the other individual. List a few of the current requests or expectations and sort them into the appropriate category below.

Request or Expectation	Shared a genuine mutual need	Not Mine to Carry theirs to manage

4) SETTING LIMITS AHEAD

When we try to make decisions in the middle of tense situations we are often left feeling vulnerable to defaulting to whatever can keep the peace within that moment. However, by preparing your limits before the event can take out the difficulty and decision making without feeling the need to compromise.

What time will you arrive? What time will you leave?

What topics are off the table for you this year? How can you safely renegotiate the conversation?

What is something you usually agree to that you are allowed to skip this year?

5) PUT IT INTO WORDS

Create a direct unapologetic statement in your own words without finding the need to justify your actions.

Example: "I need to head out by 6:00, but I'm glad I got to spend time with you before then."

Now write your own version.

If you are met with push back, repeating the same calm line is often better than re-explaining or justifying your actions. Write a shorter version you can repeat if needed:

6) LINE UP YOUR SUPPORT

Having an individual you can reach during a hard moment can help reduce the stress of the situation. Let's identify your support system prior to the situation.

Who can you reach out to during the event?

What's your plan if you need a short break (a walk, another room, your car)?

How will you unwind after the event? (journaling, call a friend, quiet time?)

7) EXPECTING SOME PUSHBACK

When we interrupt a long standing pattern of behavior within a relationship, the other individual who is used to the pattern can push back harder at first. Expecting this ahead of time keeps it from feeling like new boundary you are trying to set is a mistake.

What push back do you expect? From who?

Who will you respond if this does happen?

8) SUMMARY OF YOUR PLAN

once you have worked through all the previous sections, take some time to write a clear summary of your plan below. This can be used as a quick glance before the event itself.

Situation: _____

Arrival/ Departure Time _____

Off-limit Topic: _____

My Bounary Statement _____

If push back comes, I will: _____

My Support Contact: _____