



Now that you've identified your personal priorities and know what matters most to you, it's important that we set some boundaries to protect them!

Remember, the goal is to get you to a place where you are making intentional choices about where you spend your time and energy. And don't worry – you can absolutely be intentional about downtime and doing things that don't directly support your priorities!

How do you know if you could use stronger boundaries?

If you have difficulty putting your own needs above those of others, you no doubt have issues with setting personal boundaries. Many of us struggle with this today.

Answer these questions:

- Do you believe your happiness depends on others?
- Are you unable to say no, even when you want to?
- Do you feel responsible for other people's feelings?
- Are you more concerned with what others think of you than what you think of yourself?
- Do you feel constantly drained by all the things you have to do?
- Do you neglect your own needs, even basic care, such as eating and sleeping?
- Would others say you are a people-pleaser?
- Do you frequently have FOMO (fear of missing out)?
- Do you ever feel resentful or taken advantage of, though you'd never admit it?
- Do you find time to take care of others, but never find time to take care of yourself?
- Do you find it hard to make decisions, and often let others make them for you?
- Do you consistently ask for others' opinions before you take action?
- Do you tend to take on the emotions or moods of others in your environment?
- Do you find it nearly impossible to ask for help, even when you are struggling?
- Do you feel others' opinions are more valid than your own?
- Are you frequently unaware of how you feel or what you want?
- Do you often feel anxious or afraid, though you aren't sure of what?
- Are you overly sensitive to criticism and so try to please everyone all the time?

- Do you always go only with what other people want instead of voicing your desires? Maybe because it's simpler like that or because you are afraid of making someone angry?

If you recognize yourself in any (or many) of these questions, fear not! Next, we are going to discover how to set healthy personal boundaries and give you ways you can get started creating your own.

Why have a healthy personal boundary?

Setting strong personal boundaries is an absolute must on your journey to making yourself a priority in your own life. They aid you in discovering your true self and making sure you live life on your terms. Personal boundaries develop your self-awareness, your self-respect and they also teach others how to treat you—with respect and care.

They encompass your feelings, thoughts, beliefs, choices, intuition, needs and wants. It's about respecting yourself enough to admit what you want and asking for it from others in your life. This is why identifying your personal priorities was our first step, getting you clear on what you want and what you are working to protect!

Setting boundaries

Now that you understand why boundaries are important and you know yours could be stronger, let's look at the steps to begin setting yours. It's important to realize and remember that setting boundaries is not a one-time deal. You will need to practice using them in different situations on an on-going basis. As you get more comfortable with asserting them, you'll find it easier and more natural to use them. No one is born with boundaries in place. Each of us needs to decide for ourselves what ours are, and then stand firm in expecting them to be met and accepted by others. This process is learned, and everyone can do it!

Revisit your priorities

When we focus on other people's needs and wants only, we stop spending time on ourselves to discover what we want and need. Now's the time to change that! You've established what your personal priorities are, so consider each activity you're asked to do and evaluate whether or not it aligns with the priorities you identified.

Once you know what you desire and value in life, you'll be able to use those to make decisions about how you spend your time and energy. Anything that doesn't align with them will get an automatic "no thanks."

How do you want to be treated?

The next thing you need to do is decide how you want to be treated by others.

After all, if you don't know yourself, how can you determine how you want others to treat you and what you will and will not accept in your life? Most people who bend over backward to help others while ignoring their own needs haven't taken the time to discover who they truly are and what they want. That won't happen overnight, but you can start today.

Journal prompts

One excellent way to begin this journey of self-discovery is to start a journal. No one besides you will see it, so that you can be open and honest about your thoughts and feelings.

What are the limits you want to set? What are the "hard no's" when it comes to how you want to be treated? You may want to start by coming up with ten or more ways to fill in the blanks of these statements:

People may not _____.

I am not responsible for _____.

I deserve _____.

It's safe for me to ask for _____.

It's appropriate for me to _____ as a way of guarding my energy and time.

Journaling is a way to give you practice thinking about how to establish your boundaries in advance of needing them. Use the statements above to come up with the language you want to use the next time someone expects you to bail them out of trouble or when you want to ask for something you need.

This simple act can give you more confidence, so you feel secure in your ability to stand your ground at the moment these types of challenges occur.

Remember, you're in control.

Who decides what you HAVE to do? For the most part, YOU do. You control what you say yes to, which means you also have control over what you say NO to.

There's a quote – if it's not a HELL YES, it's a no. What activities will get your big yesses?

You vs. your kids.

You and your kids will not always share the same priorities. Remember - you are the parent, and you get to decide. Yes, we need to give them choice and empower them to make decisions, but know when their wishes start to override your priorities. That could mean you say no to a few requests. That could mean they don't register for hockey, soccer, AND jazz dance, when those activities all fall on the same weekend. That could mean they don't get a playdate if it doesn't work with the timing of everything else. Explain to them your reason for making the decisions you have, and the priorities you've set.

Tips for stating your boundaries

Up until now all of this might sound thrilling, but put in a position where you need to stand your ground, you might not be so sure of yourself. That's normal. Remember - creating and maintaining your limits is a process that will become easier the more you practice. You may be worried that putting boundaries in place will turn you into a selfish, harsh person. But trust me when I say that there are ways to do this that are kind and gentle. Below are some suggestions to stand up for yourself without feeling like guilty.

Don't give into the feeling that you need to explain or defend your decision. If someone starts to beg or argue with you after you set a boundary, simply restate your original explanation and end the conversation. Be firm, but courteous.

Remember – “No” is a complete sentence.

Use unassuming, direct language when standing your ground. Don't give excuses or explain why you've come to this decision. You only need to state your answer or choice.

If you have judgmental people in your life, start drawing attention to your needs by telling them that it's not okay with you for them to criticize your choices. Tell them that you would like them to stop commenting on your choices or whatever aspect of your life they judge. This may be scary the first time you do it, so start small if you need to.

If someone is offended or angered by your new boundaries, keep in mind that is their issue. Most likely, those people are the ones who have consciously chosen to come to you in the past because they think you will always say yes. When you start to stand your ground, they won't like it. Don't back down! You are protecting your priorities for yourself and your family.

Tips for implementing your boundaries

Pause

When someone asks you to take care of something or attend a function, you should pause before you answer. If you've spent years saying yes to everything, it's going to take some time to change that default answer. Practice telling them you'll think about it. Or, if it makes you more comfortable, say you'll have to check your calendar and get back to them. That will give you the time and space to decide if it's something you genuinely want to take part in or not. But remember – if it's a no, be confident in your no. No excuses required.

Check in with your body

When a situation occurs, or you are asked to take on a new responsibility, check in with your body. How do you feel within yourself? Do you feel relaxed? Are you naturally smiling? Do you feel excited by the prospect? Or, are your shoulders tight? Is your stomach queasy? Get to know how your emotions show up in your body. Begin using the way your body responds to gauge whether a situation is good for you. With some practice, you won't even need to think about it—it will become second nature.

Embrace flexibility

Just because you have set personal boundaries doesn't mean you have to say a firm "no" to everything. Each situation is a bit different and you may find as time goes on you want to adjust your boundaries. That's perfectly normal. Use your new tools of pausing and using your body as a gauge to determine when you feel genuine excitement about the prospect of taking on a new project or going along with the crowd. Your new motto should be "If it feels right, do it."

Resist the urge to fix

Have you ever noticed how many people come to you to vent their frustration and anger? How about when friends and co-workers call to ask for advice or help with a project? It will take some practice, but resist the urge to fix their lives for them. Instead, show compassion and empathy. You can be a sounding board for a loved one without needing to fix their problem.

Choose your company

Now that you are more aware of what you want, it's a great time to re-evaluate who you spend time with. This doesn't mean you need to cut ties with people, but make sure you are spending time with people who respect your boundaries and who are positive and supportive. People who refill your bucket, not empty it.

How to say NO

This can be an uncomfortable practice for people that have lived their whole life saying yes and going along with other's priorities. But don't worry! Saying no to things that aren't important to you or you don't enjoy is empowering. Everyone should do it! It's not healthy to be saying yes to every single request given to you, especially if some of those requests clash with your well-being and your personal priorities.

Saying no can be an incredibly difficult thing to do because you feel like you're letting people down. That's why we're going to be taking a look at the best ways to politely say no.

Why is it so hard to say no, even when we are screaming it inside when someone invites us to another boring event or to join in on a project? There are several common reasons for this:

- We're scared we'll look selfish
- We're afraid people will be angry or hurt
- We don't want to let someone down
- We are comfortable being over-scheduled
- We're afraid of missing out on something
- It makes us feel important and valued
- We feel guilty about turning down the offer
- Our self-value is related to helping and pleasing others

I can't promise it will be easy, especially since it's likely if you are reading this that you've spent a lifetime saying yes. But I do know it's worth the effort!

Just say no

Remember, plain and simple "Sorry, but I can't make it" is all that's needed. After you say it, clamp your mouth shut. If you start telling them a story about why you said no, then they have that much longer to control your answer, and you'll sometimes find yourself giving in.

"Sorry, I can't make it."

"Sorry, I can't make that work."

"Sorry, I won't be able to."

"Sorry, I don't have the capacity at this time."

"I have other priorities at this time."

“I am working on managing my energy and can't take anything else on right now.”

When to say no

It's important to understand that I'm not advocating saying no to every opportunity. I am encouraging you to choose for yourself, to be intentional about how you spend your time and energy. Instead of handing over those precious commodities to others, you're going to take charge of them for yourself. It's your life, and you deserve to live it the way you want!

Here are some suggestions for times when saying no might be in your best interest:

- When you are tired or overwhelmed
- When you are ill
- When you simply don't want to
- When the offer sounds boring or not in your wheelhouse
- When you have another way you'd rather spend that time
- When you've allocated that time to self-care
- It's going to be stressful
- You'll need to dedicate more time than is comfortable
- You already have a comfortable balance of obligations
- It's not a part of your values (you don't care about it)
- It will take time away from something important to you
- It's not your responsibility

Don't give into guilt

You may have people in your life who are harder to say no to than others. That is normal. We all have that manager, friend or relative that may put you on the spot when you tell them no. After all, they are used to you saying yes. If this happens, and it will eventually, don't give into the guilty reaction you might get internally or from them. Some people play the guilt or victim card extremely well, and they are happy to bring it out whenever they need to persuade someone to do what they want. Stand firm and repeat your no thank you. Remember what matters.

This is a practice. This will not happen all at once and it doesn't have to be a wholesale change where you say no to everything.

The most important thing is to remember YOU get to choose. Be intentional about where you spend your time and energy.