



5 STEPS TO SETTING BOUNDARIES

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HELLO!

If you're feeling resentful, overwhelmed, or burnt out, that's usually a sign it's time to set a boundary. And just what is a boundary?

Boundaries are the external expression of our internal limits.

This is the definition I created a few years ago and continue to use in my work every day. With that in mind, here are five basic steps for setting boundaries to help guide you through.

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1. UNDERSTAND YOUR LIMITS

Whenever we're thinking about setting boundaries, it's really important to take stock of our own capacity. This will allow us to put our energy where it can be used best, and move forward in a way that's sustainable. Without this understanding of our own capacity, we inadvertently end up signing up for things we don't actually have the skills for. Or, we find ourselves with so much on our plates that there's no time and energy left to do the basic things we need to do to sustain ourselves. Ask yourself - realistically, what are you willing and able to give? And remember, we're all human. We all have limits.

2. WORK THROUGH TOXIC MESSAGES

There are some majorly toxic messages out there about setting boundaries, ranging from "it's selfish to set a boundary" to "I have to keep things smooth at all costs". It's worth asking yourself - where do these toxic messages come from? In other words, who told you that? And who are those messages serving? Once you're clear on where the beliefs come from, you can decide which ones to keep, and which to let go of.



3. LET GO OF GUILT

Healthy guilt shows up in our lives when we've done something out of line with our values, and typically it helps us get back on track. But most of the time, what we're actually dealing with is toxic guilt, stemming from a belief that everyone else should come before us. So, start by asking yourself – did I do something out of line with my values? If the answer is no, then it's toxic guilt you're dealing with, and it's not serving you. Remind yourself that you've done nothing wrong, even if it feels that way.

Another key reminder I have here is that as long as we're acting in line with our values, the feeling of guilt will fade with time. It'll be uncomfortable for awhile (sorry!), but I've learned from clients that we can be uncomfortable and still be okay.

4. EXPERIMENT WITH ONE SMALL CHANGE

So many people make the mistake when they're trying to set boundaries to do it all at once. Then they get overwhelmed, they go back on the boundaries they just tried to set, and they end up feeling like they're back at square one. Instead of trying to do it all, start by picking one area of your life you'd like to set a boundary – work, dating relationships, partnerships, family, friends, activism, or volunteer work. Then, pick one type of boundary within that broader category – a financial, emotional, physical, sexual, spiritual, or time boundary. So for example, within dating relationships, you might experiment with financial boundaries by deciding you're going to draw limits around how often you offer to pay for dinner. Another example might be within the category of friendships, you might decide to work on emotional boundaries by sharing a little bit more of your feelings than you normally would.

Again, the idea is to experiment with one small change, and see how it feels.

5. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

I hear time and time again from people that boundaries get easier with time. The guilt tends to dissipate, and we can even feel proud of ourselves for meeting our own needs. We grow more confident in our own abilities, and we start to discern who we want to keep in our lives (the people who will respect our boundaries) and who might not be a fit anymore.

There's no perfect way to actually set boundaries – just the way that works best for you. And that, you figure out over time.

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