



Boundary-Setting Workbook

How to Say No Without Guilt

Introduction: Why Boundaries Matter

Boundaries are not about shutting people out; they're about letting others know how they can respect your space, energy, and emotions. When you set clear boundaries, you're protecting your well-being, and that's never selfish—it's **essential**.

Why boundaries matter: Boundaries are the invisible lines that help protect our mental and emotional health. They allow us to set limits on what we're willing to give and where we draw the line. When we don't set boundaries, we run the risk of overextending ourselves—leading to burnout, resentment, and emotional exhaustion.

Many people struggle with guilt when they set boundaries, especially if they've grown up in environments where putting others first was prioritized. This workbook is designed to help you work through that guilt, find balance, and learn to set boundaries without feeling bad about it. Remember, boundaries are a way to **honor your needs** while still caring for others.



Section One— Reflection Exercise: Identifying Your Boundary Issues

Before you can set healthy boundaries, it's important to recognize where you might be struggling. Take a moment to reflect on your experiences with boundaries.

Write down your thoughts for each question on the following pages. This is your chance to notice patterns and understand where your boundaries need strengthening.



Think about a recent time when you felt overwhelmed or resentful after helping someone. What happened, and how did you feel afterward?

Identifying where resentment shows up is often a clear sign that your boundaries may have been crossed. When we say "yes" to things we don't have the energy for, it can build frustration.



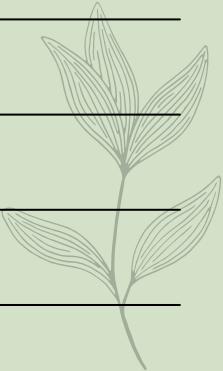
What situations make you feel obligated to say yes, even when you'd rather say no?

Guilt is often rooted in feelings of obligation. Explore what expectations are influencing your decisions—whether it's fear of disappointing someone, avoiding conflict, or seeking approval.



Do you ever feel like you're responsible for other people's emotions or happiness? Why?

Many people-pleasers carry a belief that they are responsible for making others happy. This reflection can help you see how that belief may be influencing your lack of boundaries.



Section Two— Scripts and Scenarios: How to Say No Kindly

Learning to say "no" kindly is a skill that takes practice, but it doesn't have to feel intimidating. Use these scripts for common situations to express your boundaries while still being respectful.

1. Scenario: A friend invites you to an event when you're already feeling burned out.

Thank you for inviting me! I've had a lot going on lately and really need some downtime, so **I'll have to pass this time**. Let's catch up soon!

- **Tip:** Notice how you're still acknowledging the invitation but prioritizing your needs.

2. Scenario: A coworker asks for help with a project when you're swamped with your own work.

I'd love to help, but **I've got a full plate right now** and wouldn't be able to give this the attention it deserves. I hope you can find another solution!

- **Tip:** Saying "no" doesn't have to be dismissive—here you're explaining your situation without apologizing.

Scripts and Scenarios: How to Say No Kindly continued

3. Scenario: A family member pressures you to attend a gathering you don't feel comfortable going to.

I appreciate the invitation, but **I won't be able to make it**. I hope you all have a great time!

- **Tip:** No need for over-explanation. You can politely decline and still express goodwill.

4. Scenario: A partner asks for emotional support at a time when you're feeling drained yourself.

I care about you and want to listen, but I'm not in the best space right now to give you the attention you deserve. **Can we talk later?**

- **Tip:** You're acknowledging your partner's needs while also asserting your need for emotional balance.



Handling Guilt and Pushback: Tips for Success

It's common to feel a pang of guilt after saying no, especially if you've spent most of your life putting others first. But guilt doesn't mean you did something wrong—it just means you're doing something new. Here are some strategies to help you navigate these feelings:

- **“Remind yourself that setting boundaries is about self-care, not selfishness.”** Setting boundaries isn't about pushing people away, it's about protecting your energy. Just like you'd refill a car's gas tank when it's empty, you need to refuel yourself.
- **“Give yourself permission to put your own needs first. You can't pour from an empty cup.”** You deserve the same care you give to others. When you put yourself first, you're actually better equipped to show up for others.
- **“Notice your guilt, but don't let it drive your decisions. You deserve the same care and respect you offer others.”** Guilt is just a feeling. It doesn't have to dictate your choices. Learn to sit with the discomfort of saying no, knowing that it gets easier with practice.
- **Handling Pushback:** Sometimes people might not like your boundaries, and that's okay. If someone tries to challenge your "no," stay firm and remind yourself that the discomfort is temporary. The people who respect your boundaries are the ones who truly care about your well-being.

Conclusion: You Deserve to Thrive

Setting boundaries isn't about doing less for others; it's about making sure you're doing enough for yourself, too. Saying "no" can be hard, but with the right tools it can be learned.

If you're finding it difficult to set boundaries or handle the emotions that come with it, therapy can help. Reach out to Olive Branch Counseling for support in learning how to set healthy boundaries without guilt.

