

Women Empowering Women Support Groups | The Next Step

Boundary Starter Kit

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.
-Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)

Personal Boundaries: Guidelines or rules regarding what you will and will not do in relationships. The purpose of boundaries is to protect ourselves and others from harm or exploitation. ¹

Boundaries are an inescapable part of everyday life. Whether raising a child, supporting a spouse, or responding to an email, we are continually invited to participate in each other's lives.

Many factors make personal boundaries a complex road to navigate. In intimate relationships, we are often presented with the delicate tension between meeting our needs and meeting the needs of others. It is often unclear how much of ourselves we should give, and making decisions can be fraught with doubt. Furthermore, taking care of ourselves might disappoint others or create feelings of discomfort. Further complicating matters is how our style is influenced by our family of origin experiences, and by unresolved issues (e.g., low self-worth). In short, there are no easy answers.

Regardless of the difficulty, the practice of setting personal boundaries (a daily practice!) is one of the most essential tools for healthy living. When we have a sense of what we need to be healthy and are able to communicate that, we can live with more serenity and clarity. The boundaries we set also invite the people in our lives to take more

responsibility for themselves, hopefully promoting mutual growth. When we can move out of the victim role and take responsibility for our lives, we can cultivate compassion and achieve a balance that is far more sustainable.

This kit may be for you if

- You have difficulty saying “no” to requests
- You put others first at the expense of yourself
- You want to change the dynamics of a relationship

Boundary Exercises: An Overview	
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Although the arrangement of this information is my own, the knowledge has been gathered from many sources, including my clients. Feel free to distribute this document freely.

1. Getting Started

Boundary Styles²

In general, boundaries can be characterized as

- **Functional:** Firm yet flexible, communicated in a moderate way
- **Loose or diffuse:** Intruding on the rights of others, or allowing others to cross your boundaries
- **Rigid or walled:** Closed off and distant

Many of us have learned boundary styles from our family environments. These boundary patterns are often re-enacted in intimate relationships and work settings as adults.

1.1 Boundary Violations

The purpose of the following handout is to help you identify situations where someone may have crossed your boundaries. Please select the ones that apply to you, and use the 'Notes' section to give examples.

Communication Boundaries	
Violation	Notes
○ Calling, emailing, or texting you excessively	
○ Responding to you with sarcasm, eye rolling, or mockery (called contempt)	
○ Raising their voice or yelling in your presence	

² From Pia Mellody's book, *Facing Co-dependence*

○ Blaming you for their anger or actions	
○ Interrupting you	
○ Monopolizing the conversation	
○ Rejecting, minimizing or ignoring your feelings (called invalidation)	
○ Failing to take responsibility for any aspect of your disagreement	
○ Giving you the silent treatment or shutting down	
○ Calling you names	
○ Denying or distorting your reality (called 'gaslighting')	
○ Being deceptive or withholding information	
○ Giving you back-handed compliments or engaging in passive aggressive behaviours	
○ Suddenly failing to honour previously agreed upon agreements	
<p>Criticism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All or nothing statements (e.g., you've never loved me!) ○ Assumptions (e.g., you are the kind of person who...) ○ Pointing out your flaws (e.g., you aren't very good at...) 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Intellectualizing (e.g., when the other person uses large words or concepts to confuse the other person) ○ Using excessive joking or humour in a critical way ○ Changing the topic or refusing to talk about important issues 	
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Physical Boundaries	
Violation	Notes
○ Attempting to isolate you from friends or family	
○ Touching you without permission (e.g., hitting or sexual touch)	
○ Looking through your belongings without permission	
○ Blocking you from leaving a room or home	
○ Throwing or breaking things in your presence	
○ Threatening you or using aggressive gestures	
○ Denying you personal space or privacy	
○ Standing too close to you or talking too closely	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exposing children to yelling or physical fighting 	
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Sexual Boundaries	
Violation	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Repeatedly being asked to have sex after saying “no” 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ongoing deception about your partner’s sexual behaviour 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exposing children to sexual content 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exposure to STDs through your partner’s sexual behaviour 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Having your sexual preferences shamed 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Being inappropriately stared at or objectified 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Being touched sexually while asleep 	

Other Examples	
Violation	Notes
○ Aggressive movements (e.g., slamming doors, storming around the house)	
○ Constant negativity, complaining, or whining	
○ Making unrealistic demands on someone's time, energy, or finances	
○ Continued lateness	
○ Spending someone else's money on items that are not agreed upon	
○ Refusing to participate in household chores or other relational activities	
○ Suddenly failing to honour previously agreed upon commitments	

Identifying Your Problem Areas

Consider the following questions:

1. What boundary categories have the most violations?
(e.g., sexual, communication)?

2. How have these boundary issues impacted you negatively?

3. What are the main reasons why you want to have boundaries now?

When Professional Help Is Needed

- When someone threatens to kill themselves or others
- When someone is abusing a child or exposing them to abuse
- When there is significant emotional manipulation and gaslighting
- If the boundary violations have involved infidelity, deception, or betrayal
- If you are experiencing significant impacts to your daily functioning (e.g., intrusive thoughts, emotional instability)

1.2 Personal Bill of Rights³

Sometimes it's difficult to set boundaries when we do not know what to expect in healthy relationships. The following handout has been a popular staple in the literature on healthy relationships for many years.⁴ Please review this following list and complete the questions below.

1. I have the right to ask for what I need.
2. I have the right to say no to requests or demands that I can't meet.
3. I have the right to change my mind.
4. I have the right to make mistakes and to not have to be perfect.
5. I have the right to have a difference of opinion or way of seeing the situation.
6. I have the right to follow my own values and standards.
7. I have the right to express my positive and negative feelings, as long as they do not harm anyone.
8. I have the right to determine my own priorities.
9. I am not responsible for the behaviour, feelings, or problems of others.
10. I have the right to expect honesty from others.
11. I have the right to not know the answers or to say, "I don't know."
12. I have the right to be angry at someone I love and to express this in a moderate manner.
13. I have the right to my own reality.
14. I have the right to my need for space and time.
15. I have the right to treat myself well and to be healthy.
16. I have the right to remove myself from abusive and unhealthy environments.
17. I have the right to change and grow.
18. I have the right to make new friends and contacts.
19. I have the right to have my needs and requests honoured by others.
20. I have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
21. I have the right to a fulfilling sex life.
22. I have the right to be playful.
23. I have the right to grieve and be sad.
24. I have the right to be happy.
25. I have the right to take care of myself.

³ Adapted from Copeland's *Anxiety and Phobia Workbook*.

Guidelines for Personal Responsibilities in Relationships⁵

Psychologist Jordan Peterson has made the observation that our society has become too focused on rights and not enough on responsibilities. Therefore, I have included some guidelines for responsibilities for intimate relationships. With any guidelines, some flexibility is warranted depending on the situation.

1. I am ultimately responsible for my own behaviour, including my deciding to stay in or to leave a relationship.
1. I am responsible for responding to requests for contact in a timely manner and communicating back to that person if I am not able to meet their request.⁶
2. I am responsible for returning to disagreements within two hours and trying to make reasonable attempts to repair the situation.^{7, 8}
3. I pledge not to make any statements that threaten the security of the relationship (e.g., avoiding saying, “We’re done!” in arguments).⁹
4. I am responsible to protect my relationship against outside threats or influences (e.g., addiction, infidelity, over-involvement from family).
5. I am responsible to protect my relationship and children from abuse (including hitting, damaging property, blocking the person’s entry or exit, yelling).
6. I pledge to not speak disrespectfully about my partner in front of others, and I will say something if someone else speaks ill of them.
7. I pledge to avoid excessive critical or hurtful remarks and to try to repair any damage as soon as possible.
8. I pledge to avoid lying, withholding information, embellishing, or denying my partner’s reality.
9. I pledge to be reasonable about self-focused activities and interests (including work) and will make sure I am giving adequate support to my personal life.

⁵ Although the information in this kit can be applied to a variety of relationships, I wrote this handout with romantic relationships in mind.

⁶ Of course there is no definitive timeframe for returning calls or texts, but I would suggest responding within a few hours for intimate relationships (at least to acknowledge receipt and indicate you will respond later if not available), and 24-48 hours for work situations.

⁷ Based on the work of John Gottman, it is recommended to take a [30-minute time out](#) from conflict if your heart rate goes above 95 beats per minute in order to allow you to communicate more calmly. When your heart rate rises above 95 beats per minute, this is called Flooding, and your body enters into a fight or flight state where it is difficult to clearly communicate. To measure your heart rate, try downloading apps like Instant Heart Rate on your smart phone.

⁸ A [repair attempt](#) is a term from the Gottman Method Couples Therapy that describes “a statement that prevents negativity from escalating out of control.”

⁹ Several of the handouts in this document are adapted from Tatkin’s *Wired for Love*.

10. I am responsible to communicate my thoughts, feelings, and preferences to another.¹⁰
11. I vow to not share intimate information about my personal life or to communicate regularly with someone I find romantically attractive (or where romantic potential may exist). This also includes time alone with potential romantic interests.
12. I take responsibility to share power in relationships versus putting myself in a one up or one down position.
13. I take responsibility to respect the boundaries and feelings of others.
14. I agree to honour my commitments, and on the occasions when I am unable, I will communicate this.
15. I agree to involve others in decision making and to consider their preferences as valid.

Questions for Reflection

1. Identify the three rights or responsibilities that are the most relevant in your life right now?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

2. Did any of the rights or responsibilities on this list surprise you or not occur to you?

¹⁰ Sometimes we can expect others to anticipate our needs perfectly or read our minds.

2. Boundary Basics

2.1 What is your perspective?

The first step in boundary setting is being able to articulate your perspective. In healthy relationships, our perceptions and feelings are treated as valid and equally as important as the other person's. However, if our perceptions have continually been dismissed or ignored, we can doubt ourselves. Language can be a powerful tool to help us clarify the boundary issue and how it is impacting us. This exercise can be a helpful practice to be able to understand yourself and communicate this understanding to others.

1. What are you observing?

Example: Just now, I noticed you look at the clock while I was talking.

2. What are you thinking?

Example: I had the thought that what I was saying was boring.

3. What are you feeling?

Common emotions: Hurt, confused, angry, frustrated, anxious, concerned, love, gratitude, relief, shame, disappointed, abandoned

Questioning Our Assumptions

It's important to understand that the stories that we tell ourselves may or may not be true. Using this example, it's possible that the partner looked at the clock because he may have had another commitment. It's helpful to be tentative in our assumptions of another person's motives and approach our concerns from a place of curiosity. When we are hurt, our thoughts or perceptions are often based on negative beliefs about ourselves, or on assumptions we make about the other person. It's important to present these tentatively and not accuse or criticize our partner, as this can lead to defensiveness and conflict.¹¹

Defining our reality does not mean that our partner is responsible for our thoughts, but just being able to articulate them allows the other person to be able to understand us better.

¹¹ This point might be confusing in light of the earlier mentions of gaslighting. With gaslighting, the other person is lying or withholding information in the relationship and there is a pattern of deception and attempts to cover it up.

2.2 Making Requests

Now, we are going to take the reality you have defined and formulate it into a request.

1. How could you formulate this issue into a specific request?

Remember that requests should be framed like an invitation rather than demands. You might also want to check with someone you trust about your requests to see if they seem realistic.

It would be helpful for me if...
Next time would you mind...
Could you please...

Here's another way to make a request, called the softened or gentle start-up¹²:

I feel _____ (*angry, sad, concerned, worried*)

About _____ (*you leaving for two weeks for work*)

I need _____ (*some regular times set aside for phone check-ins*)

¹² The softened start-up is a technique from the Gottman Method Couples Therapy pioneered by John Gottman and Julie Schwartz Gottman.

Some Notes on Requests

Tone of voice and delivery is crucial when making a request. It is important to try to be neutral and positive, almost as if we are talking to an acquaintance. It can also be helpful to preface the request with something you appreciate about the person or an acknowledgement of the difficulty of the situation. Once we make a request, the other person can respond by saying yes, no, or maybe to our requests. They also have the right to think about their answer.

If you're having trouble deciding what requests to make, it can be helpful to reflect on the values that underlie this issue (e.g., honesty, trust, respect).

How the other person responds to a reasonable request will give you information. A healthy person will typically listen openly and take your request seriously. This does not mean that they will honour it completely, as they may have differences of opinion, but you should have the experience of being listened to. Conversely, a less healthy person may lead you to feel like the problem is all your fault, deny the existence of the problem, or fail to take any responsibility for their part in it. Overall, if we can take the attitude that boundary issues are shared responsibilities and that we are working together as a team to make our needs known in healthy ways and to be open to influence, this spirit or approach tends to get the best outcome.

Requests Versus Demands

Often when we are frustrated with our relationships, we can resort to ultimatums to try to control the other person.

Here are some ways I differentiate requests and demands:

Demands	Requests
Have a sense of time urgency	Are firm yet reasonable with respect to timeframe
Create instability in the relationship	Create communication and further clarity
Can appear coercive or punitive	Are framed as invitations

Are rigid in their conceptualization	Are open to negotiation
Are often empty threats that are not followed through on	Have clear consequences that are communicated if violated

Demands are often fueled by a desire to elicit affection or change from our partner, but it can often have the opposite impact. When people feel coerced, they typically respond by defensiveness, becoming more rooted in their belief system, or withdrawing. Demands also tend to heighten anxiety for both parties.

Examples of demands or unhelpful requests:

- If you can't show me if you love me, I don't know if I can be in this relationship!
- If you ever make that mistake again, I'm gone!

This is not to say that a person might not actually follow through if this boundary is violated again. However, when a healthy boundary is set, it is not with the intention to control the person, but to be clear about what you need to protect yourself.

2.3 Setting Boundaries

Requests and boundaries often go together, but there are some subtle differences. Requests often involve what we are asking of another, whereas boundaries are what we are prepared to do to protect ourselves. Engaging in good self-care like exercise is actually a form of boundary because it is something we have control over.

Just to summarize,

- **A request** is something we ask for from another person
- **A boundary** is something we have control over that we do to protect ourselves

Here are some examples of boundaries:

- Determining how much time and resources you are going to invest in someone
- Refraining from sexual contact with your spouse until they get an STD/I test
- Taking a time out from a conversation that is abusive or unhealthy
- Deciding how much information you want to share with someone about yourself
- Deciding how much you are going to check up on your spouse
- Choosing to stay or to leave a relationship

1. Name three boundaries you would like to start setting:

1.
2.
3.
<i>Example: When _____ does _____, I would like to _____.</i>

Communicating Boundaries

Communicating boundaries can be just as much of a challenge as determining them! There may be times where it feels necessary to let the person know about the boundaries we have set. An example might be if you have a child with an addiction and you have decided to no longer support them. There are other times where you are not required to inform the person of the boundary you have set (e.g., cancelling an appointment with a doctor that you do not feel comfortable with). When we set boundaries, we often need to debrief the outcome with a trusted friend, therapist, or family member. It is not uncommon to feel self-doubt, confusion, or guilt in setting boundaries, especially if the person we are speaking with uses emotional manipulation. Here are some recommendations for communicating boundaries:

- Be respectful
- Keep the conversation short
- Have something written down or prepared, or at least have talking points in case you get flustered
- Know that you have the right to end the conversation
- Be open to talking about it at a later time (if appropriate)

2.4 Emotional Boundaries

Emotional boundaries involve how much mental and emotional energy we invest in the issues of another person (i.e., how much space they rent in our heads and hearts!). In relationships, we are naturally impacted by the struggles of those we care about and want to relieve their suffering. However, a line can be crossed where we can enmesh with the emotional state of another, and lose our sense of self.

Emotional boundaries are complicated because they often involve intrusive thoughts and emotions that occur outside of the actual interaction with the other person. We can end up preoccupied with the struggles of another person, leading to excessive worry, problems sleeping, and a lack of clarity. We can start to take on another person's problems as if they are our own.

This can prevent us from living our own lives and allowing that person space to develop the skills to grow.

Boundary Bubble Exercise

Here's an exercise I like from [Karla McLaren](#) called 'The Boundary Bubble,' and it works well for establishing emotional boundaries:

1. Visualize that around you is some sort of a bubble or force field. Make it your own. Some people think of other options, like an umbrella around them or a Teflon pan.
2. Decide what you want your internal environment to be inside your bubble. You can control the temperature and even visualize plants or flowers.
3. When you find yourself preoccupied with the struggles of someone else, imagine their issues bouncing off of your bubble, and have a mantra that you can say to yourself that is helpful.

Some affirmations:

- Your problems are not my problems
- I have a right to think and feel differently than you
- I care about you, but I do not have to care for another adult
- It's up to them what they do with their life, but I can be a support
- If you are having a bad day, I can have compassion, but it does not need to ruin my day

Another aspect of emotional boundaries is when we feel frustrated with someone because they are not taking responsibility for their life. We may also be upset or offended at something they said or did. Even though someone may be in the wrong, it is ultimately our responsibility to take care of ourselves by setting boundaries.

Signs You May Need to Set a Boundary

Sometimes we are not aware of the need to set a boundary until things have progressed to a damaging place. However, if we reflect on the situation, there were often signs that our boundaries were being violated. Noticing and responding to these signs protects us from losing control and moving into a place of harming others. [Pia Mellody](#) calls this offending from a victim position¹³. Many of us have had the experience of feeling provoked by someone, retaliating, then blaming that person for our reaction. In reality, we are responsible for setting boundaries and our reactions, and it is never acceptable to be abusive toward another person. The following list is intended to help you reflect on what signs occur for you early in the stages of boundary violations that indicate it is time to set a boundary.

- Resentment (anger not expressed)
- Feeling submissive to the other person/walking on eggshells
- Constant complaining to others
- Intense anxiety or fear
- Feeling like a victim
- Ruminating on the person or situation
- Feeling overwhelmed and helpless
- Giving up important self-care or activities
- Fatigue or other physical issues
- Lack of sleep
- Being irritable or short with loved ones

This is certainly not an exhaustive list, but hopefully it gives you an idea of some early warning signs.

1. What are some of the early warning signs that I need to set a boundary?

¹³ From the book *Facing Co-dependence*

Anger Boundary Exercise (Protecting yourself from hurting others)

This next exercise is helpful when you are feeling anger at someone who has crossed your boundaries and want to gain some clarity.

1. Identify: Notice when you are getting triggered with righteous indignation or irritation regarding another person. Tuning into your body's cues can be helpful. What are the signs when you are angry? (e.g., tightening chest)

2. Explore: Ask yourself: why am I feeling this way? Is it because they are not living their life the way I want them to? Is it because I am feeling taken advantage of? It is because I'm mad about something that really doesn't involve me? Does this person embody something that I don't like or haven't come to terms with inside myself? What dynamics are happening in this relationship that I need to pay attention to?

3. Self-care: Engage in something distracting to break the negative looping pattern, like going to another room or watching TV. What practice would be effective for you?

4. Respond: What do I need to do now? Is it time to set a boundary? Is it time to let this go?

Setting emotional boundaries can feel like a mental workout, because your brain is going to want to return to that pattern of thinking over and over again. This is normal, but try to keep redirecting your attention to the present moment or thinking about something else. Eventually you will train your brain to focus on other things.

2.5 Deal Breakers

A deal breaker refers to a boundary violation that leads to the end of a relationship.

Examples:

- If my partner is violent with myself or my children
- If my partner has sex with a person outside of our relationship
- If my father does not receive treatment for his alcohol abuse
- If my spouse continues to lie to me about his pornography use
- If my husband does not want to come to couples therapy with me

Deal breakers:

1.

2.

3.

Like any boundary, it's important to know that you can change your mind. Boundaries are constantly being negotiated and evaluated in a relationship, but non-negotiable boundaries are something that you know in your bones you could not live with.

Identifying Serious Impacts

What if the person is not violating your non-negotiable boundaries but the situation does not appear to be moving forward? Sometimes we need to have other kinds of limits that allow us to be honest about our relationship health. In these situations, it can be helpful to have other markers or ways to evaluate your boundary setting. One of the ways to do this is to make certain agreements to re-evaluate the relationship after a certain period of time, or to identify serious impacts.

Serious impacts involve saying, if this were to happen to me, I would need to seriously consider if I could stay in this relationship.

Examples:

- If I was not able to attend work because of the stress
- If my marriage has not improved by at least 30% in the next 6 months

It's important to remember that good boundaries, including good self-care, can prevent you from getting to this point.

What do you think you will need if these serious impacts occur?

Examples:

- Take a three-month break from the marriage
- Cut back at work to focus on your healing
- Make a request of your partner to engage in couples therapy

If these impacts occur, I plan to:

Troubleshooting Boundary Issues

1. What if the person or situation doesn't change?

This is a very real possibility. When we set boundaries, we often hope that it prompts the other person to change and to be how we would like them to be. In reality, we cannot change others, only ourselves. And most of the time, we have very little influence over ourselves on the best of days!

Waiting for someone else to change is a losing proposition because we can give up our power to someone else. This doesn't mean that we may not have our own grief reaction and feelings to their responses, which we are entitled to.

When people set boundaries and don't get the outcome they want, they often say things like, "I tried that and it didn't work!" Here are the questions I think are important to ask when we feel like our boundaries have not worked:

1. How can I evaluate my behaviour? Did I act within my own values and expectations?

2. What were my expectations of the other person? Were they realistic?

There is a possibility that our expectations were unrealistic or that this is an issue for ourselves that we may need to let go of.

Based on the response of the other person, this gives us information that we can use to make our next step.

2. How do I know if my boundaries are on the right track?

Setting boundaries is a complex process and it's helpful to get feedback along the way. Talking to a trusted friend, family member, or therapist may

be helpful in getting feedback on your boundaries. In my experience, people tend to lean to one extreme or the other (rigid or diffuse), and getting feedback can help you express your boundaries in a moderate way. Sometimes it takes getting used to the discomfort of setting boundaries in order to start to set healthy boundaries.

3. Establishing Self-Care

Self-care is about the actions we take to attend to our well-being. Self-care is a broad term that encompasses everything from taking care of our physical health by attending regular doctor's appointments to setting emotional boundaries by detaching from obsessive thinking patterns. At their core, boundaries are an act of self-love and protection.

When people lack healthy boundaries, they can put their health at risk. I recently heard the following story: "My grandfather enjoyed taking care of my grandmother, but to the extreme. He did everything for her, and ignored himself. When he had digestive issues that turned out to be cancer, he did not attend regular medical appointments, and I believe that he died early as a result."

A failure to take care of ourselves can turn into a vicious cycle that can lead to further deterioration. If we are fatigued, we often lack the clarity and strength to set boundaries. Once a pattern is set, we can feel victimized and let others take further advantage of us.

For many, taking care of ourselves is associated with guilt or a feeling of being selfish. I have seen many mothers feel intense guilt about taking time away from their children, especially if their children cry or are upset. However, having healthy self-care gives people strength and an opportunity to develop.

Although self-care is its own topic that could easily be a book, here is a basic plan for starting with self-care. We often need continually to review and change our self-care plans, but this handout can be a helpful starting place. Feel free to make your own plan!

Self-Care Coping Plan¹⁴

Type	Recommendations	Goals (weekly)
Sleep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 7- 9 hours per night ○ Have a consistent routine, even on weekends ○ Avoid electronics before bed 	
Eating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Eat real foods ○ Avoid sugar, caffeine, and alcohol 	
Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 30 minutes, 3x per week (minimum) 	
Socializing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Connect with at least one person per day ○ Schedule at least one outing per week ○ Spend time with nature and animals 	
Relaxation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yoga ○ Epsom salt baths 	
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ See a therapist 	

3. Exploring Identity

When we are focused on taking care of others, [we can lose a sense of who we are](#). Even small questions like, “what restaurant do you want to go to?” can be met with, “I have no idea.” While our identity is a fluid concept that can change, defining who you are is an important part of boundary work. It is what the family therapists call [self-differentiation](#).

4.1 Who Am I? Exercise^{15 16}

Please take time to reflect on these questions and write your answers in a journal or word document. It is often helpful to share them with someone you trust.

1. List at least three things you were good at and loved when you were a child (0-18 years old).
2. List three things you were not good at and didn't like when you were young (school, family time, socializing, dating).
3. How would a friend have described you as an adolescent (age 13-15)? How would your parents have described you during your teenage years?
4. How do you think you've changed from childhood to adolescence to adulthood?
5. How would you describe your personality?
6. List at least three strengths or good qualities you have.
7. List three things you'd like to change about yourself and why.
8. List three of the top values you have in life (e.g., honesty, compassion).

¹⁵ Adapted from the self-concept exercise developed by Larson and Sbarra, and the DBT house developed by unknown author.

¹⁶ Questions also adapted from Kristin Minto Snowden's "Exercises to Explore Who I am" www.kristinsnowdenMFT.com

9. What are three goals you'd like to accomplish this year?
10. What are three dreams you'd like to live before the end of your life?
11. What makes you feel alive?
12. What would be your ideal lifestyle and job?
13. What is something you've always wanted to try?
14. What are some of your pet peeves or things that bother you?
15. What do you want people to know about you?
16. What do you try to hide from other people?
17. What emotions do you most struggle to feel and express?
18. What is your main mission in life? What do you want to be remembered for?

Final Thoughts

Thank-you for making it (or skimming) to the end of this kit! I'd like to say it again – setting boundaries is hard work! In my experience, setting boundaries is a daily practice that requires ongoing effort. Some days we may feel very strong and clear in our boundaries, and other days we might feel guilty and confused. You are going to make mistakes and have setbacks. What matters more is how you persevere and grow. As one wise person told me, “we can't be perfect while we're learning.” I wish you all of the best in your journey!

Kimberly Sprintz, Women Empowering Women Support Groups
The Next Step | nextstepwew.org

Additional Resources

Books (some are available in audio format)

- *Facing Co-dependence* – Pia Mellody
- *Moving Beyond Betrayal* – Vicki Tidwell Palmer
- *Human Magnet Syndrome* – Ross Rosenberg
- *Co-dependent No More* – Melody Beattie
- *Rising Strong* – Brene Brown
- *Boundaries* – Anne Katherine
- *Is it Love or Addiction?* – Brenda Schaeffer

Videos

- [Brene Brown](#)
- [Ross Rosenberg](#) (for emotionally abusive dynamics)
- [Pia Mellody](#)

Groups

- [Co-Da](#)
- [Nicole Perry](#) (offers workshops on boundaries in Edmonton)

Although the arrangement of this information is my own, the knowledge has been gathered from many sources, including my clients. Feel free to distribute this document freely. 30