My Values inform My Boundaries - Worksheet

Note: Go at your own pace. Nothing has to be completed today. If anything feels like too much, you can pause, put your feet on the floor, and take a slow breath. You can always come back to this. Sometimes, taking some time to let thoughts process can be helpful.

How Values Become Boundaries

Boundaries can be internal or external boundaries. Internal boundaries are within yourself (what you think, feel, tolerate, participate in, or take responsibility for). External boundaries are limits you set with other people (what you will or won't allow someone to so/say, and what you will do if that boundary is crossed). This worksheet can be used for either.

A value tells you what matters to you. A boundary is how you honor, protect and live out those values through *your* own choices for yourself and when you are in relationship with other people.

Many times, we know what we value, but we may struggle to know what to *do* about it. This is a common struggle, especially if you have spent most of your life putting other's needs first, staying quiet to avoid conflict, or peacekeeping.

Boundaries are a skill. Like *any* skill, boundaries are best learned and implemented one *small* step at a time. Learning to draft and hold boundaries is a process, *not* a pass-or-fail test. Give yourself grace as you learn this skill.

A boundary is about your own action or actions; it is NOT about the other person's behavior.

A boundary does not say, "You must never lie to me." It says, "This is what I am willing to take part in, what I am not willing to take part in, and how I will take care of myself.

Example: Honesty matters to me. I am willing to stay in a relationship where hard truths can be discussed openly. I am no longer willing to take part in conversations where I feel I am being lied to. If that happens, I will end the conversation and take space before deciding what to do next.

Notice that this doesn't say, "You must never lie to me." That would be a demand about someone else. A boundary names what "I" will and won't participate in, and what "I" will do to take care of myself. You don't have to prove the other person is wrong. A boundary can simply reflect what you *need*.

Boundaries can help us create safety by helping us to see clearly and speak up about what we will and will not participate in, permit, or tolerate. Betrayal and repeatedly disregarded boundaries can take a great deal from us. Over time, we may become disconnected from our own needs, feelings, and a sense of what matters to us.

I want to pause here. In many circles boundaries are discussed in terms of the consequences that follow when they are crossed. However, the word "consequence" can carry a negative connotation and/or be misunderstood as punishment. I prefer to use the term "response". When a boundary is not respected, our intention is not to punish the other person but to respond in a way that honors our needs and supports our well-being.

One more thought on responses: Your response to a crossed boundary does not have to be an absolute or an extreme measure. For example, you don't have to say that you will seek a divorce the moment a particular boundary is crossed unless that is genuinely that response you intend to take and you have the means and ability to follow through. I encourage you to leave yourself some flexibility in deciding how to respond. This does not mean compromising your boundary or accepting behavior that is not okay with you. It means choosing a response that is realistic, honors your needs, and is within your control. Sometimes that response may be as simple as taking space and time away from the other person. You can be firm about what you will and will not tolerate while allowing yourself room to decide what you need in the moment. The goal isn't to make threats you feel pressured to carry out; it's to respond in ways that protect your well-being and help you maintain trust in yourself. It is also not about taking on the exhausting job of policing your partner's behavior; your energy is better spent caring for yourself and deciding what you need.

At other times, honoring a boundary means taking action in response to the violation. That response is not about making our partner hurt because they have hurt us. It is about choosing what we need to do to protect our well-being and create greater safety for ourselves.

Self-care is not something we have to earn by first enforcing a boundary. We are allowed to care for ourselves whenever the need arises, without having to justify or earn that care.

Honoring our own boundaries can also mean reclaiming ourselves. This begins with becoming curious about our needs, listening to what our bodies are telling us, and noticing how our emotions are influencing our responses. Choosing to redirect some of the attention and energy we have spent on our partner toward our own well-being can be a profound act of self-love.

Developing this awareness can also help use decide how we want to respond when a boundary is crossed. When we consider our boundaries ahead of time, we can imagine how we might feel if a violation occurs and identify what we may need in that moment. We can even plan a possible response in advance, giving ourselves a clearer starting point if the situation arises.

Sometimes, our response involves what we will do when our partner takes a particular action. Sometimes, it involves recognizing and meeting our own needs, Sometimes, it involves both.

We get to choose how we respond to our partner's actions, and we get to choose how we respond to our own needs.

Next, you'll revisit the values we identified in the Values Clarification worksheet found on my website (https://dotthecoach.com/tools-and-resources#worksheets) and choose a situation connected to one of those values. From there, you'll begin drafting a boundary that feels meaningful, realistic, and right for you.

Step 1: Choose a Situation

Pick one relationship or situation where you're unsure what boundary you may need. It doesn't have to be your hardest one. Starting smaller is okay and often starting smaller can help us practice and gain confidence before moving to bigger situations.

Write a few sentences about it:

Step 2: Connect It to a Value

Choose one of your values from your earlier work.

Which value am I trying to protect? _____

What is happening that moves me away from this value?

What would honoring this value look like here?

What might I need to say "no" to?

What might I need to say "yes" to?

Step 3: Draft Your Boundary

"Because _____(the value you need to protect) matters to me…"

"I am willing to…"(What can I genuinely say yes to?)

Example: "Because honesty matters to me I am willing to listen and hear what has happened as long as you tell me the entire truth without defensiveness, minimization, justification, or half-truths."

"I am no longer willing to…"(What conflicts with my value? Keep the focus on yourself.)

Example: "I am no longer willing to be kept in the dark about my own reality. I am also not willing to accept your justifications, minimizations, or only getting part of parts of the truth."

"If this happens, I will…"

(Choose something within your control, such as taking space, ending a conversation, changing your level of participation, or asking for support.)

Example: "If this happens, I will state that I do not feel I am getting the entire truth or that I am sensing minimization or justification. After that, if you cannot tell me what feels like the entire truth and/or remove the justifications and minimizations, I will politely remove myself from the conversation. I will then decide what I need to take care of myself and how I plan to move forward."

The last part of a boundary is often the part the people find to be the hardest. It may mean breaking old, very entrenched patterns, or you may be used to focusing on what the other person is doing. You may need to step away from the situation, take space to regulate yourself, change your level of participation, or find support from a trusted friend, support group, therapist, or coach.

Notice in the examples I used that there were not punitive actions for the other person. This is *NOT* letting them get away with anything. This is letting them know that you will not tolerate the behavior but that you are also not going to step into the role of "policewoman" by trying to regulate their behavior.

You cannot make another person change, that can only come from within them. You *can* control your own responses. That response is *always* within your control. A boundary that depends on another person's behavior can leave you feeling powerless. Boundaries are about stepping back into your *own* power.

A quick boundary test: Ask yourself, "Could I do this even if the other person does absolutely nothing differently?" If your answer is yes, it is within your control. If you answered no, you may need to rethink the boundary. (More about that in the next step.)

Step 4: Four Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Set a Boundary*

Read your draft on the previous page, then ask yourself each question. Take your time.

1. Will it keep me safe?

Consider your emotional, physical, psychological, financial, and relational safety.

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

2. Am I willing to follow through on this boundary?

Do I truly want to do this (or am I doing it because I feel I should)?

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

3. Am I able to follow through on this boundary?

Do I have the ability, time, resources, and support to do this?

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

4. Is it 100% in my control?

Does it depend on the other person doing anything? If so, adjust it until it depends only on you.

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

If you answered "Not sure" or "No" to any question, that isn't failure. It's useful information. It's worth pausing to notice what it's pointing to.

- ✓ A "no/not sure" on safety may mean this boundary needs more support, a safer setting, a written plan ahead of time, or that a different action would protect you better.
- ✓ A "no/not sure" on willingness often means part of you isn't convinced yet, and it can help to sleep on it or take time to process what's underneath that hesitation before deciding.
- ✓ A "no/not sure" on ability may simply mean the timing or resources aren't there yet, not that the boundary itself is wrong, it may help to revisit it once you have more support or time.
- ✓ A "no/not sure" on control usually means the boundary is still describing what you want from someone else rather than what you'll do yourself, so it's worth reworking it until it depends only on you is how you step into your own power.

Whatever you notice, you can use it. Try adjusting your boundary, starting with a smaller version, or talking it through with a trusted person or your coach.

*Questions adapted from Jenna Riemersma.

You may write your revised boundary below if needed:

Step 5: One Small Step

One small way I can practice this boundary this week (this doesn't need to be the whole boundary, just one small action you can try in the next few days to begin building the habit):

Example: "This week, I will practice speaking up when I notice minimization or defensiveness rather than staying silent or letting the conversation continue as it is."

Something that might make this difficult (think about a habit, emotion, or situation that may get in the way so you are prepared instead of being caught off-guard):

Example: "I know I typically feel frightened to speak up when this situation arises, and my husband is accustomed to me allowing him minimize or justify his behavior without challenging it. Through my childhood experiences and this relationship, I learned that staying silent could help keep the peace. I now recognize that this often came at the expense of my own needs and reality. I want to begin honoring myself by speaking up for what I need, even when doing so feels uncomfortable."

When that happens, I can support myself by (…using a grounding technique, a person to call, a phrase or words to remind you why you are doing this or that it is okay to stand up for your own needs, or something calming, so you are planning ahead for your success):

Example: "I can support myself by noticing when my body becomes tense, such as when I clench my jaw or tighten my shoulders in response to my partner's lying. When I notice these signs, I will take a slow, deep breath and remind myself that I deserve to be treated with dignity and that my needs matter. If I need additional support, I can reach out to Jane, who has offered to be available to me. I will also keep a Post-it on my bathroom mirror that says, "My needs are valuable and worth honoring."

Some final notes:

A boundary is not a demand that someone else change their behavior, feelings, or choices. It is a clear decision about what I'm willing to take part in, and how I'll care for myself when a line is crossed.

If you've never set boundaries before, or you've often people-pleased, said yes when you meant no, or put yourself last, this can feel unfamiliar. That doesn't mean you're doing it wrong.

Real change takes time. Experts point to a minimum of three months of consistent, daily evidence, but for many people it can take considerably longer, sometimes years, and that is normal too. I don't want you to think you have to be perfect at boundaries all the time. Setbacks can happen, but they should be owned and followed up with an immediate return to the recovery process, not a delayed one.

Your first boundary is with yourself (internal boundary). Relief, calm, or a longing for closeness can be real, and you can still feel and express them, without letting them take the wheel and loosen the (external) boundaries you have set. You can be warm, grateful for positive change, and supportive to your partner if you'd like. However, you are not obligated to give your partner an "all access pass" to your heart, mind, and body before you truly feel it is warranted.

When needed, you can use this "Reality check": What benchmarks/needs has my partner met? Pausing to ask yourself this can help you take a step back and look at the situation with a bit more objectivity.

A note on safety: Setting boundaries is not always safe in an abusive relationship. If speaking up or enforcing a boundary could put you at risk, prioritize your safety (and the safety of your children if that applies) rather than confronting the other person. You can begin by practicing internal boundaries and honoring your own needs in ways that feel safe for your situation. Even when you cannot safely control what happens around you, you can begin reconnecting with your own needs, values, and choices. You deserve support in finding a safe path forward. If you need help please reach out to the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-7233 or text "BEGIN" to 88788.

Hold your boundaries. They are an expression of your integrity. When things don't go as planned, you can notice, you can adjust, and you can try again.