

From Guilt to Grace: How to Set Boundaries That Heal (Not Hurt) Your Relationships

A Gentle Introduction to Loving Boundaries

Reflective Prompts and Scripts for Setting Healthy Limits
A Free Resource from *The Serenity Circle*

"Boundaries are the distance at which I can love you and me simultaneously."

~Prentis Hemphill

If you're reading this, you're likely wrestling with one of the most challenging aspects of loving someone with addiction and/or mental health challenges: setting boundaries. You're not alone in feeling confused, guilty, or even terrified about this topic. Setting healthy boundaries is by far one of the most difficult things loving families and friends can do... *it's also the most important and impactful*. We want you to know:

- You are allowed to have limits
- You CAN say no
- You are allowed to put your own well being first
- Your loved one(s) might not like it, and that's okay

This might all feel very foreign to you, especially if you've been raised to believe that love means endless giving, or that good people should always put others first. Here's what we've learned in The Serenity Circle: **Boundaries aren't walls that keep love out - they're bridges that allow healthy love to flow**. Please don't take our word for it. We'd much rather you try what we're suggesting in the pages that follow, and find out for yourself.

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER: This workbook is designed to support individuals impacted by a loved one's addiction and/or mental health challenge in a setting where boundaries can be communicated and honored without risk of harm. **If you are in an abusive, violent, or unsafe situation**, please reach out to the proper authorities, a crisis hotline, or domestic violence support organization for immediate support and guidance.

Crisis Resources:

National Crisis Lifeline: 988

Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741

SAMHSA National Helpline: 1-800-662-4357

This workbook is just a brief introduction to boundaries. Inside the Serenity Circle community, we spend a lot of time practicing these skills together, supporting each other through the discomfort, and celebrating victories - big and small. Think of this as your first taste of what's possible when we learn to love with healthy limits.

With compassion,

The Serenity Circle Team

Understanding Boundaries: What They Are (And What They're Not)

Common Misconceptions:

✗ **Boundaries are about controlling others**

- Reality: Boundaries are about controlling yourself

✗ **Boundaries are mean or selfish**

- Reality: Boundaries are loving and necessary

✗ **Boundaries are ultimatums, threats, or punishment**

- Reality: Boundaries are loving limits that allow for natural consequences

✗ **Setting boundaries will make my loved one hate me**

- Reality: Boundaries may cause temporary discomfort but create space for mutual respect

What Boundaries Actually Are

- Limits you set to protect your physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing
- Ways to communicate what you will and will not tolerate
- Actions you take to care for yourself
- Loving ways to stay connected while staying safe

Healthy Boundaries

Example 1: "It's not okay for you to yell at me - I'm going to step away until we can talk respectfully to one another." Example 2: "Going forward, when you come home drunk, I'll be sleeping in the spare bedroom."

It's not about demanding how others must behave. It's about deciding how **YOU** will behave in situations that make you uncomfortable - a *very important distinction*. **For boundaries to work, you MUST do what you say you're going to do, otherwise you lose all credibility.**



Types of Boundaries

Emotional Boundaries: You protect yourself by deciding what you are and are not willing to tolerate.

Physical Boundaries: You define your comfort level with physical touch, personal space, and privacy.

Time Boundaries: You manage how you spend your time and availability, and protect yourself from overcommitment and burnout.

Financial Boundaries: You set clear limits on how your money is earned, shared, lent, and spent in your relationships.

Mental boundaries - You protect your thoughts, values, and opinions from being manipulated by others.

Material boundaries - You decide how you share or lend your personal possessions and resources.

Sexual boundaries - You define what you're comfortable with regarding sexual contact and intimacy.

Professional boundaries - You maintain appropriate relationships and interactions in work or business settings.

Energy boundaries - You manage your emotional and physical energy by limiting the time you spend in draining interactions or environments.

Social boundaries - You decide your comfort level with social situations, gatherings, and the topics you're willing to discuss.

Digital/Social Media Boundaries: You control your online presence, social media interactions, and digital communication availability by regulating how, when, and with whom you engage.



Boundaries help us preserve our peace, create safety, and foster respect. Without them, we often become overwhelmed, resentful, and burned out. They are most effective when communicated calmly and clearly - not in the heat of an argument. When emotions are running high, it's harder to express needs with clarity and compassion, and harder for others to truly hear us. Sharing boundaries during the calm moments increases the chances they'll be respected and understood.

The Codependency Connection

Codependency happens when we become so focused on another person, that we lose ourselves. It's a pattern of behavior where we focus excessively on others' needs while neglecting our own. It often involves people-pleasing, controlling, rescuing, and/or enabling undesirable behavior.

Signs You Might Be Struggling with Codependency

Check any that resonate with you:

- You feel responsible for your loved one's emotions and actions
- You make excuses for their behavior to others
- You give up your own needs to meet theirs
- You feel guilty when you're not helping or fixing
- You're constantly worried about their reactions
- You struggle to say no without feeling terrible
- You feel like you're walking on eggshells
- You've lost touch with your own wants and needs
- You feel angry or resentful but have trouble expressing it
- You believe that if you just keep loving them, and doing for them... they'll change
- You derive your self-worth from others' approval
- You have a strong need to be needed
- You struggle with perfectionism and a need for control
- You have difficulty identifying your own feelings
- You fear abandonment
- You tend to attract or stay in dysfunctional relationships
- You feel compelled to offer advice or help, even when not asked
- You have low self-esteem despite outward achievements
- You frequently seek external validation
- You fear rejection or disapproval
- You find yourself constantly trying to "manage" situations or people around you

If you checked some - or all - of the boxes, you are NOT alone! You'll find many other caring and concerned family members just like you inside the Serenity Circle.

Reflection Section: Getting to Know Your Boundary Patterns

Part 1: Your Boundary History

Reflect on these questions with gentle curiosity:

What does the word "boundary" mean to you? Growing up, what did you learn about boundaries?



- How did your family handle conflict?
- What messages did you receive about saying no?
- How were your own boundaries respected (or not)?

Journal space: _____

What fears come up when you think about setting boundaries?

- Fear of abandonment?
- Fear of being seen as mean?
- Fear of your loved one's reaction?
- Fear of losing control?

Complete this sentence: "If I set boundaries with my loved one(s), I'm afraid that..."

How often do you say yes to doing something you don't want to do?

In what areas of your life do you feel drained or resentful? What situations and/or relationships drain your energy the most?

In what ways have you abandoned your own needs to care for someone else?

Do you ever feel taken for granted? Do you feel like your voice doesn't matter?

What would respecting your own needs look like?

Are you doing things for your loved one(s) because of your own need to be needed?

Gentle Reminder: It's time to check in with your own motivations.... It feels good to be the one to have all the answers. It can make you feel very competent. while inevitably making our loved ones feel incompetent. By doing things for loved ones (rescuing, problem-solving, making excuses for them, etc.) **robs them of the confidence and self respect that comes from overcoming life's challenges on their own.**

Part 2: Recognizing Your Current Patterns

Rate how often you do these things (1=Never, 5=Always):

- I say yes when I really want to say no ____
- I give money when I can't afford it ____
- I make excuses for my loved one's behavior ____
- I clean up their messes (literal or metaphorical) ____
- I lie to protect them from suffering the natural consequences of their actions ____
- I cancel my own plans to help them ____
- I feel guilty when I'm not helping ____
- I lose sleep worrying about them ____
- I avoid conflict because it's my job to keep the peace ____
- I feel angry and/or resentful, but I don't express it ____
- I rarely share my feelings, needs, and desires to avoid conflict ____
- I do things for them that they can easily do themselves (but may not want to) ____

If you've answered the above questions honestly, you probably have a pretty high score. That just means you're in the right place! You'll find many other caring and concerned family members just like you inside the Serenity Circle.

The Compassionate Yes and the Loving No

Understanding the Difference

A Compassionate Yes:

- Comes from genuine desire to help
- Doesn't deplete your resources
- Doesn't encourage harmful behavior to continue
- Maintains your sense of self



A Loving No:

- Protects your wellbeing
- Allows natural consequences to occur
- Preserves your energy so you can support your loved ones in healthier ways
- Shows respect for both your loved one AND yourself

Practice: The Pause

Before automatically saying yes, try this:

1. **Pause** - "Let me think about that"
2. **Check in with yourself** - How does this request feel in my body?
3. **Ask** - By doing this, am I enabling the undesirable behavior? Or am I enabling RECOVERY
4. **Decide** - What would real love really look like here?
5. **Respond** - With kindness, clarity, and with your feelings, needs, and desires in mind

Scripts for Setting Loving Boundaries

Common Family Boundary Struggles: Below you will find some common situations that families find themselves in and some ideas for how to handle them. Keep in mind, what works for one family, won't necessarily work for another. **There is no right or wrong way** and there is no one-size-fits-all set of boundaries - there's only what works for you and your family's unique needs.

When They Ask for Money - You're afraid they'll use the cash you give them to buy drugs

Instead of: "I can't afford it" (which invites argument)

Try: "I've decided not to give money directly, but I'm happy to help you look for resources" or "I care about you, and I'm not able to help financially right now" or "I'm not comfortable giving you cash, but I'd be happy to purchase some groceries for you" (*You may or may not be willing to give or to help - and that's okay. If you do, make sure it's on your terms and you're not feeling forced to do something that goes against your better judgment.*)

If they persist: Stay calm, centered, and say in the most genuinely kind and loving way, "I understand you're disappointed. My decision hasn't changed."

When They Want to Stay at Your House - Last time, they stole valuable items from you

Instead of: Making excuses or saying yes, when you're uncomfortable or don't feel safe,

Try: "I need my home to feel safe and peaceful. I'd be happy to help you find housing assistance." or "You're welcome to be here when you're sober" or "I love you, and I need space right now."

If they get angry: "I can see why you're upset and I'm not changing my mind."

When They're facing a challenge - and expecting you to take care it for them



Instead of: Rushing to fix it

Try: "This sounds really difficult. What's your plan?" or "I believe in your ability to handle this" or "I'm here to listen, but I can't fix this for you." or "I love you, and I won't lie to cover for you."

If they say you don't care: "I care about you deeply. That's exactly why I'm not doing this for you."

When They Try to Make You Feel Guilty

Instead of: Defending yourself or giving in

Try: "I understand you're frustrated" or "I can see this is hard for you" or "I'm sorry you feel that way" or you might even try, "This situation frustrates me too."

Remember: You do NOT have to defend your boundaries. Trying to explain yourself only provides room for more arguments.

Boundary Setting Practice

The BOUNDARY Method

B - Breathe and center yourself

O - Observe what you're feeling

U - Understand what you need

N - Name your boundary clearly

D - Decide on the natural consequence

A - Act with loving consistency

R - Remind yourself why this matters

Y - Yield to the process (it takes time and LOTS of practice)

Practice Scenario 1: The Money Request

Situation: Your loved one calls asking for \$200 for "groceries" but you suspect it's for substances.

Using the BOUNDARY method:

B - Take three deep breaths

O - Notice the familiar feelings of anxiety and guilt

U - You need to protect your own financial situation

N - "I'm not giving you money"

D - They push back and argue with you - you'll end the call

A - Stay calm and consistent

R - This helps both of you in the long run

Y - Accept that they'll be upset



Your response: "I can hear that you're stressed about money. I'm not able to give you cash, but I'd be happy to help you look for food banks or other resources."

Practice Scenario 2: The Guilt Trip

Situation: "You obviously don't care about me anymore. Everyone else's family helps them."

Your response: "I can see you're really hurting right now. I do care about you, which is why I'm making different choices about how to help."

If they continue: "I'm going to hang up now. I love you, and I'll talk to you when we can have a respectful conversation."

Working with the Discomfort

It's Normal to Feel:

- Guilty
- Scared
- Sad
- Angry
- Confused
- Lonely
- Resentful

Gentle Reminders When It Gets Hard:

"This discomfort is temporary. My boundaries are protecting both of us."

"My loved one's reaction doesn't mean I'm wrong."

"I can love someone and still have limits."

"I'm not responsible for their choices or feelings."

"It's not my job to manage/control someone else's emotions."

"What I want and need matters too."

Self-Compassion Practice

When you're struggling, try this:



1. **Acknowledge:** "This is a moment of suffering"
2. **Normalize:** "Difficulty is part of life"
3. **Offer kindness:** "How might I be kind to myself right now?"

Creating Your Personal Boundary Plan

Step 1: Identify Your Top 3 Boundary Challenges

Step 2: Choose One Small Boundary to Practice

Start small. Maybe it's:

- Not answering the phone after 10 PM
- Not giving money without 24 hours to think about it
- Not cleaning up messes they can clean themselves

My first boundary practice will be: _____

Step 3: Write Your Script

When this situation comes up, I will say:

If they push back, I will:

Step 4: Plan Your Support

Who can I call when this gets difficult?

What self-care will I do after setting this boundary? (Hint: attend a Serenity Circle Support Session, catch a yoga, meditation or sound healing replay, share what you're feeling in the community forum)



The Ripple Effect of Healthy Boundaries

What You Might Notice:

Initially:

- More conflict
- Pushback from your loved one
- Increased guilt or anxiety
- Feeling like you're being "mean"
- Pressure to go back to old patterns

Over time:

- More authentic relationships
- Increased self-respect
- Better mental and physical health
- Clearer communication
- More energy for what matters to you

For your loved one:

- They may face natural consequences
- They may learn a valuable lesson they wouldn't otherwise learn if you gave into their demands
- They learn to respect your limits
- They will learn how to manage their own emotions
- They will develop new coping skills
- After suffering the consequences of their own behavior, they may be inspired to seek recovery



Remember:

You're not responsible for anyone's reaction to your boundaries. You are responsible for maintaining them with kindness, compassion, and consistency.

Moving Forward: Your Boundary Journey

Daily Affirmations for Boundary Setting

- I am allowed to have limits
- My needs matter
- I can love someone and still say no
- I am not responsible for how my loved ones feel
- A boundary is an act of compassion for my loved ones and for myself
- I deserve respect
- I can handle difficult conversations
- My wellbeing matters
- I can be kind and firm at the same time
- I trust myself to make good decisions
- Boundaries are really hard - and I can do hard things
- Affirmations for Letting Go of Guilt:
 - It's not my job to carry someone else's pain.
 - Protecting my peace is an act of love.
 - Protecting my peace gives others permission to do the same.
 - I release what is not mine to carry.
 - I choose peace over control.

Weekly Check-In Questions

Every week, ask yourself:

- How did I honor my boundaries this week?
- What was challenging about setting limits?
- What support do I need?
- How can I be more compassionate with myself?
- What boundary do I need to work on next?

You're Not Alone in This Journey

Setting boundaries with someone you love who struggles with addiction and/or mental health challenges, is one of the most difficult and necessary things you'll ever do. It will absolutely go against every instinct you have that wants you to help, fix, and save.

But here's what we've learned in The Serenity Circle: **Boundaries aren't about loving less - they're about loving better.** They're not deal breakers, they're essential to building healthy relationships.

This workbook is just the beginning. Inside our community, we dive deeper into all these important concepts, practice them together, and support each other through the inevitable challenges. **Because here's what we know:** You don't have to figure this out alone. You don't have to be perfect. You just have to be willing to try, one small boundary at a time.

What We Practice Together in The Serenity Circle:

- **Boundary challenges** with community support
- **Family Support Sessions** where we role-play difficult conversations
- **Mindfulness Practices** to help you stay centered during time of conflict
- **Self-compassion Practices** for when boundaries feel impossible
- **Celebration Circles** to acknowledge our growth
- **24/7 Community Support** for when boundaries are being tested

Your Next Steps:

1. **Practice one small boundary** from this workbook
2. **Be patient with yourself** as you learn
3. **Remember that discomfort is part of growth**
4. **Join the Serenity Circle community** where you'll find others walking this same path

Remember: Every boundary you set with love is a gift - to yourself, to your loved one, and to your relationship. You're not just protecting yourself; you're creating space for authentic, healthy love to grow.

You've got this. And you're not alone.

Resources for Continued Learning

Books We Recommend:

- "Boundaries" by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend
- "Codependent No More" by Melody Beattie
- "The Language of Letting Go" by Melody Beattie

Here's a simple, printable tracker designed to help you build awareness, track progress, and reflect on how setting boundaries affects your well-being over time.

My Boundaries Tracker

Date _____ Situation _____

Boundary I Set _____

How I Felt Before _____ How I Felt After _____

What I Learned / Noticed _____

Date _____ Situation _____

Boundary I Set _____

How I Felt Before _____ How I Felt After _____

What I Learned / Noticed _____

Date _____ Situation _____

Boundary I Set _____

How I Felt Before _____ How I Felt After _____

What I Learned / Noticed _____

Date _____ Situation _____

Boundary I Set _____

How I Felt Before _____ How I Felt After _____

What I Learned / Noticed _____

Tips for Using This Tracker:

Keep it somewhere private but visible to encourage regular use.

Don't aim for perfection - just progress and awareness.

Review at the end of each week and month to celebrate growth and notice patterns.

Your Next Steps:

1. **Be patient with yourself** as you learn
2. **Remember that discomfort is part of growth**
3. **Join the Serenity Circle community** where you'll find others walking this same path
4. Visit: SerenityCircle.co to learn more

Together, we can transform the way we communicate, heal our relationships, and find peace in our families and in the world - even when faced with the challenges of supporting a loved one with addiction and mental health challenges. Remember, you're not alone – the Serenity Circle is here to support you every step of the way.

The Serenity Circle MANIFESTO

We believe in a world where families affected by addiction find peace, not punishment.

Where compassion replaces judgment. Where mindfulness conquers chaos.

We are parents, partners, siblings, and friends who've spent sleepless nights worrying,

Who've felt our hearts break over and over - yet refuse to give up hope.

We reject the failed "tough love" approaches that have torn families apart.

We stand against the shame, blame, and stigma that keep us trapped in isolation.

We embrace a new way forward: Finding our own peace first...

Responding rather than reacting.

Leading with understanding rather than fear.

Building bridges instead of walls.

We understand that yelling doesn't work. Threatening doesn't work.

Cutting ties rarely leads to healing. Rock bottom often means death.

Where our own destructive habits once controlled us - awareness now guides us.

We believe mindfulness isn't just a buzzword - it's a lifeline.

Yoga isn't just exercise - it's emotional freedom.

Meditation isn't just sitting quietly - it's connecting to our power.

We understand that our loved ones may not be able to change yet - but we can.

When we heal ourselves, we transform our families.

When we breathe through chaos, we model the calm our loved ones so desperately need.

We are not powerless. We are not helpless. We are not alone.

We are families choosing a different path—

One of strength through serenity,

Power through peace, And healing through community.

This is more than support. This is a revolution of the heart.

This is The Serenity Circle...Where peace begins with us

This workbook is designed for educational purposes and is not a substitute for professional mental health treatment. If you're experiencing thoughts of self-harm or are in crisis, please reach out to a mental health professional immediately.