

MENTAL HEALTH WORKSHEET SERIES
VOLUME 11



Understanding & Practicing Boundaries

CREATED BY: STEPHANIE BURTON, MA, MSed, LMHC

This resource is for your personal, educational, or professional use only.

Please do not copy, resell, or distribute without prior written consent from the creator.

Thank you for honoring the work and the care behind it.

While it can be used as a tool to supplement an existing therapeutic relationship with a licensed mental health professional (LMHC, LCSW, LMFT, LPC, or a Licensed Psychologist), this resource should NOT be used as a substitute for therapy.

If you find that this resource brings up feelings and thoughts that are challenging to deal with on your own or with a trusted person, I encourage you to seek therapy to continue your healing journey.

Copyright © 2025 by Stephanie C. Burton, MA, MEd, LMHC
All rights reserved.



www.soulfulbydesign.com

Introduction

VOL.11

Do any of the following resonate with you?

- Feeling intense guilt or fear when taking even brief time for yourself.
- Rescuing others from natural consequences, shielding them from discomfort, or stepping in so often that it fosters dependency or learned helplessness.
- Making yourself small, silent, or stagnant just to keep the peace.
- Feeling resentment but struggling to voice it.
- Saying yes when your body, mind, or spirit is clearly saying no.
- Feeling invisible, erased, or like your identity is entirely wrapped up in being “the helper.”
- Carrying responsibility for someone else’s emotions, safety, choices, or sobriety.
- Living in a constant state of overwhelm, anxiety, or emotional hypervigilance.
- Experiencing chronic physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual exhaustion.
- Neglecting your own basic needs or daily responsibilities—even the “small” ones.
- Avoiding conflict out of fear of being seen as disrespectful, ungrateful, or disloyal.
- Defining your worth by how much you give, how well you hold things together, or how little you ask for.

If you found yourself nodding yes to these, it may be a sign that boundaries in your life need to be created, or reinforced.

Soulfull Note to Self:

Boundaries are not the end of love—they are the conditions that allow love to last. They protect your peace, make room for your needs, and teach others how to honor your presence.

When you honor your boundaries, you are saying: My wholeness matters. My energy matters. I matter.

This guide will help you understand and practice setting and maintaining boundaries in your life.

What They Are

Boundaries are the guidelines and limits you set to protect your time, energy, and emotional well-being. Boundaries:

- Keep you grounded in who you are while staying connected to others.
- Protect your nervous system by reducing stress, preventing burnout, and allowing rest.
- Act as buffers against overwhelm.
- Build trust in relationships by clarifying how to care for each other without suffocating or overstepping.

What They Are NOT

Boundaries are not a one-time declaration. They are a practice. They require consistency, communication, and compassion for yourself as you grow. Boundaries are not:

- Punishments, threats, or rejections.
- Acts of selfishness—they are acts of self-preservation.
- Tools for manipulation or control.
- Excuses for avoiding responsibility or accountability.

Without boundaries, we can lose ourselves in others' needs and neglect our own. With boundaries, we cultivate safety, self-trust, and healthier connections. Saying “yes” when you mean “no” creates resentment, stress, and anxiety. Giving a response rooted in the clarity of your boundaries creates peace and alignment.

To set a clear boundary, remember this formula:

$$\text{NEED} + \text{PROTECTIVE ACTION} = \text{BOUNDARY}$$

Steps to Applying the Boundary Equation:

- 1.) Identify and state your need.
- 2.) Identify and state the behavior that threatens this need.
- 3.) Identify your protective action (i.e., not continuing to loan money to someone who refuses to pay you back, even though that was the agreement, not engaging with a toxic comment, limiting time with someone unless others are present, etc.)

Boundary Example: Imagine you are having a phone conversation with a colleague who consistently calls you about work-related things well after working hours, and it is interfering with your valued family time and self-care. You might set a boundary by saying to your colleague:

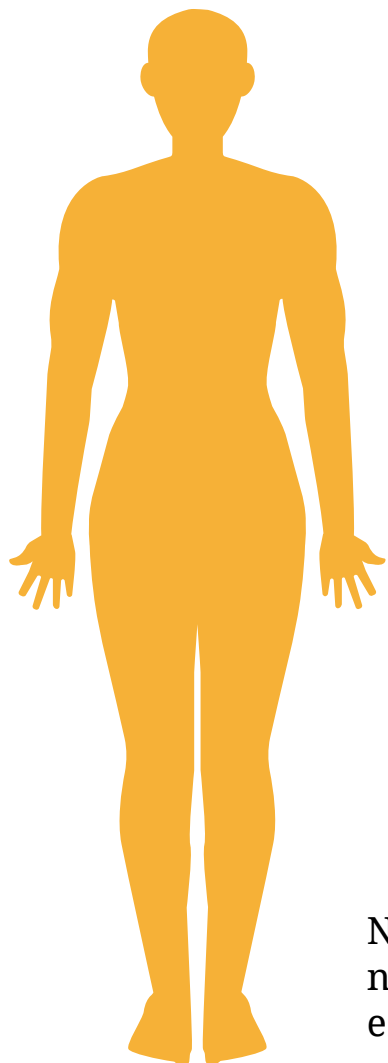
*I need to decompress at the end of the day (**your need**).
Therefore, I will not take non-emergency calls or respond to non-urgent emails after 7:00 pm (**your protective action**).
This time is for me and my family (**your need**).
If you call after that time (**behavior that misaligns with your need**), please leave a voicemail, and I will return the call or email the next day.” (**how you will respect your own boundary**)*

Write down three recent times you felt uncomfortable or resentful. Ask yourself: What boundary would have helped here? Write the boundary you needed, using the boundary formula in the previous section.

Uncomfortable situation:

Boundary needed:

Recall a time you said “yes” but wanted to say “no.” Where did your body hold that tension (jaw, stomach, chest, shoulders)? Label it on the body outline below, then reflect on what your body might be telling you.



.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Now imagine giving yourself permission to say no. Write down what physical or emotional shifts you notice.

.....

.....

.....

List one relationship that feels safe and respectful. What boundaries are honored in this relationship?

List one relationship that feels draining. What boundaries are missing or ignored?

The Risks of Boundaries:

VOL. 11

Every boundary carries risk. Risks of setting boundaries might include: conflict, disappointment, or even the end of certain relationships. Risks of not setting boundaries might include: exhaustion, resentment, and slowly losing yourself. The cost of not setting boundaries often goes unseen at first—but grows heavy over time. Setting boundaries may feel hard, but it preserves your wholeness.

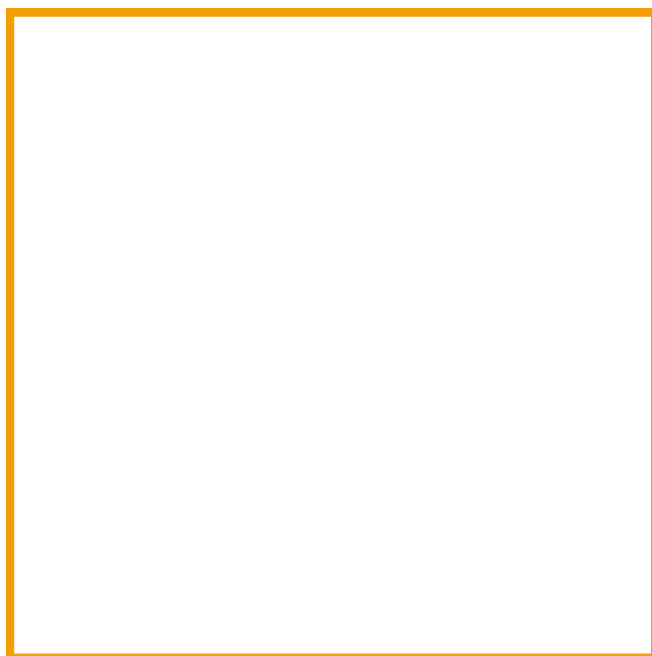
Boundary Balance Sheet Exercise

Choose one current situation where you suspect boundaries might be needed in your life. In Column 1, write the costs of setting a boundary. In Column 2, write the costs of not setting it. When you're done, compare and reflect—which cost feels heavier?

Column 1

Write the costs of setting a boundary

Example: The cost of setting a boundary with a family member who consistently disrespects me is that I might lose the relationship.



Column 2

Write the costs of NOT setting a boundary.

Example: The cost of NOT setting a boundary with a family member who consistently disrespects me is that I might become resentful and bitter.



notes

VOL. 11

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

About THE CREATOR

I'm a Midwestern girl raised in a home adorned in Black art, music, literature, and culture. From Faith Ringgold on the walls, to Toni Morrison on the shelves, and old-school R&B spinning through the house, my upbringing instilled a deep pride in my heritage, and a love for storytelling, creativity, and community that still guides me today.



My academic path took a few turns—Nursing, and then Psychology at Fisk University, a master's in Sociology, and ultimately a second master's in Counselor Education—each step clarifying my calling to become a therapist. Through personal experiences, faith, and growth, I felt led toward soul-centered, culturally grounded mental health work.

When I'm not in session, I'm creating, coloring, crocheting, listening to music, podcasts or audiobooks, or watching historical and sociocultural documentaries and classic Black sitcoms. I'm a proud member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., a wife to my best friend, a mama to one radiant daughter, a dog mom, and a caregiver in the sandwich generation—held up by strong women, deep friendships, and a whole lot of love.