

— SHAPING DESTINY —
Transforming How We Live, Love & Lead

BOUNDARY-SETTING GUIDE

Where Your Time, Energy & Peace Begin

*A complete, evidence-based companion for protecting what matters and
an introduction to how Shaping Destiny can help when boundaries feel impossible to hold.*

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Before You Begin

We wrote this guide because so many of the people who come to us start the same way: “I know I need to say no more often. I just don't know how or why it feels so hard.”

Most of us learned, long before we had words for it, that keeping others comfortable was safer than being clear about our own needs. That's not a character flaw, and it's rarely just about willpower. Boundaries undo that slowly, and with practice.

This guide will help you understand why boundaries feel the way they do for you specifically, and some practical, evidence-based ways to build them without losing the relationships you value.

Toward the end of this guide, we have also included an honest look at what working with us actually involves, so you know exactly what to expect if you ever want more support than a guide can give.

- *The Shaping Destiny Team*

Why Boundaries Feel So Hard

If it were simply a matter of finding the right words, you would have found them by now.

Most of us don't hear about boundaries; we learn about them when we try to have them, and usually face unhelpful consequences. A childhood where a "no" was met with withdrawal, guilt, or punishment teaches a fast lesson: agreement is safer than honesty. That lesson doesn't disappear with age. It just gets quieter, showing up as a knot in your stomach before you decline an invitation, or an apology you didn't need to make.

There is also a wider pattern at play. Many people, particularly those raised to prioritise others' comfort, are praised precisely for the absence of boundaries: for being easy-going, endlessly available, "low-maintenance." Reversing that isn't just a communication skill. It's relearning that your own needs are also allowed to matter.

WORTH REMEMBERING

— *This isn't about becoming less caring. It's about caring for yourself with the same seriousness you already extend to everyone else.*

THE BASICS

What a Boundary Actually Is

Not a wall. Not a punishment. The line where you end and someone else begins.

A boundary is about deciding what you will and won't accept, tolerate, or take on. Setting a boundary is not about controlling or punishing other people. Healthy boundaries are communicated clearly and defended consistently.

Unhealthy ones tend to go one of two ways: too rigid, keeping everyone out, or too porous, letting everything in until there's nothing left of you.

Healthy Boundaries

- + Say no without over-explaining
- + Communicate needs directly
- + Flex for context, not for fear
- + Feel firm, not cold

Unhealthy Boundaries

- Over-explain or apologise excessively
- Expect others to simply guess
- Change only to avoid conflict
- Feel either rigid or absent

REFLECT

- *Which column describes you more often at work, and is it the same at home?*
- *Is there one relationship where you are consistently more porous than everywhere else?*

Why Saying No Feels So Hard

If it were simple, everyone would already be doing it.

For many of us, saying no was never an option, or was actively discouraged. We learn early that being agreeable keeps the peace, and being needed keeps us valued. Saying no can trigger an old fear: that we will be seen as difficult, selfish, or unlovable. CBT calls these automatic thoughts; ACT calls them fused beliefs. Either way, they are learned behaviours, which means they can be unlearned.

THE AUTOMATIC THOUGHT

“If I say no, they will be upset with me.”



THE REFRAME

Their reaction is information, not your responsibility.

THE AUTOMATIC THOUGHT

“I should be able to handle this.”



THE REFRAME

Capacity is not a moral test. Prioritise and plan around your available time, resources and energies.

THE AUTOMATIC THOUGHT

“Saying no makes me selfish.”



THE REFRAME

A no to one thing is a yes to something that matters more.

TRY THIS

Name the Story

Next time you feel the urge to over-explain a “no,” pause and ask: what story am I telling myself about what will happen if I don't? Write it down. Most catastrophic predictions, once written out plainly, are easier to test against reality.

Practical Scripts You Can Use Today

Boundaries are easier to hold when you already have the words.

“ I can't take this on right now, but I appreciate you thinking of me.

“ That doesn't work for me, and here's what I can do instead.

“ I need some time before I can respond to your query.

“ I hear you, and my answer is still no.

BEFORE YOU USE A SCRIPT

- *A boundary lands better delivered calmly and once, than repeated anxiously three times.*
- *If your voice shakes, that's alright. Remember, the words still count.*

A CLIENT'S STORY

Composite Case Study: The Cost of Being “Easy”

The following is a composite scenario drawn from common patterns we see in our work. It does not describe any real individual.

Priya came to us describing herself, half-joking, as “the family fixer” - the one who rearranged her schedule for her parents, absorbed extra work when colleagues were overwhelmed, and rarely said no to anyone but herself. She hadn't taken a real day off in over a year.

What brought her in wasn't a single crisis, but a quieter, fatigued self: she had started resenting people she loved, then feeling guilty for the resentment, then working even harder to make up for it.

The shift didn't start with a dramatic confrontation. It started with one sentence, tried once, at work: “I can take this on next week, not this one.” Nothing collapsed. Her colleague adjusted. Priya noticed she had been rehearsing disasters that never arrived.

Six months on, she still finds boundaries uncomfortable, but she just no longer mistakes that discomfort for a sign that she is doing something wrong.

REFLECT

Where in your life are you already and what would it cost you to stay that way for another year?

IN CONTEXT

Boundaries at Work, Home & In Relationships

The words change less than you would think. The relationship changes everything else.

WORK

Messages keep arriving well after your working hours.

“I don't check messages after 6 pm, and I will respond first thing tomorrow.”

FAMILY

You are expected to attend every gathering, no exceptions.

“I won't make this one, but I would love to plan another time.”

RELATIONSHIPS

A partner expects constant availability and closeness.

“I need some time to recharge alone, and it isn't about you.”

FRIENDSHIPS

A friend regularly cancels last minute, without acknowledging it.

“I need us to actually confirm plans, or I would rather not pencil something in.”

Building the Boundary Habit

- 1** **Pause Before You Answer**
Buy time with “let me check and get back to you” instead of an automatic yes.
- 2** **Separate the Ask From the Person**
Declining a request isn't declining the relationship.
- 3** **Expect the Discomfort**
The moment right after a boundary lands is meant to feel uncomfortable. Remember, it fades faster than it seems like it will. Practice it.
- 4** **Repair, Don't Retreat**
If a boundary comes out clumsy or too sharp, revisit it calmly later. You don't have to abandon it.

EXERCISE

Track Your Yeses

For one week, note every time you say yes to something you didn't want to do, and what you told yourself in the moment. At the end of the week, look for the pattern; not to judge it, but to see it clearly.

Reflective Questions Worth Sitting With

Boundaries are rarely about other people. They start with what you believe you are allowed to need.

- 01** *What did you learn growing up about what happens when you say no?*
 - 02** *Whose disapproval do you fear most when you imagine setting a boundary?*
 - 03** *Where do you over-give in order to avoid a harder conversation?*
 - 04** *What would you do with the time and energy a clearer boundary would free up?*
 - 05** *Is there a boundary you've already set that you're proud of, even a small one?*
 - 06** *What's the actual worst-case outcome of the boundary you're avoiding, and how likely is it, really?*
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What It's Like to Work With Shaping Destiny

Support that starts with where you actually struggle, not a generic plan.

Reaching out doesn't commit you to anything beyond a conversation. Most people start with a single consultation to talk through what's happening, before deciding what, if anything, comes next.

- 1 Initial Consultation**
A confidential conversation to understand where boundaries feel hardest for you, and why.
 - 2 Understanding the Pattern**
Early sessions explore where these patterns started, and what they've protected you from.
 - 3 A Personalised Plan**
Practical tools drawn from CBT and ACT, paced to what you're actually ready to practise.
 - 4 Ongoing Practice**
Real situations from your week become the material, and not hypothetical scenarios.
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Why People Choose Shaping Destiny

Setting and managing boundaries about building healthier relationships with yourself and others. Many people come to us looking for practical, evidence-based support that goes beyond advice and leads to lasting change.

At Shaping Destiny, you will be supported by a therapist who is:

- NHS (UK) trained in evidence-based psychological therapies
- BABCP-registered (British Association for Behavioural & Cognitive Psychotherapies)
- Experienced in helping adults navigate people-pleasing, perfectionism, difficult relationships and workplace challenges
- Trained in CBT, ACT and trauma-informed approaches to create meaningful, sustainable behavioural change
- Focused on helping you build confidence, communicate assertively and establish healthy boundaries without guilt

Our work is guided by outcomes, not assumptions. Across our broader practice, many clients report meaningful improvements in confidence, emotional wellbeing and day-to-day functioning after structured therapy support.

A FEW QUESTIONS PEOPLE OFTEN ASK

Will I need to confront everyone in my life at once?

No. Most people start with one relationship or context, and build confidence from there.

Is this only useful if I'm a "pushover"?

Not at all. Plenty of clients hold boundaries well in some areas of life and struggle in others; often at work, or specifically with family.

How soon can we be seen?

Depending upon current availability, you may begin your re-discovery journey within 1-2 weeks.

READY WHEN YOU ARE

You Don't Have to Overhaul Everything at Once

Most people don't start with a grand plan. They start with one boundary, held once, somewhere it matters. If you would like support building that muscle, we are here.

Shaping Destiny's clinicians draw on CBT, ACT and integrative approaches to help you hold boundaries that protect your time, energy and relationships, without losing the people you value.

Book a private consultation - www.shaping-destiny.com

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This guide is provided for general educational and wellbeing purposes only and does not constitute medical or psychological advice, diagnosis, or treatment. The case study on page 7 is a composite illustration and does not describe a real individual. If you are in crisis or experiencing thoughts of self-harm, please contact a licensed mental health professional or your local emergency services immediately. © Shaping Destiny. All rights reserved.