

EXPLORING BEYOND DIVORCE

Coaching Guide • Journey 12 of 12

Setting Personal Boundaries

Understanding your limits and respecting theirs

About This Journey

After divorce, you may need to reconsider how you spend your time, what you share, and what contact feels appropriate. Saying no or asking for a change can feel unfamiliar, especially if you have often put other people's wishes ahead of your own.

This journey explores personal boundaries, ten ways to practice them, and the responsibility to respect other people's limits too. The aim is to make your choices clearer and more workable, not to win every disagreement or control how someone else feels.

What Are Personal Boundaries

Personal boundaries describe your limits around your body, time, privacy, belongings, and participation in relationships. They help you decide what you are willing to do, what you want to keep private, and how you will respond when an interaction does not work for you.

A request asks another person to act differently. A boundary identifies a limit and, where needed, an action you can take. For example: "Please lower your voice" is a request. "If the shouting continues, I will end this call and return to the practical issue later" describes your intended response.

Boundaries Work in Both Directions

You may decline an invitation, ask before discussing a sensitive subject, or choose not to answer a personal question. Other people have those choices too. Respecting a limit means listening without pressure, even when you feel disappointed or would choose differently.

Signs a Boundary May Need Attention

Automatic agreement: You repeatedly say yes before considering whether you have the time or willingness.

Unwanted disclosure: You share more than you intended because you feel pressed to explain yourself.

Repeated strain: Certain interactions leave you feeling resentful, depleted, or unable to speak freely.

Unclear expectations: You and another person seem to have different assumptions about access, availability, or responsibility.

These are invitations to look more closely, not proof that someone has crossed a line. Ask what happened, what you need, and whether the limit has been made clear.

Ten Steps to Setting Healthy Boundaries

Start with a situation you can manage. You do not need to change every relationship at once.

1 Name Your Limits

Consider your physical space, time, emotional capacity, privacy, and values. Be specific about what you are willing to offer and what you need to decline. “I can talk for fifteen minutes” is easier to understand than hoping someone notices that you are tired.

2 Tune Into Your Feelings

Notice discomfort, resentment, or tension and ask what they may be telling you. A feeling is useful information, but it does not automatically identify the cause. You might need a clearer agreement, a break, or time to understand your reaction.

3 Be Direct

Use a short, clear statement: “I am keeping that private,” or “Please check with me before making plans on my behalf.” You can offer context if you wish, but a long explanation is not always necessary. Avoid expecting someone to infer a limit you have not expressed.

4 Give Yourself Permission

You are allowed to have preferences and limits even when someone is disappointed. Feeling guilty does not by itself mean that you have acted unfairly. Consider your commitments and the other person’s needs while remembering that your own needs belong in the decision too.

5 Practice Self Awareness

Notice when you agree out of habit or begin to abandon a limit. Ask what is happening, what you can control, and what response fits your intentions. You can pause before answering: “Let me think about that and get back to you.”

6 Consider Your Past and Present

Reflect on what you learned about saying no, disagreeing, or asking for space. A habit that once helped you keep the peace may no longer fit. You can acknowledge why it developed and practice a different response without criticizing yourself for needing time.

A Practice for Today

Choose one recurring request. Before answering it, ask yourself: Do I want to do this? Do I have the capacity? What have I already committed to? Then choose a clear yes, a clear no, or a realistic alternative.

Putting Boundaries Into Practice

7 Make Care for Yourself a Priority

Protect time for rest, support, and the activities that sustain you. Consider those needs when making plans rather than treating them as what is left over. A workable boundary balances your capacity with responsibilities you have already accepted.

8 Seek Support

Practice the words with a trusted friend, coach, or counselor. Ask for help thinking through a difficult situation rather than asking someone else to decide every limit for you. If expressing a boundary could put you at risk, seek appropriate support before confronting the person.

9 Be Assertive and Follow Through

State the limit respectfully and choose a response within your control. “I will pause the conversation if insults continue” is different from demanding that someone never feel angry. Follow through when you reasonably can, and reconsider any response that is impractical or intended to punish.

10 Start Small and Adjust

Begin with a manageable limit, such as declining an optional invitation or setting aside uninterrupted time. Notice what worked and what needs to be clearer. You can revise a boundary as your circumstances change; consistency does not require keeping a rule that no longer fits.

Examples After Divorce

Privacy: “I am not discussing the details of the breakup. I would appreciate talking about something else.”

Availability: “I can help on Saturday morning, but I am not available for the whole weekend.”

Necessary communication: “Let us keep this exchange focused on the schedule. I am not discussing our former relationship here.”

Respecting their limit: “I understand you do not want to talk about that. We can leave it there.”

When a Boundary Is Challenged

Someone may misunderstand, disagree, or test whether your limit will hold. Clarify it once if useful, then decide what you can do next. You do not have to keep arguing until the other person approves. A boundary cannot guarantee cooperation or prevent another person’s harmful behavior.

Where you share responsibilities, consider practical needs and existing agreements when choosing your response. If an interaction feels unsafe, prioritize safety and support rather than trying to enforce the boundary through a confrontation.

Reflection Questions

Write here or in a journal. Choose a specific situation and focus on a response that is within your control.

1. What boundary feels most important to establish or strengthen right now, and why?

2. What limit was repeatedly overlooked or crossed in your marriage or past relationship? What do you want to do differently now?

3. What makes it difficult to state or maintain a boundary: fear, guilt, self-doubt, practical constraints, or something else?

4. Who respects your limits, and what does that look like? How do you respond when someone else sets a limit with you?

5. What small boundary will you practice this week? Write the words you could use and the action you can take if needed.

A Closing Thought

Clear boundaries can help you make room for both connection and self-respect. You can care about someone without agreeing to every request, and you can respect their limits without abandoning your own. Begin with one honest statement and one action you can reasonably carry out.

Continuing Your Recovery Journey

This is Journey 12 of 12, but there is no deadline for completing your recovery. Return to any Journey that feels useful, practice at your own pace, and seek support when you need it.

Additional Support

1-on-1 Clarity Sessions • Weekly Zoom Support Groups

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