

The Overwhelmed Brain

Personal Boundaries Workbook

Learn to honor what you will and will not accept in your life

Introduction

Your personal boundaries are how you define what you do and don't want in your life. One way to know when someone violates your boundaries is when they do behavior that makes you uncomfortable.

Typically, when someone makes you feel uncomfortable, they are crossing a line that you've created in your life. A good example might be if you get uncomfortable around people who yell at you. If someone is yelling at you, making you feel at all uncomfortable, dishonored or disrespected, they have likely crossed a boundary.

This worksheet is designed to help you identify your boundaries so that you know what you will and won't accept in your life. You may *know* a boundary violation when you see it, but these exercises will help you narrow them down even further so that you can be very clear exactly what you are honoring in yourself.

I like to refer to boundaries as "castle walls". By knowing your boundaries, you can then decide who's allowed inside your castle, where you are most vulnerable. Only the people you trust most are allowed in otherwise you don't feel safe.

The Process

I'm going to ask you a series of questions that will help you understand yourself a bit more and help you identify what your most important boundaries are. This process is designed to help you gain a better understanding of yourself so that you can make choices that honor *you*.

You can either print this workbook or use a word processor to answer the questions. Do your best to answer honestly because knowing where you are will help you get where you want to be.

Remember, *all* the answers you come up with are right, so never filter what comes out of you. If you can't answer a question for any reason, just skip it and answer as many as you can.

Are You Ready?

Just clear your mind for a moment. If that's a difficult task, just think about what your perfect day or week (or life) would look like. Get that perfect picture in mind.

If you're ready, let's begin! You don't have to know or answer every question but do your best to dig in and come up with *something* if you can.

A. Think of a situation where you felt like speaking up for yourself but chose not to. Keeping that event in mind, answer the following questions.

1. Why didn't you speak up for yourself?

2. How did you feel after you didn't speak up?

3. If you knew there would be absolutely no negative consequences for speaking up at that time, what would you have said or done differently?

4. Let's say that you actually *did* speak up regardless of the outcome, what do you think the other people involved would have done or said in response?

5. Thinking about your answer to number 4, how would you feel about event the day after you spoke up?

6. Again, thinking about your answer to number 4, how would you feel about that event a *year* after speaking up?

7. What's more important, how people *perceive* you or how they *treat* you?

8. If how people *perceive* you is more important than how they treat you, do you think it's a good idea to dishonor yourself to honor *them*? Why?

9. If how people *treat* you is more important than how they perceive you, do you think it's a good idea to let them know how they should treat you if they are mistreating you? Why?

10. If you saw a small child standing by him or herself teasing a vicious, barking dog at the end of its frayed leash, would you do or say anything? Why?

B. The following questions address specific relationships we have in different areas of life. Some questions you may not have an answer for, but that's okay because they may not apply to your situation.

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

People you are, or plan to be, romantically involved with

1. What's one thing your current or future partner could do (or does) that would make you leave the relationship without question?

2. What are some other things your partner could do (or does) that would make you leave without question?

3. What are some things your partner could do (or does) that would cause you great upset, but not necessarily make you leave right away?

4. What do you wish was different about your partner?

5. What do you refuse to have in an intimate relationship?

6. What do you *want* in an intimate relationship?

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Mother, father, siblings, and other people you consider family

1. Do you believe you honor your boundaries with all family members?

2. a. If you answered "no" to question 1, think of one family member you have the most trouble honoring yourself around. Why don't you honor your boundaries around that family member?

2. b. What would happen if you chose to honor your boundaries around that family member?

2. c. Pretend you *did* honor your boundaries in a particular situation with that family member, would you feel better about yourself or worse?

2. d. If this particular family member humiliated or disrespected your partner or children, would you speak up or stand up to protect them? (Assuming you knew you would not be physically injured).

3. a. If you answered "no" or "maybe" to the last question, skip to question 3. b. If you answered "yes" to the last question, why would you speak up or stand up for them but not yourself?

3. b. If you answered "no" or "maybe" to question 2. d., what specifically do you think would happen if you chose to stand or speak up for your children or partner?

4. When it comes to the family members that don't honor your boundaries, what do you wish they would do differently?

5. What have one or more family members done that really upset you, and what did you do about it?

6. What's one thing about you that, if it were different, would cause you to be able to stand up for yourself no matter what?

BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS

Coworkers, managers, and others you are in contact with at your job

1. What is something a coworker or superior could do that would make you quit without question?

2. If you really needed the money and there were no other immediate job opportunities, would you stay at a job that compromised your values, beliefs and/or ideals? Why?

3. What are some things about your job you don't like?

4. Have you done anything to change what you *don't* like about your job? Why?

5. What prevents your job from being *exactly* what you want it to be? (Even if the reason is small).

6. If you knew you could *never* quit doing what you do for a living, what would you change to make where you work more enjoyable?

7. If you could say anything to your boss without consequence, what would you say?

8. Finish this sentence: When a superior crosses my boundaries at work, I...

9. Finish this sentence: When a coworker crosses my boundaries at work, I...

10. Do you spend most days submissive and fearful or confident and in integrity with your values and beliefs? Why?

FRIENDSHIPS

Friends and others that you regularly come into contact with

1. Do you honor your boundaries the same way with friends as you do with family? Why?

2. Do you have any friends or acquaintances that do or say things that make you uncomfortable or upset? If so, do you say or do anything about their behavior? Why?

3. Do you keep friends you don't particularly want in your life? Why?

4. Do you have friends that would do almost *anything* for you?

5. If you answered "yes" to 4, and someone embarrassed or disrespected that friend, would you speak up or stand up for *them*? (Assuming you knew you would not be physically injured). Why?

6. When it comes to friends that don't honor your boundaries, what do you wish they would do differently? And do they know what you wish for them to do differently?

7. What has a friend done that really upset you? Did you do anything about it? Why?

YOU

How you honor your personal boundaries when you are alone or with strangers

1. When you're around people you don't know, do you get upset when they assume they know what's best for you? Why?

2. Have you ever been in a situation where someone you didn't know, or barely knew, made you feel uncomfortable or maybe even violated?

3. If you answered "yes" to number 2, would you ever let that happen again? Why or why not?

4. Is it more important to you to feel *safe* or be *liked*?

5. If you *knew* that honoring your boundaries would have unpleasant consequences short-term, but absolutely positive and beneficial long-term results, would you choose to do so?

6. If you answered "yes" to question 5, what stops you from believing that *all* consequences will be beneficial to you long-term?

7. Would you rather feel a very sharp pain that ended in a few hours or an unending, medium to dull pain that never ended?

8. Do you think you would feel better if you were able to honor yourself?

Now that you've done quite a bit of reflection and introspection, going through the different scenarios I presented, how do you feel about honoring your boundaries now? Do you feel at all different?

This exercise was designed to loosen up your beliefs about honoring yourself and your boundaries. If you are already comfortable about standing or speaking up for yourself, or even just walking away from situations that cross the line, then this was just a refresher for you. If however you are not comfortable honoring yourself in certain situations, then this workbook is a good start in knowing exactly what you're honoring.

Your personal boundaries are what you allow or prevent from entering your life. If your coworker looks over your shoulder while you're entering a password, and you feel uncomfortable about that, a personal boundary is being crossed. He or she may not be doing it consciously, but because you're uncomfortable by their behavior, you have a choice to speak up or not.

With personal boundaries, it's never about the other person - it's about *you*. That means when a personal boundary is being crossed, you can honor yourself by speaking up and protecting those boundaries, or you can *dishonor* yourself by allowing the violation to continue.

That might be hard to hear, and it's true that you may have what seems like no choice sometimes, so you have to try your best to continue honoring yourself wherever and whenever you can, otherwise you may be harming yourself.

For example, one of the questions asked if you would protect a family member. If you answered yes, then why wouldn't you also protect yourself?

Treat yourself like you are *two* people:

- The small, fearful child that needs protection
- The confident parent to that child

If you adopt this concept, you'll suddenly find a power inside yourself that you may not have known was there. This is exactly what I did when I faced my abusive, alcoholic stepfather after years without seeing him. He was gone for good, or so I thought, but one day he showed up at my mom's house while I was over there. I answered the door and like an explosion, I was hit with fear! But I was also presented with a choice I never realized I had before.

I could choose to act like that small child inside me, the one that was scared and needed to be protected, or I could act like the adult I've always wanted to be around him. That way I could *protect* the child inside. Making the choice to stand up to him for the first time in my life was one of the hardest decisions I'd ever made. I was *very nervous*, but I had to protect the child by becoming the parent I needed to be for myself.

I stood up to him and refused to let him in. It was a *huge* risk because I didn't know what to expect. But I had to do it because I knew the answer to a specific question that I now always ask myself:

What's the right thing to do?

The *right* thing to do is sometimes the scariest, but I guarantee if you do it once, it gets easier and easier. The quick, sharp pain that comes from doing what's right for you and others you love is a lot easier to deal with than the long, unending medium pain that comes from letting others walk all over you time and time again.

Don't dishonor the child you have with you at all times - that "inner" child that reacts to the world from a child's perspective. When you do, it adds more fear to your life and you never get a chance to heal.

The trick to learning how to honor your boundaries is to start small and take mini leaps of faith. When minor events show up in life, and you are presented with a choice of which path to take, choose the one that honors and protects that child within. You can do this by considering how you feel *now*, not how you'll feel later.

Start making decisions based on what you want *now*, so your mind doesn't wander to what might happen later. *That is the secret to honoring yourself.*

The first time you do this with something major can be hard, but once you get past the first hurdle, you'll be amazed how much easier it gets. You'll also find out who really loves and supports you because those that do will want you to honor yourself more and more. Those that don't, or can't, will want you to honor *them* regardless of your own needs.

That kind of relationship is dysfunctional and is something you don't want in your life. Your emotional health needs to come before other people's desires. Then, if you are emotionally healthy, you can choose if you want to fulfill their needs too.

There are always exceptions of course. Children and severely disabled people tend to be those exceptions. But here's the rule: *Don't treat fully capable people like severely disabled people.* People who have the full capacity to take care and think for themselves don't have a right to take away your integrity. They don't have a right to cause you to dishonor yourself by having you honor *their* needs over your own.

Honoring your boundaries takes practice, so start small and work your way up. Every step is a leap of faith because it's usually a jump into the unknown. Learn to be curious about the unknown, not afraid of it. I can't think of a single time when honoring myself didn't lead me down a better path. Every single time I chose to take a leap, I ended up better off because of it. *You will be better off too!*

Your Personal Boundaries
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Use the following sheet to write down your boundaries (everything you *don't* want in your life). As the days and weeks go by, keep adding to this table and use it as a guide and reminder so that you know what you need to work on.

Honoring yourself is a day to day process, but as long as you're aware of where you need work, you'll always keep that forward momentum.

Here's an example of how to fill out the table on the next page:

I don't want...	because it makes me feel...	If I could, I would...
My girlfriend to call me stupid	Like she doesn't respect me or value my input	Tell her to back off. I'm not stupid. I may not know everything that she does, but I've gotten through a lot of stuff in my life and deserve some respect.
My boss to yell at me in front of other people	Humiliated and disrespected	Visit him in his office when he's not so angry and ask him to respectfully stop yelling at me in front of other people
People to smoke around me	Like I can't breathe. They don't understand how it affects me.	Probably walk away unless I had no choice. Then I would ask them if they wouldn't mind putting their cigarette out since I am having trouble breathing.

On the next page, you'll find a blank chart that you can print fill out yourself. Keep returning to it as you discover new boundaries. Soon you'll know exactly *what* you are honoring.

I hope this has been educational for you and you are able to improve in all areas of your life. If you have any questions, feel free to write me at paul@theoverwhelmedbrain.com.

Thank you for using the Personal Boundaries Workbook.

You are amazing!

MY PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

I don't want...	Because it makes me feel...	If I could, I would...