



WHEN TO SAY YES
HOW TO SAY NO
TO TAKE CONTROL
OF YOUR LIFE

BOUNDARIES KICKSTART GUIDE

5 STEPS TO BUILD
HEALTHIER RELATIONSHIPS

DR. HENRY CLOUD & DR. JOHN TOWNSEND

BOUNDARIES KICKSTART GUIDE

5 Steps to Build Healthier Relationships

How to Use the Kickstart Guide:

The Boundaries Kickstart Guide is a free e-book designed to accompany the award-winning book, Boundaries. You will need a copy of the book to use this material. Purchase your copy of Boundaries wherever books are sold.

This guide provides suggested reading selections from Boundaries and offers insightful “Questions for Reflection” to walk you through five steps to build healthier relationships. After completing the Kickstart Guide, we think you’ll agree – boundaries make life better!

Step 1 – Understanding Boundaries

Step 2 – Setting Boundaries with Your Spouse

Step 3 – Setting Boundaries with Your Children

Step 4 – Dealing with Boundaries Resistance

Step 5 – Measuring Your Success with Boundaries

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Introduction

One of the most serious problems facing people today is confusion about boundaries. Many sincere, dedicated, individuals struggle with tremendous confusion about when it is appropriate to set limits. When confronted with their lack of boundaries, they raise good questions:

- Can I set limits and still be a loving person?
- What are legitimate boundaries?
- What if someone is upset or hurt by my boundaries?
- How do I answer someone who wants my time, love, energy, or money?
- Why do I feel guilty or afraid when I consider setting boundaries?
- How do boundaries relate to submission?
- Aren't boundaries selfish?
- Why is it difficult for me to hear no from other people?
- Why do I tend to want to control other people when I don't get what I want?

Just as homeowners set physical property lines around their land, we need to set mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual boundaries for our lives to help us distinguish what is our responsibility and what is not. The inability to set appropriate boundaries at appropriate times with the appropriate people can be very destructive.

Misinformation about what the Bible says about boundaries can also be destructive. To counter such wrong thinking, this Kickstart Guide and the accompanying text present a biblical view of boundaries: what they are, what they protect, how they are developed, how they are injured, how to repair them, and how to use them.

As you read our book, *Boundaries*, and work through this Kickstart Guide, you will find answers to the questions listed above—and more. In fact, our goal is to help you use boundaries appropriately to achieve the relationships and purposes that God intends for you as you grow in him.

Blessings,

Dr. Henry Cloud
DR. John Townsend

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BOUNDARIES KICKSTART GUIDE

Step 1 – Understanding Boundaries

Open your copy of *Boundaries* and read pages 29 – 31, including the sections “What Does a Boundary Look Like?” and “Invisible Property Lines and Responsibility.” Next, return to answer the following questions.

Remember the story of Bill? His parents paid his bills, fretted over his circumstances, worried about his future, and exerted much energy to keep him going. Bill didn’t study, plan, or work, yet he had a nice place to live, plenty of money, and all the rights of a family member who was doing his part. He was irresponsible and happy—and they were responsible and miserable.

You could compare Bill to a man who never waters his lawn. Whenever his neighbors turn on their sprinkler system, the water falls on Bill’s lawn. Their grass is turning brown and dying, but Bill sees his green grass and thinks his yard is doing fine.

In this story, it was suggested to Bill’s parents that they define the property lines a little better and fix their “sprinkler system” so that water would fall on their own lawn. Perhaps then, when Bill didn’t water his lawn and found himself living in dirt, he would recognize that he had a problem and would do something about it.

Questions for Reflection

1. Think of a relationship where you might be watering someone else’s yard while your own grass withers and dies?
2. Do you feel that it is cruel to stop watering someone else’s yard? Do you feel guilty or selfish about the thought of telling someone no?
3. Do you tend to feel responsible for other people’s feelings, choices, and behaviors? In what areas of your life, or for which people in your life, do you do this?

The goal of this first step is to help you define where your boundaries might be missing. Recognize them as an ever-present part of life that can increase your ability to love others and protect you from burnout.

Open your copy of *Boundaries* and read the sections “Me and Not Me” and “To and For” on pages 31 - 33. Then, answer the following questions.

The Purpose of Boundaries

Boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me. A boundary shows where you end and someone else begins, leading to a sense of ownership. Often, our family or other past relationships may have confused us about how to properly set limits for ourselves and with others. Read the following verses from the Bible:

Galatians 6:2 – “Carry each other’s burdens, and you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

Galatians 6:5 – “Each one should carry their own load.

The original Greek words for “burden” and “load” give important insight into these two verses. Burden means “excess burdens,” boulders that we need help carrying. Load means “cargo” or “the burden of daily toil.” You could liken the idea to a knapsack. A knapsack is possible to carry, and we are expected to carry our own. We are expected to deal with our own feelings, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as the responsibilities that God has given us, even though it takes effort. In addition, we are not to carry the “knapsacks” of others.

Questions for Reflection

1. When have you acted as if your “boulder” is your daily load and have refused to ask for help from others? Is this situation currently happening to you? Who should you reach out to for assistance?
2. When have you allowed yourself to carry someone else’s knapsack when they should be responsible to carry it on their own? Is this situation currently happening to you? Who do you need to let carry their own load?
3. We must own our own thoughts. Do you think things through for yourself, or do you tend to accept other people’s ideas and let them do your thinking for you? Name one area of your life where you would do well to think through some issues for yourself.

In order to not stay in pain or become irresponsible, it’s important to determine what “me” is, where your boundary of responsibility lies, and where someone else’s begins.

Open your copy of Boundaries and read the sections “Good In, Bad Out” and “God and Boundaries” on pages 33 – 35. Then, return to answer the following questions.

Boundaries Let the Good In and Keep the Bad Out

Boundaries help us distinguish our property so we can take care of it. We need to keep things that will nurture us inside our fences and keep things that will harm us outside. We need to keep the good in and the bad out, and that’s what boundaries help us do.

However, boundaries are not meant to be walls. We should not be “walled off” from others. Instead, we are meant to be in community with one another. But, in every community the members have their own space and property.

Two aspects of limits are important for creating better boundaries. First, setting limits and separating ourselves protects love because we are taking a stand against things that destroy love. Second, setting limits in order to establish an internal structure is an important component of boundaries and identity, as well as ownership, responsibility, and self-control.

The first aspect is setting limits with others. That means setting limits on our exposure to people who are behaving poorly. We can't change other people or make them behave right, but we can gain some distance from them.

Questions for Reflection

1. As a result of past emotional injury, have you reversed the function of boundaries to let the bad in and keep the good out? For instance, is there any pain you are holding inside rather than expressing it and getting it out of your soul?
2. Where are you not opening up to the love and support from the outside that would bring healing?
3. Where in your life today would you do well to limit your exposure to someone who is destructive or unhealthy? Why would that be a wise move?

Step 1 Review

Taking care of all that lies within our boundaries isn't easy. Neither is allowing other people to take care of what lies within their boundaries. Setting boundaries and maintaining them is hard work. But, as you'll see in the next step, boundary problems stem from certain myths that can be addressed. Recognizing misconceptions that cause your boundary problems can help you establish healthy boundaries for yourself.

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Step 2 – Setting Boundaries with Your Spouse

Open your copy of *Boundaries* and read the section, “Is This Yours, Mine or Ours?” on pages 157 – 162. Then, return to answer the following questions.

If there were ever a relationship where boundaries could get confused, it is marriage, where by design husband and wife “become one flesh” (see Ephesians 5:31). Boundaries foster separateness. Marriage has as one of its goals the giving up of some of our separateness and becoming one. What a potential state of confusion! In fact, more marriages fail because of poor boundaries than any other reason.

The Difference Between Love and Resentment

Problems arise when we blame our spouse for our own lack of limits. But, your spouse is not responsible for your limits; you are. Only you know what you can and want to give, and only you can be responsible for drawing that line. If you do not draw it, you can quickly become resentful.

Questions for Reflection

1. Often spouses will do more than they really want to and then resent the other for not stopping them from over-giving. Review Bob and Nancy’s story on pages 161 - 162. What situation in your marriage, if any, does it remind you of?
2. Where do you need to set some limits on what you will give your spouse?
3. Where do you need to take responsibility for your own wants instead of expecting your spouse to take care of them all for you?

Open your copy of *Boundaries* and read the sections, “The Law of Sowing and Reaping” and “The Law of Responsibility” on pages 162–163. Next, answer the following questions.

The Law of Sowing and Reaping

Many times one spouse may be out of control but may not suffer the consequences of this behavior. Letting your spouse suffer the consequences—or being allowed to suffer the consequences for your own behavior—is not manipulation. Instead, someone is limiting how they will allow themselves to be treated and exhibiting self-control. The natural consequences are falling on the shoulders of the responsible party.

Questions for Reflection

1. Are there any actions where your spouse is not letting you suffer the consequences?
2. Are there any actions where you need to let your spouse suffer the consequences? If so, what is keeping you from letting your spouse suffer the consequences for his or her behavior?

The Law of Responsibility

People who set limits exhibit self-control and show responsibility for themselves. Setting limits is an act of love; by binding and limiting the evil, they protect the good. Instead of taking responsibility for people we love, or rescuing them, we need to show responsibility to them by confronting evil when we see it. Keep in mind that the most responsible behavior possible is usually the most difficult.

Questions for Reflection

1. Where are you getting angry, pouting, or acting disappointed in hopes of controlling your spouse? Where are you waiting to be rescued rather than taking responsibility for yourself?
2. Are there any areas where you are giving in to your spouse's anger, pouting, and disappointments and thereby taking responsibility for what he or she is feeling? Where are you rescuing your spouse?
3. Explain the difference between being responsible "to your spouse" and being responsible "for your spouse."

Step 2 Review

When the husband and wife in a marriage set boundaries, the marriage can then grow and develop. Setting and receiving firm boundaries with your spouse can lead to a much greater intimacy. Take the risk, knowing that the rewards can be very worthwhile.

However, you not only need to address boundaries with your spouse; you also need to address boundaries with your children. And, that's covered in the next step.

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Step 3 – Setting Boundaries with Your Children

Open your copy of *Boundaries* and read “Having a Sense of Control and Choice” on pages 187 – 188. Next, answer the following questions.

Of all the areas in which boundaries are crucial, none is more relevant than that of raising children. How we approach boundaries and child rearing will have enormous impact on the characters of our kids—how they develop values, how well they do in school, what friends they pick, whom they marry, and how well they do in a career.

Giving Children a Sense of Control and Choice

Children need to have a sense of control and choice in their life. They need to see themselves not as the dependent, helpless pawns of parents, but as willing, initiative-taking agents of their own lives. If children aren’t allowed to make decisions and skin their knees as a result, they become atrophied in their change-making abilities. Children need a sense that their lives are largely theirs to determine, within the province of God’s sovereignty. Being free to make decisions teaches them to appreciate the consequences of the choices they make.

Questions for Reflection

1. Recall the story of Sal and his daughter Pamela. What do you like about the way Sal dealt with Pamela’s objection to going to the dentist? What didn’t you like?
2. Where can you apply Sal’s approach with your children? Be specific in your plans and then take action.
3. What happens when parents make their children’s choices for them and try to prevent them from making painful decisions?

Open your copy of *Boundaries* and read “Delaying Gratification of Goals” on page 189. Next, return to answer the following questions.

The Power of Delaying Gratification

The word *now* was made for young children. It’s where they live. Yet at some point in our development we learn the value of *later*, of delaying one good for a greater good. We learn to say no to our impulses, wishes, and desires for some gain down the road.

Learning how to delay gratification helps our children become self-sufficient adults instead of sluggards who are always in crisis. It also helps them learn to have a goal and work towards it.

Questions for Reflection

1. How did you learn—or how are you learning—the value of delaying gratification?
2. How can you begin or continue to teach your children the value of delaying gratification?

Open your copy of *Boundaries* and read “Respecting the Limits of Others” on page 190 - 192. Next, return to answer the following questions.

Respecting the Limits of Others

From an early age, children need to be able to accept the limits of parents, siblings, and friends. They need to realize that the world doesn’t revolve around them. Accepting limits teaches us to take responsibility for ourselves. The longer we hate and resist the limits of others, the more dependent on them we will be. We will come to expect others to take care of us, rather than simply taking care of ourselves.

If we don’t teach our children to take a no, someone who loves them far less may take on the job. Most parents would much rather spare their children from such suffering. The earlier we teach limits, the better.

Questions for Reflection

1. The list on page 190 identifies various sources of no in life. At which of the eight stages did you learn to accept the boundary of other people’s no? Why is it better to learn to accept no from the sources early in the list instead of later in the list?
2. How did you learn that you can hurt people you love and that your actions matter? What are you doing to teach your children this lesson?

Step 3 Review

We need to help our children realize that their actions impact other people. When they are aware of other people’s needs and hurts, they learn to be responsible for what they do and say. This lesson can keep our children from being self-centered or controlling. Then, they can become loving people.

As parents, we have the challenging task and sober responsibility of teaching our children to have an internal sense of boundaries and to respect the boundaries of others. There are no guarantees that our training will be heeded. Yet as we learn about our own boundary issues, take responsibility for them, and grow up ourselves, we increase our kids’ chances to learn boundaries for the adult world where they’ll need them every day.

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Step 4 – Dealing with Boundaries Resistance

Open your copy of *Boundaries* and read pages 245 – 249, including the sections, “Outside Resistance” and “Angry Reactions.” Then, return to answer the following questions.

We have talked about the necessity of boundaries and their wonderful value in our lives. In fact, we have all but said that life without boundaries is no life at all. But establishing and maintaining boundaries takes a lot of work, discipline, and, most of all, desire. But, even with the desire for a better life, we can be reluctant to do the work of boundaries for another reason: it can be a war. There will be skirmishes and battles. There will be disputes. There will be losses.

For example, remember the story of Julie who had a difficult time with boundaries most of her life. The child of a domineering father and a mother who controlled her with guilt, Julie had been afraid to set boundaries with some people because of their anger or because of the guilt she would feel for “hurting them.”

How are you like Julie? Are you afraid of people’s anger? Of hurting people? Both? Julie learned that people were going to fight hard against her limits. Whom do you expect to fight hard against your limits? Outside resistance—people fighting against your boundaries—comes in a variety of forms. Let’s look at four of them.

Angry Reactions

The most common resistance from the outside is anger. People who get angry at others for setting boundaries have a character problem. Self-centered, they think the world exists for them and their comfort. If you keep your boundaries, those who are angry at you will have to learn self-control, rather than using their anger to control other people.

Questions for Reflection

1. Review the 6 steps for coping with someone’s anger on pages 248–249. What will you do to internalize these steps and make them your own? When will you take action?
2. People who get angry may leave their relationship with you if they can no longer control you. Are you willing to take that risk with the angry, controlling people in your life? Why or why not?

God says he will only do things the right way and that he will not participate in evil. When people choose their own ways over his, he lets them go. Sometimes, we have to do the same in our relationships.

Open your copy of *Boundaries* and read the section “Guilt Messages” on pages 249 – 252. Next, answer the following questions.

Guilt Messages

No weapon in the arsenal of the controlling person is as strong as the guilt message. People with poor boundaries almost always internalize guilt messages leveled at them. Controlling people who use guilt messages are trying to make you change your choices.

God says that we are to give and not be self-centered. He doesn’t say that we have to give whatever anyone wants from us. We are in control of our giving. We are free to make choices, and we are to take responsibility for their impact on us and other people.

Questions for Reflection

1. What guilt messages are you dealing with today? By whom?
2. Review the six steps for coping with guilt messages on pages 251–252. Which steps give you new insight into the dynamics of guilt messages? Be specific about what you’ve learned. Which steps call for new behavior? What will you do to internalize these steps and make them your own? When will you take action?

Empathize with the distress the guilt sender is feeling, but make it clear that it is their distress. Stop reacting. Give empathy. Be a listener, but don’t take the blame. Make sure that the guilt sender hears that you hear the feeling behind the guilt message.

Open your copy of *Boundaries* and read the sections, “Consequences and Countermoves” and “Physical Resistance” on pages 252 – 255. Next, answer the following questions.

Consequences and Countermoves

The consequences of setting boundaries will be countermoves by controlling people, and those can be harsh.

Questions for Reflection

1. Who in your life might react like Brian’s father by setting boundaries? What you are getting for your lack of boundaries and what you stand to lose by setting boundaries?
2. Review the remaining five steps for coping with the consequences of your boundary setting on pages 253–254. Which steps give you helpful insights into the seriousness of the boundaries you are considering setting? Be specific about what you’ve learned. Which steps call for new behavior? Which steps offer you strength? What will you do to internalize these steps and make them your own? When will you take action?

Physical Resistance

Some people can't maintain their boundaries with other people because they will be physically overpowered or injured. Physical abuse is a serious problem, and the abuser requires outside help. The problem will not go away, and it could get much worse. Seek help immediately.

Questions for Reflection

1. If you are in relationship with an abusive spouse or boyfriend, what is God's message to you today?
2. When will you take action?

Step 4 Review

The Bible is clear about two principles: (1) We always need to forgive, but (2) we don't always achieve reconciliation. Forgiveness is something that we do in our hearts; we release someone from a debt that they owe us. We write off the person's debt, and she no longer owes us. We no longer condemn her. She is clean. Only one party is needed for forgiveness: me. The person who owes me a debt does not have to ask my forgiveness. It is a work of grace in my heart.

This brings us to the second principle: we do not always achieve reconciliation. God forgave the world, but the whole world is not reconciled to him. Although he may have forgiven all people, all people have not owned their sin and appropriated his forgiveness. That would be reconciliation. Forgiveness takes one; reconciliation takes two.

We do not open ourselves up to the other party until we have seen that she has truly owned her part of the problem. True repentance is much more than saying "I'm sorry"; it is changing direction. Do not think that because you have forgiven that you have to reconcile. You can offer reconciliation, but it must be contingent upon the other person owning her behavior and bringing forth trustworthy fruits.

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Step 5 – Measuring Your Success with Boundaries

Open your copy of *Boundaries* and read the section, “Practice Baby No’s,” on pages 283 – 285. Then, return to answer the following questions.

As strange as it may seem, a sign that you’re having success setting new boundaries is often a sense of self-condemnation or that you’ve transgressed some important rules in your limit setting. Many people experience intense critical self-judgment when they begin telling the truth about what is and isn’t their responsibility. Why is that? Let’s look at the answer in terms of practicing how to say no and the feelings of guilt.

Practice Baby No’s

When experiences in the past have taught you not to set limits, confronting someone on a relatively insignificant matter is never a small step—it’s a huge leap forward. But, that huge leap must be taken only with careful planning.

Growth in setting emotional boundaries must be at a rate that takes into account your past injuries. So, it is wise to start small and practice saying no in comfortable situations.

Questions for Reflection

1. Think back to the story of Shareen. Her mother sent guilt messages whenever Shareen set limits, and her father was enraged whenever she dared disagree. Likewise, what past injuries make setting limits and saying no difficult for you?
2. With whom can you practice saying no? What support group and/or good friend(s) will you seek out to work on boundaries with? When will you take that step?

Here’s an idea to help you navigate this step: Ask your support group or your good friends if you could work on boundaries with them. They will show you their true value in their response to your truth-telling. Either, they’ll warmly cheer you on in being able to disagree with and confront them, or they’ll resist you. Either way, you’ll learn something.

A good supportive relationship cherishes the no of all parties involved. The members know that true intimacy is only built around the freedom to disagree. Begin practicing your no with people who will honor it and love you for it.

Open your copy of *Boundaries* and read “Rejoicing in the Guilty Feelings” on pages 285 – 286. Then, answer the following questions.

Rejoice in the Guilty Feelings

If your conscience provided no “how could you?” guilt-inducing messages, it might mean you were remaining enslaved to the internal parent in your mind. That’s why we encourage you to rejoice in the feelings of guilt. You’re moving ahead.

Questions for Reflection

1. What evidence is there that you have a weak conscience or an overactive and harsh internal judge? Give specific examples of the kind of condemning self-talk that goes on in your mind.
2. In what boundary setting will you feel like you are transgressing when you aren’t? What are you going to do with that guilt?

Open your copy of **Boundaries** and read “**Practicing Grown-Up No’s**” on pages 286 – 287. Then, answer the following questions.

Practice Grown-Up No’s

Straightening out the extremely complicated, conflicted, frightening relationships in your life is a major goal in becoming a boundaried person and a step that requires some grown-up no’s. Before considering what to do with these people, make sure that your goals for this important boundary work are not confused. According to the discussion on page 286 in *Boundaries* and the Scriptures given there, what is the ultimate goal of boundary work?

The goal is to have a character structure that has boundaries and that can set limits on self and with others at the appropriate times. Furthermore, having internal boundaries results in having boundaries in the world.

Questions for Reflection

1. Who is your number one “boundary buster”? Who is the foremost person in your life with whom it’s difficult to set limits? List all the names that come to mind.
2. Make a list of your significant relationships. Next to each name, note any specific treasures that are being violated. What boundaries do you need to set to protect these treasures? Who will support you as you take this critical step?

Developing a well-defined, honest, and goal-oriented character structure enables you to take this crucial step. That structure will also enable you to deal with any crisis that your boundaries may precipitate. Remember that the conflicts and disagreements that appear already exist. Boundaries simply bring them to the surface.

Open your copy of *Boundaries* and read "Rejoicing in the Absence of Guilty Feelings" on pages 287 – 288. Then, answer the following questions.

Rejoice in the Absence of Guilty Feelings

If you've been working through the steps outlined so far, you have had many experiences with people who understand love, responsibility, and forgiveness. As a result, your heart now has somewhere else to go for self-evaluation other than a critical conscience. Your heart can rest instead in the emotional memories of loving, truthful people. There is nothing to fuel guilt feelings.

Questions for Reflection

1. Are you noticing an easing up of guilty feelings and an increase of empathic sorrow? Point to a specific instance of setting limits that might have caused you greater guilt and more self-recriminations had it happened before you started setting boundaries.
2. Identify some of the people that God has placed in your life and some of the situations he has seen you through which have helped quiet your harsh internal parent.

Think for a second about the last time you were asked for something from someone. Perhaps it was for some of your time that you weren't sure you had to give. Suppose the person asking is not selfish, manipulative, or controlling. Reasonable people can make reasonable requests sometimes.

So, you were asked for something you weren't sure you had left over to give. You weren't sure you could do it with a "cheerful heart." What happened next is what measuring success with boundaries is all about. You probably did one of two things:

1. Since you were unsure, you said yes.
2. Since you were unsure, you said no.

Which response is more mature? In most cases, the second. Why? It is more responsible to give out of our resources than to promise that which we might not be able to deliver.

Step 5 Review

Individuals with successful boundaries aren't frantic, in a hurry, or out of control. They have direction in their lives, a steady moving toward their personal goals. The reward for wise boundaries is the joy of desires fulfilled in life. Consider the Apostle Paul's comments at the end of his life:

The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (2 Timothy 4:6-7)

Does life interrupt the process of the person with mature boundaries? Won't there be trials, complications, and people wanting me on their track and not God's? Absolutely. There will be all sorts of resistances to our boundaries and goals.

However, the person with mature limits understands, makes room, and allows for those potential situations. He or she knows that, should it be needed, a no is waiting inside the heart—ready to use. Not for an attack. Not to punish another. But to protect the time, talents, and treasures that God has allocated to us during our time on this planet.

Thank you for taking time to complete the Boundaries Kickstart Guide. After reading the excerpts from the book and answering all of the questions, you can clearly see how boundaries make life better!

For more information about Boundaries
and the entire book series, visit:
www.BoundariesBooks.com

