



UNDERSTANDING UNMET MATERNAL NEEDS

A guided workbook for exploring attachment patterns, identifying your needs, and practicing healthier boundaries.

Dr. Dani Murphy • Refuel Life Trauma Center, PLLC

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Learn more:
traumacentervva.com

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Welcome

A gentle beginning

You do not have to rush this work.

This workbook is a place to slow down, notice patterns, and explore what you need. Move at a pace that feels manageable. You may pause, skip a prompt, or return later.

Before you begin

A note about gentleness

The goal is not to blame yourself or anyone else. The goal is to understand your experience with curiosity, define safety and healing for yourself, and practice choices that support your wellbeing.

What would help me feel supported as I use this workbook?

Where can I pause if I feel overwhelmed?

Part One: Notice the Pattern

Begin with one recent interaction that felt emotionally unsettling. You can choose a small, specific moment.

Prompt 1: The interaction

What happened? Write only what you feel ready to record.

Prompt 1 continued

Notice your experience.

Emotions:

Body sensations:

Prompt 2: Notice the pull

What did you feel pulled to do in that moment?

I felt pulled to...

What was I trying to prevent, fix, or protect?

Prompt 3: Name the choice

What did you actually do? What do you wish you could have done?

What I actually did:

What I wish I could have done:

Part Two: Understand What the Pattern Protects

Patterns often develop for a reason. Explore what your reaction may be trying to protect you from.

Prompt 4: What am I afraid might happen?

Check any that fit, then add your own.

☐ Disappointing someone

☐ Being rejected

☐ Losing approval

☐ Managing conflict

☐ Being misunderstood

☐ Someone being angry or upset

☐ Something else:

Prompt 5: Complete the belief

Finish each sentence with the first response that comes to mind.

If someone is upset with me, it means...

To be loved or accepted, I have to...

Setting a boundary makes me...

Prompt 5 continued: Where might this belief have come from?

Consider family patterns, caregiver emotions, dismissal of needs, or times when boundaries were interpreted as rejection.

I remember...

I learned...

Prompt 6: What does the pattern protect?

What might this pattern have helped you avoid, maintain, or receive?
What does it cost you now?

It may protect me from...

The cost for me is...

Part Three: Identify the Need

Needs are not demands. Naming a need gives you more information about what matters to you.

Prompt 7: What do I need?

Check any that fit, then add your own.

☐ Acknowledgment

☐ Clarity

☐ Emotional safety

☐ Respect

☐ Space

☐ Validation

☐ Support

☐ Rest

☐ Understanding

Prompt 7 continued: What belongs to me?

Separate what belongs to you from what belongs to the other person.

What I can own:

What belongs to the other person:

I can care about their feelings without...

Prompt 8: Make the need specific

What would this need look like in a real interaction? What would you notice if it were being respected?

My need is...

It would look like...

Reflection: Pause and integrate

What are you noticing about the connection between the interaction, the fear, the belief, and the need?

Part Four: Choose a Boundary

A boundary is a limit you set around what you will participate in, accept, or do. A boundary is not a way to control another person or guarantee their response.

Boundaries can include

Choose the area that fits.

☐ Conversation

☐ Time

☐ Emotional

☐ Privacy

☐ Physical

☐ Contact

A boundary I may need is about...

Boundary types

Conversation: what topics, tones, or times you will engage.

Time: how long you can stay or when you will respond.

Emotional: what feelings and responsibilities are yours.

Privacy: what you share and with whom.

Physical: what contact feels acceptable.

Contact: how and when communication happens.

Prompt 9: Choose one boundary

What is one specific boundary that would support the need you named?
Keep the focus on an action you control.

My boundary is...

The action I control is...

Prompt 10: Use the boundary formula

When [specific behavior happens], I will [action you control] because I need [need or value].

When...

I will...

Because I need...

Prompt 11: Prepare for reactions

How might the other person respond? What would you like to remember if they are disappointed, critical, or do not agree?

If they react by...

I can remind myself...

Boundary Script Bank

Short scripts to adapt to your own voice.

"I need time before I respond."

"No, I am not able to do that."

"I am not ready to explain more."

"I hear that you disagree."

Boundary Script Bank

Short scripts to adapt to your own voice.

"I am not available for criticism in this conversation."

"I cannot manage your emotions for you."

"I am going to end this conversation now."

"I care about you, and I'm still keeping this boundary."

Boundary Script Bank

Suggested responses.

"I understand that you're disappointed. My answer is still no."

"I'm not asking you to agree. I'm letting you know what I can do."

"I need to pause and come back to this later."

Part Five: Support Yourself Afterward

Setting a boundary can bring up many feelings. An aftercare plan can help you return to steadiness.

Prompt 12: Create an aftercare plan

Choose what may support you after setting a boundary.

☐ Contact a safe person

☐ Take a walk

☐ Drink water

☐ Journal

☐ Silence notifications

☐ Rest

☐ Bring the experience to therapy

☐ Something else:

Grounding practice: Return to the present

Notice five things you can see, four things you can feel, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste.

"I'm allowed to pause. I don't have to solve everything right now."

What I notice right now:

Your Boundary Plan

Use this page to gather what you have learned.

The pattern I notice:

The emotions and body sensations:

The fear beneath it:

Your Boundary Plan continued

Continue your plan with the need, responsibility, boundary, response, and aftercare you choose.

The belief I want to question:

The need I am naming:

What belongs to me / what does not:

My boundary:

If it is not respected, I will:

My aftercare plan:

One small step

Small changes count. Choose one manageable change to practice.

☐ Wait before saying yes.

☐ Notice guilt without obeying it.

☐ Ask for time.

☐ Share less.

☐ Practice with someone safe.

My small step is...

Final Reflection

There is no perfect way to do this work.

What surprised me?

What felt difficult?

What is clearer now?

What support might help?

Therapy and support

You do not have to do this alone. Therapy can support changing patterns, processing painful experiences, and practicing boundaries.

Learn More About Therapy: traumacenterva.com

Request a Consultation: traumacenterva.com/new-clients

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Important Information

This workbook is educational and reflective. It is not a clinical assessment, diagnosis, treatment plan, or substitute for individualized mental-health care. "Mother wound" is not a formal mental-health diagnosis.

Protect your privacy when writing or sharing your reflections.

If you are in crisis or need immediate support, contact local emergency or crisis resources.

Important Information continued

Move at a pace that feels safe for you. Pause when overwhelmed and consider bringing difficult material to a qualified mental-health professional.

Notes:

A next step

You are allowed to pause. You are allowed to need support. You are allowed to practice one small boundary at a time.

Learn more: traumacenterva.com

Request a consultation: traumacenterva.com/new-clients

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