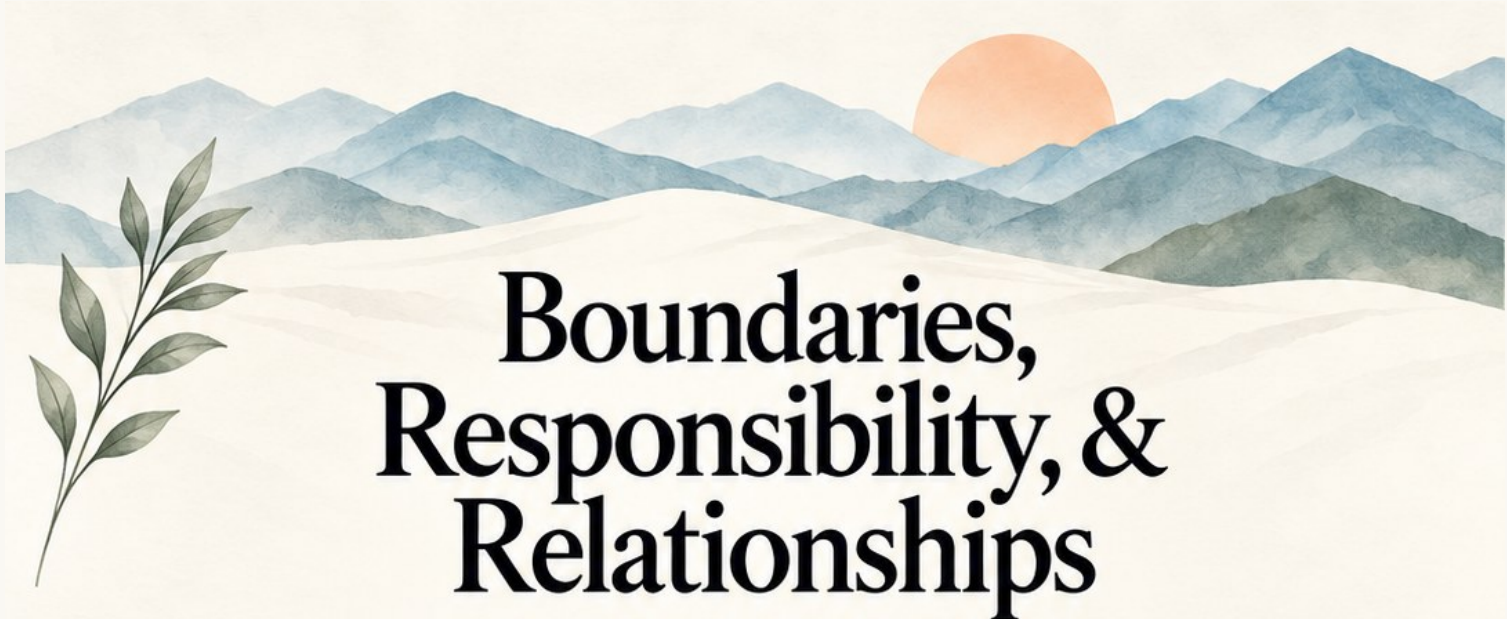




Boundaries, Responsibility, & Relationships

A trauma-informed guide to knowing what is yours, what is not, and how steadier connection can be built.



Boundaries support connection.

Healthy boundaries are not walls. They help create clarity, consent, dignity, and more honest relationships.

1

What is a boundary?

A boundary is a limit that clarifies what you need, what you are available for, and what you will do to care for your well-being and relationships. Healthy boundaries support autonomy, mutual respect, and emotional safety.



A boundary describes your choices and actions. It is not a tool for controlling another person's feelings, thoughts, or behavior.

2

What boundaries are—and are not



They ARE:

clear limits around time, energy, body, values, communication, and access.



They ARE:

a way to protect dignity, safety, and self-respect while staying connected.



They are NOT:

punishment, retaliation, silent withdrawal, or a demand that someone agree.



They are NOT:

a guarantee that another person will like, welcome, or feel comfortable with your limit.



Feeling uneasy after setting a limit does not, by itself, mean the limit is unhealthy.



Why Boundaries Can Feel Hard

Many experiences can make boundaries feel difficult. Understanding these patterns can help you respond with more compassion for yourself.



Old learning

If needs or limits once led to criticism, rejection, conflict, or punishment, saying no may feel unsafe.



Over-responsibility

You may feel responsible for keeping other people calm, pleased, or connected.



Body alarm

Your nervous system may react before your thinking mind catches up.



Fear of rupture

A limit can feel like a threat to connection even when it is respectful and necessary.

With practice, self-trust, and relationships that can tolerate honesty, boundaries often become more usable.

1 Signs a boundary may be needed



You feel resentment, dread, or depletion.



You overextend, overexplain, or people-please.



You feel responsible for another person's emotions.



You say yes when you mean no.



You leave interactions feeling flooded, shut down, or ashamed.



Practicing Boundaries

Learning limits, choice, and steadier connection takes practice.

1



Practicing boundaries builds self-trust.

Boundaries become more usable when you notice your needs, speak clearly, and repeat them with care.

2

Boundary language you can try

“I care about this,
and I need time
before I
respond.”

“I’m not available
for being yelled
at.”

“That doesn’t
work for me.”

“I can listen, but I
can’t solve this
for you.”

“I need us to slow
this down.”

“I’m willing to
continue when
we can speak
respectfully.”

3

A few trauma-informed reminders



You do not need
to justify every
limit.



Guilt does not
always mean you
are doing something
wrong.



You can be kind
and still be firm.



Repeating a boundary
is often part of
the process.



If boundaries feel unfamiliar or activating, that does not mean you are doing them wrong. Many people learn healthy limits gradually through safety, repetition, and repair.



Responsibility Creates Clarity

Knowing what belongs to you—and what does not—can reduce shame, resentment, and overfunctioning.



You are responsible for your choices, needs, values, and repair.
You are not responsible for controlling another person's inner world.

1

What is yours



Your feelings:

Noticing, naming, and caring for your own feelings.



Your behavior and choices:

What you do, say, and how you show up.



Your limits and consent:

Setting and communicating your boundaries.



Your values and priorities:

Knowing what matters and choosing accordingly.



Your repair when you cause harm:

Taking accountability and making different choices.

2

What is not yours



Another person's feelings.



Another person's reactions to your boundary.



Fixing, rescuing, or regulating everyone.



Mind-reading or predicting every need.



Carrying all the responsibility for the relationship.



Healthy responsibility supports agency in both people. When you take responsibility for what is yours and release what is not, relationships have more room for honesty, respect, and genuine connection.



Support Without Taking Over

Support is different from taking over.



You can care without rescuing.
Support their autonomy rather than taking over their problems.



You can listen without agreeing.
You can make room for someone's experience even when you see it differently.



You can empathize without abandoning yourself.
Compassion can coexist with your own needs and boundaries.



You can offer support without taking full responsibility.
You can be present and still trust another person to make their own choices.

Common signs of over-responsibility



Chronic guilt,
even when you've done nothing wrong.



Resentment, especially
when you feel unappreciated.



Overexplaining
to avoid conflict.



Difficulty resting
or letting go.



People-pleasing
at your own expense.



Fear of disappointing
others.



Relationships Where Both People Matter

Healthier relationships are built through clarity, consent, accountability, and repair.



Healthy connection does not require perfection.
It grows through honesty, boundaries, and repair.

Signs of healthier connection



Room for both people's needs

Both people can have needs, limits, and different perspectives.



Respect for no and for pacing

A no is respected, and there is space to move at a safer pace.



Accountability and repair

When harm happens, there is willingness to take responsibility and make repair.



Less mind-reading and more direct communication

Needs, feelings, and concerns can be expressed more clearly.



Connection without self-abandonment

You can stay connected without giving up your values, needs, or sense of self.



A trauma-informed reminder

If closeness, difference, or conflict feel activating, that may reflect old learning—not failure. Safer relationships are often learned through repeated experiences of respect, repair, and steadiness.



Building Safety and Making Repair

1 What helps relationships feel safer



Clarity

Being clear about needs, limits, and expectations reduces confusion and builds trust.



Consistency

Follow-through and reliable actions create a sense of safety over time.



Consent

Ongoing consent supports choice, respect, and mutual safety.



Curiosity and repair

Willingness to be curious in hard moments and make repair helps maintain connection.

2 When conflict happens



Pause and regulate

Take space if needed to settle your body and reduce reactivity.



Name what happened directly

Use clear, specific language about what you observed and felt.



Own your part

Take responsibility for your impact, even if someone else also contributed.



Notice when more support is needed

If patterns keep repeating, consider support from a trusted person, therapist, or mediator.



Healthy boundaries and healthy relationships are not about perfection. They are ongoing practices of clarity, responsibility, compassion, and repair.



References & Educational Guidance



This resource is informed by trauma treatment, attachment research, differentiation of self, autonomy, emotion regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness.

1

Key ideas reflected in this resource



Boundaries describe your choices and limits, not how to control another person.



Over-responsibility can develop in trauma and insecure attachment contexts.



Emotional safety, consent, and repair support healthier connection.



Differentiation supports staying connected without losing your sense of self.



Emotion regulation and interpersonal effectiveness skills can support boundary setting.

2

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