THE PRACTICE PACKS / PK08

Boundaries: clear, respectful choices

Know your limit. Choose your words.

Separate a personal limit from a request, then practice language that fits your situation. A fictional example and optional experiment help you review what is workable without judging yourself by someone else's response.

Adults and caregivers | 7 original resources

A sequence you can adapt

Explore an explanation or fictional example. Choose an activity, rehearse, try an optional practice, and review what helped. Use the facilitator guide to adapt the sequence; every page is optional.

Inside this pack

1. A Limit, a Request, and a Choice
2. The Extra Shift: A Boundary Example
3. What Am I Available For?
4. Rehearse a No, a Delay, or a Smaller Offer
5. A Small Boundary Experiment
6. Review the Boundary, Not Your Worth
7. Facilitator Notes: Boundaries in Context

Choose with care

Assess power, dependency, employment pressures, disability, and possible retaliation before encouraging a direct statement. A private plan, delayed response, or specialist support may be more appropriate than confrontation. Do not prescribe eye contact or a single culturally preferred communication style.

Standard fillable edition

Type into response areas and save a separate copy in a PDF reader that supports forms.

Original educational material. Not a validated assessment or treatment protocol.

Boundaries: clear, respectful choices | Understand

A Limit, a Request, and a Choice

Adults and caregivers | 5 to 8 minutes | Handout

Distinguish what you can ask for from what you can choose to do.

A boundary can help you clarify what you are available for and what you need to protect. It does not give you control over another person's feelings or decisions.

How to use this page

Read the three distinctions. Think of an ordinary situation involving time, energy, space, or information. You may keep the situation private.

Your limit

A limit describes your availability or a condition you need, such as time to rest before another task. It may be temporary or depend on the situation. You can care about someone and still have a limit. You do not need to prove that your exhaustion is severe enough.

Your request

A request asks another person for an action. They may agree, decline, or offer an alternative. Clear wording can help them understand you, but it cannot guarantee a respectful response. A request is different from threatening punishment to force agreement.

Your next choice

Consider an action within your control if the situation continues, such as ending a call or asking for help. Real choices can be constrained by money, work, caregiving, or safety. If stating a limit could lead to retaliation, seek private support and consider safer options before speaking.

1. One situation where I want to clarify my availability or ask for a change

Original educational material. Not a validated assessment or treatment protocol.

PK08-01 | continued

Facilitator notes and adaptation

Do not imply that people cause mistreatment by having weak boundaries. Validate constraints and safety needs. Assertive communication is an option, not a moral obligation.

About this resource

AI-assisted original draft for More Than Therapy. Version 1.0. Source and editorial checks: 27 October 2026. Independent clinical review pending; no human clinical reviewer is recorded. The references below inform concepts and do not validate or endorse this original page.

Conceptual references

PB06 | Centre for Clinical Interventions, Government of Western Australia | Assertiveness: Improving Assertiveness Self-Help Resources

https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Assertiveness

PB07 | Department of Health, Government of Western Australia | Assertive Communication

https://www.health.wa.gov.au/sitecore/content/Healthy-WA/Articles/A_E/Assertive-communication

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Boundaries: clear, respectful choices | Example

The Extra Shift: A Boundary Example

Adults and caregivers | 5 to 8 minutes | Handout

Follow a fictional person from an automatic yes to a realistic, limited offer.

This fictional example concerns Sam, who helps an older relative and also works part time. It is not a client story. Sam's relative can disagree without threatening or punishing Sam.

How to use this page

Read the sequence and notice the difference between caring, available capacity, and a specific offer. Your situation may require a different choice.

The familiar pattern

A relative asked Sam to take over another afternoon of errands. Sam almost agreed immediately, then noticed that doing so would cancel a needed appointment. Sam wanted to help but did not have the capacity for the whole request.

A pause and a clear answer

Sam said, "Let me check my week and get back to you tonight." After checking, Sam replied, "I cannot do Thursday afternoon. I can order the groceries on Wednesday, if that helps." The relative was disappointed. Sam acknowledged that feeling without offering the unavailable afternoon.

What stayed difficult

The remaining errands still needed a solution. Sam asked whether they could review other supports together next week. That did not remove every pressure. The useful change was making an honest offer and protecting an existing commitment. Sam planned to review whether the smaller offer was sustainable rather than making it permanent automatically.

1. What was within Sam's control, and what remained outside it?

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PK08-02 | continued

Facilitator notes and adaptation

Caregiving choices are affected by real service shortages and obligations. A short script alone cannot resolve those conditions. Consider formal support, accommodations, or consultation when relevant.

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Boundaries: clear, respectful choices | Explore

What Am I Available For?

Adults and caregivers | 8 to 10 minutes | Worksheet

Translate a vague sense of overload into a specific limit and possible response.

Choose one request or expectation that has felt difficult. You may use a made-up example if your own situation is too charged. This page is for preparation; sending or saying anything is optional.

How to use this page

Write, draw, or talk through the three areas. Keep attention on your available capacity and the circumstances that shape your choices.

Name the actual demand

Describe what you are being asked to do, how often, and what it would require. Include less visible work such as arranging appointments, remembering details, travel, or recovery time. Naming the work can reveal why an apparently small request feels large.

Separate preference from capacity

Consider what you want, what you can realistically offer, and what is not currently possible. A partial offer is optional, not the price of saying no. Notice any contractual, legal, caregiving, or practical obligations that need professional clarification rather than a quick script.

Choose a workable response

You might ask for time, state a limit, make a request, seek support, or postpone the conversation. Choose wording and a communication method that fit your culture, access needs, and safety. Another person's disappointment does not automatically mean your choice was wrong.

1. The request, its hidden demands, and what matters to me

Original educational material. Not a validated assessment or treatment protocol.

PK08-03 | continued

2. What I can offer, cannot offer, or need to clarify

3. My possible response, and the support or timing it needs

Facilitator notes and adaptation

Address coercion or threats separately. Do not urge a person to test a boundary with someone who may retaliate. Explore structural supports as well as language.

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Boundaries: clear, respectful choices | Rehearse

Rehearse a No, a Delay, or a Smaller Offer

Adults and caregivers | 8 to 15 minutes | Clinician script

Practice one clear response and a respectful repeat without overexplaining.

Practice with a trusted person, facilitator, or an imaginary listener. Choose a low-stakes request. The listener's role is to help you test words, not to pressure you until you give in.

How to use this page

Agree on one practice response. You can read from the page, use a communication aid, or stop at any time. Direct eye contact is not required.

Choose your response

Try language that sounds like you. A no might be, "I am not available for that." A delay might be, "I need to check before I answer." A smaller offer might be, "I can help with the first part, but not the whole task." Add context only if you want to.

Try one ordinary follow-up

The listener asks a mild question such as, "Could you reconsider?" Repeat the essential point or state when you will decide. You do not need to invent more reasons. Keep the rehearsal brief; do not simulate threats, harassment, or abuse.

Notice the fit

Check whether your words conveyed the choice you intended. Was the pace comfortable? Would writing be easier? Adjust one detail and try again if useful. Finish by naming how you would leave or seek support if a real interaction became unsafe.

1. The wording and communication method I want to keep or adjust

Original educational material. Not a validated assessment or treatment protocol.

PK08-04 | continued

Facilitator notes and adaptation

Use graded rehearsal only with consent and appropriate clinical judgment. Do not treat distress as evidence that the person must persist with confrontation.

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Boundaries: clear, respectful choices | Practice

A Small Boundary Experiment

Adults and caregivers | 5 to 10 minutes | Worksheet

Try one optional change in availability and plan how to notice its effects.

Choose an everyday situation where a small change feels safe enough to test. You may practice privately rather than communicate with another person. The task should fit your circumstances, not create another obligation.

How to use this page

Decide on one action, a time window, and a way to review it. You can change your mind if the situation becomes less workable.

Make the experiment small

Examples include waiting until a planned time to answer a nonurgent message, checking your calendar before agreeing, or asking whether a task can be shared. Choose an action that respects real responsibilities and does not rely on someone else behaving perfectly.

Prepare for the feeling

You might notice relief, guilt, uncertainty, or nothing in particular. You do not have to remove the feeling before deciding what is workable. Identify a supportive reminder or person who can help you think without insisting on a particular answer.

Set a review point

Afterward, note what the change protected and what it cost. If it created a safety concern or practical problem, pause and seek support. The aim is to learn about fit and capacity, not to prove that you can tolerate any reaction.

1. My optional experiment and the situation in which I will try it

Original educational material. Not a validated assessment or treatment protocol.

PK08-05 | continued

2. Support I may need, and a reason to pause or change the plan

3. When I will review what happened

Facilitator notes and adaptation

Check whether delayed responses could affect essential care or agreed duties. Encourage realistic alternatives and professional consultation when responsibilities are unclear.

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Boundaries: clear, respectful choices | Review

Review the Boundary, Not Your Worth

Adults and caregivers | 5 to 10 minutes | Worksheet

Evaluate a boundary attempt by clarity, safety, and fit rather than approval.

Use this page after trying a response, preparing one, or deciding not to act. You can learn from any of those choices. Someone else's reaction is information, not a complete verdict on you.

How to use this page

Recall one specific moment. Keep the review brief and avoid replaying an upsetting exchange in detail. If you need support first, leave the page for later.

What did you choose?

Name the action you took or the decision you postponed. Did it communicate your availability, protect something important, or reveal a need for help? If the words came out differently than planned, describe the difference without calling yourself weak or selfish.

What did the situation show?

Consider both your internal experience and the external conditions. Were the words understandable? Was the timing workable? Was the other person able to respect choice? Do not respond to threats or coercion by assuming you only need a better script.

What would make the next choice easier?

You may keep the limit, change the wording, ask for support, or decide direct communication is unsuitable. If there was no attempt, identify one obstacle such as uncertainty, dependence, access, or safety. Choose a next step that addresses that actual obstacle.

1. What I chose, and what it protected or revealed

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PK08-06 | continued

2. What felt workable or difficult, including the other person's response

3. What I want to keep, change, or get support with

Facilitator notes and adaptation

This is not a measure of assertiveness or resilience. Validate survival strategies and avoid interpreting compliance under pressure as consent.

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Boundaries: clear, respectful choices | Facilitate

Facilitator Notes: Boundaries in Context

Mental health professionals | 10 to 20 minutes | Session guide

Support a person's choice while attending to power, culture, and practical constraints.

Boundary work can become unhelpful when it assumes that everyone can safely say no. Use this guide to choose a relevant activity and check the conditions surrounding it.

How to use this page

Prepare one exploration or rehearsal with the person's consent. The time estimate covers this planning task, not assessment of every legal, relational, or safety issue.

Understand the stakes

Ask what the person wants to protect and what could happen if they speak. Consider financial dependency, employment, caregiving, discrimination, disability, immigration concerns, and coercion. If retaliation is possible, prioritize private support and appropriate specialist planning over direct rehearsal.

Offer more than one communication route

A spoken statement is one option. Writing, using an advocate, requesting time, or making a private plan may fit better. Ask what respect and directness mean in the person's context. Do not prescribe eye contact, volume, or posture as proof of confidence.

Review without grading

Invite the person to judge whether the activity increased clarity or created pressure. If practice did not happen, examine fit and barriers. Distinguish a negotiable request, a personal limit, and an obligation requiring clarification. Use supervision or specialist consultation when the issue exceeds your competence or role.

1. Context, communication options, and consultation needs to address through approved clinical processes

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PK08-07 | continued

Facilitator notes and adaptation

A person is not responsible for preventing another person's abuse through better communication. Keep real clinical information in approved records; these pages do not provide legal advice or establish safety.

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PB07 | Department of Health, Government of Western Australia | Assertive Communication

https://www.health.wa.gov.au/sitecore/content/Healthy-WA/Articles/A_E/Assertive-communication

PB02 | National Domestic Violence Hotline | Should I Go To Couples Therapy With My Abusive Partner?

https://www.thehotline.org/resources/should-i-go-to-couples-therapy-with-my-abusive-partner/

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