RELATIONSHIPS, BOUNDARIES & AUTONOMY

The Boundary Experiment

About 10-15 minutes to prepare and reflect

This workbook offers a gentle introduction to the practice for you to explore on your own; deeper work is best undertaken with the support of a professional counsellor.

Make room for your own response

A boundary gives practical expression to what you are willing or able to do. This exercise invites you to notice your preference and consider how you might communicate it in one ordinary situation.

Choose something small: asking for time to reply to an invitation, suggesting a different meeting time, or saying how long you can stay.

1. Choose a manageable situation

Think of a situation where a small preference or limit would matter to you. Choose someone with whom it feels safe enough to express a difference. You can work with an imagined everyday example instead.

If expressing a limit could put you at risk of threats, punishment or harm, leave that situation out of this exercise and seek appropriate support. Another person's harmful behaviour is not your fault.

2. Notice what is yours

Ask: "What would I prefer here?" Then consider what is possible alongside any commitments you need to honour. Notice thoughts or feelings that arise without making them the test of whether your preference matters.

3. Find words you could use

Write a short sentence that describes your response. For example: "I would like some time to think. I will reply tomorrow." Or: "I can stay until seven." Make it sound like something you would actually say.

4. Rehearse, or try it

Read your sentence silently or say it aloud on your own. Notice how it feels. You can change the wording or stop at rehearsal. If you choose to try it with the other person, keep to the small situation you selected.

5. Look back

What happened, either in rehearsal or in the conversation? Separate what you observed from what you guessed the other person might think. Their agreement is not the measure of whether your preference deserves consideration.

You can pause or stop at any point. This exercise does not ask you to confront someone or persuade them to agree.

THE BOUNDARY EXPERIMENT

Prepare and reflect

The small situation I have chosen, and what I would prefer:

The words I could use:

What I noticed during rehearsal or afterwards:

If the response is different from what you hoped

Take time before deciding what comes next. You may want to clarify your words, reconsider what you can offer, or seek support. You do not have to solve the whole relationship in this experiment.

A limit concerns your own availability or actions. It cannot guarantee how another person will feel or behave.

THE BOUNDARY EXPERIMENT

Returning to the practice

Over four weeks

Use the pace in your Development Map plan if this practice has been recommended. Rehearsal can remain your experiment throughout; a real conversation is optional.

Week 1 | Notice your preference

Choose one everyday situation. Give yourself time to recognise what you would like, alongside the practical circumstances. You do not need to act yet.

Week 2 | Find your words

Write or rehearse a response. Does it express what you mean? Adjust any wording that feels unlike you, overly apologetic or unnecessarily forceful.

Week 3 | Choose a small experiment

Repeat the rehearsal or try the response in a manageable situation. Notice what you can learn from the experience, including whether you need a different approach or more support.

Week 4 | Consider what you learned

What helped you stay in touch with your preference? What was difficult? You may wish to repeat the same small experiment, change it or leave it aside.

What would make a next attempt manageable?

This practice supports self-reflection. It is not a treatment or a substitute for professional support.

Work with me

If this workbook has opened up something you would like to explore further, you are welcome to get in touch. I offer psychotherapy and counselling in Dalston, East London, and online. We can use an initial session to consider what brings you to therapy and whether working together feels right for you.

BOOK AN INITIAL SESSION	CONTACT ME