

My Boundaries My Voice Individual Workbook

A gentle way to use this resource

Begin anywhere. Read one section at a time, choose only what fits, and skip, adapt, pause, or stop as needed. Try one practice before adding another. Reflection is an invitation, not a requirement.

Created by Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | My Reflective Collective

Educational wellness material. Not therapy, diagnosis, medical advice, crisis care, or a substitute for individualized professional support.



Before you begin

Take a moment to notice where you are starting. There is no correct answer and no requirement to complete every prompt.

What is most present?	What would feel supportive?
[ ] Tension or restlessness [ ] Heavy emotion [ ] Numbness or shutdown [ ] Racing thoughts [ ] Low energy [ ] Something else: _____	[ ] More steadiness [ ] More clarity [ ] Comfort or rest [ ] A practical next step [ ] Connection or support [ ] Something else: _____

A simple rhythm

1. Notice	Name what is happening without judging it.
2. Choose	Select one prompt or practice that fits your energy and circumstances.
3. Try	Use it gently for a clear amount of time. Smaller still counts.
4. Check	Notice whether you feel even slightly steadier, clearer, safer, or less alone.

Low-energy option

Read only the headings. Circle or note one sentence that feels useful. Then choose one action that takes five minutes or less. You can return later; stopping is allowed.

A supportive worksheet for clarifying needs, language, consent, repair, and respectful limits.

Use this at your own pace. Skip, adapt, pause, or stop. You are allowed to choose what fits your body, culture, privacy, energy, safety, access needs, and real-life limits today.

A printable reflection and practice resource

MY BOUNDARIES, MY VOICE

A Trauma-Informed Workbook for Needs, Consent, Self-Trust & Respectful Limits A compassionate Boundaries are not walls, punishments, proof that you do not care, or a way to aim control another person. They are ways of honoring safety, dignity, capacity, consent, values, and the conditions under which connection can remain healthy.

This workbook supports people who freeze, overexplain, avoid conflict, feel guilty saying no, fear disappointing others, or struggle to recognize what they need until resentment or exhaustion appears.

NOTICE - NAME - COMMUNICATE - FOLLOW THROUGH

MyReflectiveCollective.com

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

PART FOUNDATION

Boundaries Without Shame

Many people learned that safety or belonging depended on being agreeable, useful, quiet, easy, responsible, or highly aware of other people's feelings.

TRAUMA-INFORME Difficulty setting boundaries may reflect protection, attachment needs, cultural or D VIEW family expectations, disability or dependence, previous punishment, discrimination, or real power differences. The question is not "Why am I weak?" but "What has made this difficult, and what support increases choice?"

Core permissions

-] I may have needs. [ ] I may take time to answer.
-] I may say no without proving harm. [ ] I may change consent.
-] I may protect privacy. [ ] I may disappoint someone.
-] I may ask for accommodation. [ ] I may choose safety over explanation.

I learned that saying no meant:

The consequence I fear now is:

What I want boundaries to make possible:

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE FOR SELF-REFLECTION

Choice first: You may write, draw, sit quietly, skip this prompt, or return later. You do not need to force insight or disclosure.

1. Orient: If comfortable, notice the room, the support beneath you, and one

neutral or pleasant detail. Let your breathing be natural.

2. Notice: What happens in my body when I imagine saying no or asking for

change?

3. Respond with care: Try: "My fear makes sense, and I deserve choices."

4. Choose: Choose whether to continue, pause, write privately, or seek support.

Remember: Growth can include resting, grieving, asking for help, changing direction, and recognizing what you have already survived.

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

PART 1

What a Boundary Is - and Is Not

Clarity reduces the pressure to make every limit sound perfect.

BOUNDARY A statement of your limit and the action you will take: "If yelling begins, I will end the conversation and revisit it later." REQUEST An invitation another person may accept, decline, or negotiate: "Would you lower your voice?" RULE OR A mutually discussed expectation: "We agree not to share private information."

AGREEMENT

CONTROL An attempt to force another person's choices: "You are not allowed to speak to

anyone I dislike."

Clarity practice

A request I want to make:

A boundary within my control:

A shared agreement I may want to discuss:

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE FOR SELF-REFLECTION

2. Notice: Am I naming what I will do, or trying to guarantee another person's

behavior?

3. Respond with care: Say: "I can communicate clearly without controlling the

outcome."

4. Choose: Rewrite one limit using an action you can realistically take.

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

PART 2

My Boundary Signals

Boundaries often become visible first through body sensations, emotions, resentment, avoidance, or exhaustion.

Signals I may notice

-] Tight chest or jaw [ ] Dread

-] Irritability [ ] Resentment

-] Numbness [ ] Overexplaining

-] Avoiding messages [ ] Feeling trapped

-] Sudden exhaustion [ ] Wanting to escape

-] Agreeing too quickly [ ] Rumination afterward

A situation where my body signals "too much" or "not okay":

What I usually do next:

What the signal may be protecting:

What would help me notice earlier:

SIGNALS ARE A body signal is not always a final answer, but it deserves attention. Pause, gather INFORMATION context, assess safety, and decide what fits your values and circumstances.

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE FOR SELF-REFLECTION

2. Notice: What sensation, feeling, or pattern have I been overriding?

3. Respond with care: Try: "I can listen without forcing myself to act before I am

ready."

4. Choose: Name the earliest signal you want to treat as permission to pause.

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

PART 3

Needs, Preferences, Limits & Non-Negotiables

Not every preference requires a firm boundary, and not every boundary is negotiable.

Sort what is present

-] Preference - I would like this. [ ] Request - I am asking for this.

-] Flexible limit - context matters. [ ] Firm limit - I will not participate.

-] Safety boundary - protection is required. [ ] Access need - participation depends on support.

A preference I can express:

A request I can make:

A flexible limit and what affects it:

A firm or safety-related limit:

An accommodation or access need:

What matters underneath

-] Safety [ ] Respect
-] Rest [ ] Privacy
-] Choice [ ] Fairness
-] Health [ ] Belonging
-] Autonomy [ ] Predictability
-] Dignity [ ] Connection

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE FOR SELF-REFLECTION

2. Notice: Which need am I tempted to minimize because someone else may not understand it?

3. Respond with care: Say: "A need can be real even when another person has a different need."

4. Choose: Identify whether you need a request, boundary, accommodation, or safety plan.

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

PART 4

Consent Is Ongoing & Contextual

Consent should be informed, freely given, specific, reversible, and possible to decline without punishment.

Consent applies to

-] Touch and sexual activity [ ] Emotional disclosure
-] Photos and posting [ ] Money and property
-] Time and availability [ ] Medical information
-] Location sharing [ ] Passwords/devices
-] Helping or caregiving [ ] Physical space
-] Jokes and teasing [ ] Sharing someone's story

It is easier for me to recognize yes when:

My unsure, not-yet, or no may look like:

What makes it difficult to withdraw consent:

How I want others to check in:

IMPORTANT Silence, freezing, compliance under pressure, past consent, a relationship, marriage, gifts, or money do not automatically equal present consent. A person can change their mind.

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE FOR SELF-REFLECTION

2. Notice: Do I feel free to choose, or am I responding to fear, pressure, guilt,

dependence, or urgency?

3. Respond with care: Offer: "I am allowed to pause and check what is true for

me."

4. Choose: Use "I need time," "not yet," or "no" where safe; seek support if

refusal may bring retaliation.

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

PART 5

Finding My Voice

Your voice can be quiet, written, delayed, supported, direct, gentle, or brief. Assertiveness is not a personality type.

Communication options

-] Speak in person [ ] Write a message
-] Bring notes [ ] Use an advocate
-] Practice first [ ] Ask for a scheduled talk
-] Use fewer words [ ] Repeat the same sentence
-] Leave if unsafe [ ] Request interpretation/AAC BASIC SCRIPT "When ___ happens, I feel/notice ___. I need/value ___. I am asking ___. If that cannot happen, I will ___."

The boundary I want to express:

My shortest clear version:

A warmer version that is still clear:

A written version:

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE FOR SELF-REFLECTION

2. Notice: What am I trying to prevent by overexplaining?

3. Respond with care: Try: "Clarity does not require a courtroom case."

4. Choose: Choose the communication method, timing, and amount of detail that

best protect access and safety.

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

PART 6

Guilt, Anxiety & Disappointing Others

Feeling guilty does not always mean you have done something wrong. It may mean you are doing something unfamiliar.

What may show up _____
_____

-] Fear of rejection [ ] Fear of anger

-] Responsibility for feelings [ ] Shame

-] Second-guessing [ ] Urge to undo the boundary

-] Compulsive apologizing [ ] Catastrophic thinking

-] Grief [ ] Relief

The guilt says:

What is actually my responsibility:

What belongs to the other person:

A compassionate truth I need:

DISCERNMENT Ask: Did I act against my values, or did someone simply dislike my limit? If repair is needed, repair the behavior - not the existence of your boundary.

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE FOR SELF-REFLECTION

2. Notice: Can I allow another person's disappointment without rushing to erase

it?

3. Respond with care: Say: "Their feeling matters, and I do not have to abandon

myself to change it."

4. Choose: Wait a planned amount of time before retracting a boundary solely to

reduce guilt.

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

PART 7

People-Pleasing, Fawning &

Over-Responsibility

Appeasing can be an intelligent survival response. It may create short-term safety while making authentic consent and needs harder to access.

I tend to say yes when:

What I hope the yes will prevent:

What the yes costs me later:

How resentment or exhaustion appears:

Pause phrases

-] "Let me think about it." [ ] "I need to check my capacity."
-] "I cannot answer right now." [ ] "That does not work for me."
-] "I can offer ___, not ___." [ ] "I am going to pass." NEW GOAL The goal is not to become less caring. It is to make care more chosen, honest, sustainable, and mutual.

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE FOR SELF-REFLECTION

2. Notice: If I did not have to earn safety through usefulness, what answer might

be true?

3. Respond with care: Thank the appeasing response for trying to protect you;

then check present-day options.

4. Choose: Practice delaying one non-urgent answer instead of forcing an

immediate yes or no.

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

PART 8

Boundaries in Close Relationships

Closeness does not eliminate individuality, privacy, consent, friendships, rest, or the right to disagree.

Areas to discuss

-] Alone time [ ] Communication frequency
-] Conflict breaks [ ] Touch/intimacy
-] Phones/privacy [ ] Money
-] Friends/family [ ] Social media
-] Home responsibilities [ ] Caregiving
-] Emotional labor [ ] Shared decisions

A relationship boundary that supports connection:

A limit I fear will be interpreted as rejection:

How I can communicate care and the limit together:

What reciprocity would look like:

CONNECTION + "I care about us, and I am not able to continue while we are insulting each other. I will LIMIT take 30 minutes and return at 7:00."

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE FOR SELF-REFLECTION

2. Notice: Am I protecting healthy separateness, avoiding intimacy, or

responding to an unsafe dynamic?

3. Respond with care: Try: "A healthy relationship can hold both closeness and

individuality."

4. Choose: Name one boundary that could make connection safer or more

genuine.

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

PART 9

Family, Culture & Community

Boundaries exist within real systems. Family loyalty, faith, collectivism, caregiving, immigration, racism, gender expectations, and community survival may shape what feels possible.

A family or cultural value I want to honor:

A role or expectation that weighs on me:

What I fear my boundary may mean to others:

A culturally respectful form my boundary could take:

Who may understand or support this change:

CULTURAL There is no single "healthy" tone, amount of independence, or family structure. The HUMILITY focus is informed choice, dignity, safety, sustainability, and reduced harm - not imposing individualism.

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE FOR SELF-REFLECTION

2. Notice: Which parts of this conflict are personal, relational, cultural, or

connected to power?

3. Respond with care: Say: "I can honor where I come from and still consider

what I need now."

4. Choose: Seek language, timing, or community support that fits your context.

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

PART 10

Work, Caregiving & Digital Boundaries

Availability can expand until every request feels urgent. Clear limits help protect capacity and reduce invisible resentment.

Areas to review

-] Work hours [ ] Email/text response time

-] After-hours contact [ ] Caregiving tasks

-] Emergency definition [ ] Location sharing

-] Passwords [ ] Posting photos

-] Borrowing money/items [ ] Transportation favors

-] Emotional venting [ ] Repeated crisis support

A demand that currently exceeds my capacity:

What I can realistically offer:

What I cannot continue offering:

A resource, referral, or alternative:

CARE WITH LIMITS "I care about what you are facing. I cannot be available throughout the night. I can talk for 20 minutes now and help you identify another support."

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE FOR SELF-REFLECTION

2. Notice: Am I the right person, the only person, or simply the person who has

not said no?

3. Respond with care: Offer: "Caring does not require unlimited access to me."

4. Choose: Choose a response-time, availability, or caregiving boundary to test.

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

PART 11

Pushback, Negotiation & Broken Boundaries

A boundary does not become invalid because someone argues, misunderstands, bargains, or dislikes it.

Possible responses

-] Questions [ ] Disappointment

-] Negotiation [ ] Guilt-tripping

-] Mocking [ ] Repeated testing

-] Silent treatment [ ] Threats

-] Retaliation [ ] Respect and adjustment

Pushback I expect:

What I am willing to negotiate:

What is not negotiable:

My repeat phrase:

The consequence or protective action I can take:

BROKEN-RECORD "I understand you disagree. My answer remains no." "I have shared what I can offer." PRACTICE "I will end this conversation if the insults continue."

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE FOR SELF-REFLECTION

2. Notice: Is this ordinary disappointment, persistent manipulation, or a safety

risk?

3. Respond with care: Say: "I can stop explaining when the conversation is no

longer respectful or productive."

4. Choose: Decide whether to repeat, negotiate, disengage, document, seek

support, or safety-plan.

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

PART 12

Safety, Power & Coercive Control

Boundaries work differently when another person uses fear, dependence, surveillance, threats, isolation, or violence to control choices.

Warning signs

-] Fear of saying no [ ] Monitoring devices/location

-] Financial control [ ] Threats or intimidation

-] Employment sabotage [ ] Isolation

-] Sexual coercion [ ] Property destruction

-] Threats involving children/pets [ ] Stalking

-] Retaliation after limits [ ] Blocking access to help SAFETY FIRST Direct confrontation or announcing plans may increase danger in some situations.

Trust your knowledge of the person and context. Consider confidential, individualized support from a qualified domestic-violence, sexual-assault, stalking, legal, housing, or advocacy resource.

A safer way to access support:

A person, place, device, or document I may need:

What information should remain private:

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE FOR SELF-REFLECTION

2. Notice: Do I have enough privacy and safety to complete or keep this page?

3. Respond with care: You may stop, conceal, remove, or avoid documenting

anything that could increase risk.

4. Choose: Choose safety over finishing the exercise. Use emergency services if

there is immediate danger.

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

PART 13

Repair When I Cross a Boundary

Having boundaries includes respecting other people's limits and repairing when your behavior causes harm.

The boundary or consent cue I missed or crossed:

What I did - without minimizing:

The impact I understand:

What accountability requires now:

How I will reduce the chance of repetition:

REPAIR LANGUAGE "I did ___. It was not okay. I understand it may have affected you by ___. You do not owe me reassurance or immediate forgiveness. I will ___ differently."

Accountability includes

-] Stopping the behavior [ ] Respecting distance
-] No excuses [ ] No pressure to forgive
-] Replacing or repairing damage [ ] Learning and changed behavior
-] Professional help if needed [ ] Accepting consequences

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE FOR SELF-REFLECTION

2. Notice: Can I tolerate shame or discomfort without making the harmed person

care for me?

3. Respond with care: Try: "Accountability is a behavior I can practice; self-attack

is not repair."

4. Choose: Choose the specific action that centers safety and changed behavior.

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

PART 14

My Boundary Practice Plan

Build confidence through lower-risk practice before the hardest conversation when possible.

Boundary ladder

Lower-risk boundary to practice:

Moderate boundary:

Higher-risk boundary needing support or planning:

My script:

Where and when:

Support before or after:

Expected feelings:

How I will care for myself afterward:

Success can mean

-] I noticed my need. [ ] I paused before answering.
-] I communicated clearly. [ ] I tolerated discomfort.
-] I followed through. [ ] I learned what support I need.

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE FOR SELF-REFLECTION

2. Notice: Is this practice challenging but safe enough?

3. Respond with care: Say: "Success is honoring my process, not controlling

their response."

4. Choose: Choose one boundary practice and a review date.

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

PART 15

My Voice & Boundaries Agreement

A flexible commitment to self-respect, consent, honest care, and safety.

-] I will notice before overriding myself. [ ] I may take time to answer.

-] I will distinguish requests from boundaries. [ ] I will communicate as clearly as I can.

-] I will respect others' boundaries. [ ] I will repair harm.

-] I will seek support for pushback. [ ] I will prioritize safety when power is unequal.

The truth I want my voice to carry:

A boundary that protects my well-being:

How I will respond to guilt:

Who can support my practice:

What I want healthy connection to feel like:

PERSONAL My needs, limits, consent, identity, and dignity matter. I can care for others without COMMITMENT disappearing. I can be compassionate and clear. I may revise my boundaries as I learn, circumstances change, and safety requires.

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE FOR SELF-REFLECTION

2. Notice: What do I understand about my voice now that I want to remember?

3. Respond with care: Thank the protective parts that helped you survive and the

emerging parts learning new choices.

4. Choose: Choose one small act of honest self-respect and one way to rest.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Educational-wellness disclaimer

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 911. In the United States, call or text 988 for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | MyReflectiveCollective.com

SAFETY, PRIVACY & EDUCATIONAL USE

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE - MICHELLE D. ELDER, MSW, LMHC

If there is immediate danger or a medical emergency: Call 911 in the United States or use your local emergency number. For U.S. suicide or mental-health crisis support, call or text 988. For relationship-safety support, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-7233, text START to 88788, or visit TheHotline.org from a safer device when possible. _____

_____ Privacy and safer searching

If someone may monitor your device, accounts, internet connection, location, downloads, or browser activity, consider using a safer device and a trusted network. Private browsing may reduce locally saved history but does not make activity invisible. Clearing history can also be noticed. A website Quick Exit button changes the page; it cannot erase browser, download, router, account, employer, school, carrier, or device records. Choose only steps that feel safer in your situation.

Do not store identifying or safety-sensitive answers where another person may find them.

Educational scope and professional limits This resource provides general psychoeducation, reflection, and wellness support. It is not therapy, counseling, diagnosis, assessment, treatment, medical advice, legal advice, crisis response, forensic evaluation, or an individualized safety plan.

It does not replace care from a licensed clinician, healthcare professional, attorney, trained advocate, emergency service, or other qualified professional. Laws, court procedures, services, and risks vary by location and circumstance.

Choice, pacing, and inclusion You may skip, change, discuss, dictate, draw, pause, or stop any activity. No exercise can determine what you experienced, diagnose a condition, prove a legal claim, guarantee safety, or tell you whether to stay, leave, report, reconcile, forgive, or pursue court action. Adapt language and activities for culture, identity, disability, neurotype, age, literacy, sensory needs, and personal preference. Automatic translation can make mistakes; confirm legal, medical, emergency, and safety-critical wording with a qualified person.

Copyright and sharing

Created by Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC for My Reflective Collective. Free for personal educational use and supportive discussion. Keep the creator credit and this safety page with the resource when sharing. Do not sell, misrepresent, or present it as individualized clinical or legal advice.

MyReflectiveCollective.com - Pause - Reflect - Learn - Practice

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE - NOT THERAPY OR INDIVIDUALIZED CARE

Immediate danger or medical emergency: call 911 | U.S. crisis support: call or text 988 | Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC

Supportive practices and reminders

Trauma-informed choice

You are in charge of pace, privacy, and participation. Keep your eyes open if that feels safer. Change the words, position, movement, or environment. Skip any prompt that increases distress. You never have to describe a traumatic experience to benefit from grounding or reflection.

A one-minute mindfulness pause

Notice one point of support beneath you. Look around and name three neutral things you see. Notice one sound and one body sensation without trying to change either. Ask, 'What would support me in the next few minutes?' Choose the smallest workable response.

Believable affirmations

Choose language your mind can accept. Try: 'I can take one step at a time.' 'My needs and boundaries matter.' 'I am allowed to pause.' 'I can ask for support.' 'This moment is difficult, and it will not always feel exactly like this.' Edit any statement until it feels honest and respectful.

Practical tips

Pair reflection with water, food, movement, rest, medication as prescribed, or contact with a safe person when needed. Save the most helpful page where it is easy to find. Revisit the resource when you are relatively steady so the choices feel familiar during harder moments.

When more support is appropriate

A worksheet cannot provide emergency care, diagnosis, or individualized treatment. Consider a qualified health or mental-health professional when distress is intense, persistent, worsening, affecting daily functioning, or connected with safety concerns. In immediate danger, contact local emergency services or a crisis service available in your country.

Integrate and choose your next step

Pause after reading. More information is not always more helpful; the goal is to leave with one choice you can actually use.

What stood out?

_____

_____

What is one kind, realistic next step?

_____

_____

What support, boundary, or adaptation would help?

_____

_____

If this did not help

You did not fail. Try making the step smaller, changing from a thinking practice to a body or sensory practice, checking basic needs, or involving a safe person. Strong, persistent, or worsening distress may need professional or crisis support beyond a worksheet.