

## Ep #4: The Why, What, and How of Setting Boundaries



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Nicole Symcox**

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## Ep #4: The Why, What, and How of Setting Boundaries

No is a complete sentence. That's it. Donezo. No. When you learn how to use this in your daily life to protect your emotional and mental energy, it is a game-changer.

Welcome to *Mental Health Remix*, a show for ambitious humans who are ready to feel, think, and be different. If you want to stop struggling with perfectionism, build better relationships, and connect with yourself and your potential, this is the place for you...

Here's your host, educator, coach and licensed psychotherapist, Nicole Symcox...

Hey, hey everyone. Welcome to episode number four. Today we are talking all things boundaries. This is a huge topic and it tends to be a little overwhelming for people. I actually probably spend most of my day talking to people about boundaries because boundaries are something that are applied to yourself in relationship with others.

So there's a lot of moving parts to it and there's a lot of reasons to why they are hard to implement. So for today's episode, I'm going to focus on one aspect of boundaries that you can start thinking about differently and implement in your life by the end of this episode. So let's dive in.

Let's start with this. What the hell is a boundary? The simplest way to describe it is this; they are rules and guidelines for how you want to be treated by others in order to protect your emotional and mental resources, i.e. your energy.

So as we talked about in episode three, you cannot give from an empty bucket. Once you are out of emotional reserves, emotional energy, you are out, and you are going to have to take active steps to fill yourself back up again so you function at your best levels. So boundaries are your key element to self-care and protecting yourself so you can continue to feel

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good every day and avoid burnout from over-responsibility and overextending yourself in areas maybe you shouldn't be.

So why are boundaries so freaking hard? Boundaries are connected to our internal wiring on how we see, feel, and think about relationships. Relationships, my friends. This includes our relationship with ourselves. So if any of that feels unhealthy or unresolved or confusing, boundaries become a really hard thing because they require you to be clear on how you see yourself in relationship to others.

So if you can't see yourself and others clearly or through a healthy lens, boundaries are going to feel challenging at first. Almost like pushing a boulder uphill at first. But my friends, please hear me loud and clear. They are not impossible. Boundaries are very possible and once you learn to implement this stuff, you'll probably never go back to the old ways because it creates so much relief in your life.

So this stuff is all changeable so remember, you're never stuck. You're going to hear me say that throughout many episodes. You are never stuck. You have options and things are changeable. Just because you've done life one way for a long time doesn't mean you have to keep doing it that way. There are always tools and strategies for working through stuff so you can learn and grow and be different in the world.

Okay, so with that, let's move straight into it. So let's talk about that. Setting a boundary requires you learn the word no and accept that you're not Superman or Wonder Woman here to save the planet from destruction. In a way, that can be a relief. People who feel over-responsible for the behavior and outcomes of others tend to put a lot of internal pressure on themselves to be perfect for other people.

To fill in the gaps for others and be everything to everyone, and that's an enormous amount of pressure. And when you are a person who tends to be over-responsible, you tend to have relationships with people who are

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seemingly helpless and don't do things for themselves the way you think they should.

So people who are over-responsible tend to swoop in and be the superhero for others in their lives. So here's the problem with that; when you continuously fill in the gaps for others, you rob them of the learning experience they need to grow and change. If you keep doing everything for them, they become dependent on you and helpless. And my guess, if you have a relationship like that in your life right now, you're probably feeling the full weight of this already.

So because boundaries are connected to so many aspects of yourself, it's really hard to just all of a sudden one day start saying no to things or making no a complete sentence, or developing the ability to discern within yourself what an appropriate boundary even is or what a boundary would be that would honor your emotional world the most.

So I want you to have grace for yourself. I want you to take the pressure off and I would invite you to embrace this idea of learning, of growing, of changing, and that's a process. Boundaries are not an easy thing, so I want you to have grace for yourself if what we talk about today feels really hard. It's okay. It's okay if it feels hard at first because if you keep going at it, it's likely to get easier, especially if you get the support you need in order to implement them in a way that feels good to you.

So many times when we're first implementing boundaries, people tend to feel really bad about it. Guilt and shame are the most common emotions that pop up first. However, anger is another one. So anger, you have to remember, it's not necessarily a bad emotion. There really are no bad emotions and that's probably the most stereotypical therapy thing you'll hear me ever say, but anger is not a bad emotion.

No emotions are really bad. They're just information and energy in the body and we have to learn how to interpret and respond to that appropriately so

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that we can feel better. But when we are angry out of fear, it tends to lead us into places that we don't want to go.

So when we're making decisions, we want to do it from a place of internal strength and alignment. Not a place of defense or powerlessness, which is a lot of times where people start because they're so angry over how they've been treated by someone or something, some situation, and they don't totally know how to implement boundaries yet, and so they kind of go all ham on it.

And that's not the best strategy because when you implement boundaries it's going to require you to be consistent and follow up. So boundaries are not something you want to do impulsively. You want to do it from a place that really feels good to you, and this is why working in therapy can really help you discover what is that boundary that is truly going to honor me and get the results in my life that I want to get.

So again, like I was saying, like many things, this is a practice and it's not something you just learn or you get it overnight, especially if you have a trauma history or you're wrestling with an anxiety disorder. These two things will complicate boundaries. So you again, want to have grace for yourself. You're going to need some strategic support and help to unweave this emotional web you're experiencing so you can make decisions and actually hear your own inner voice and honor it.

So that's the deeper side of things where therapy can be helpful, but let's bring it on back to this podcast episode. So for the sake of this podcast episode, we're going to keep it super simple and straightforward so you can get some preliminary tools in your hands while you work on the deeper stuff with a mental health professional or whoever it is you're working with.

Here we go. The three hot truths about boundaries. Number one, know your why. This is how you get caught in the manipulation web of others who don't have boundaries or don't respect boundaries. If you don't fully understand or are committed to the why of needing a boundary, then you're

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going to get swayed. You're going to get swayed because you're not really strong in your reason, and that's true with anything in life. When we're not clear on our reasons for doing something, we can easily be convinced otherwise.

Don't assume people will just honor your boundaries because you say the words. They won't. People need to see your why in action. Not your words. So for example, an easy illustration of this would be managing your time. So let's say you've evaluated everything you have going on in your life and you've decided a root cause of your stress and overwhelm right now has to do with not getting enough sleep. So this is the example of setting a boundary that we're going to work through in this episode.

As you evaluate how you feel, you come to the conclusion you need a solid eight hours of sleep every night to function at your best, otherwise girl, it's a mess. You're spacy, you're grouchy, low energy, and you just don't feel good. So you notice that this lack of sleep is truly getting in the way of how you interact with people in your life and your ability to get stuff done during the day because you're so darn tired.

And because you're so tired, you're having difficulty focusing and concentrating on tasks and getting them done to completion, and it's causing a significant amount of distress for you because you're also doing a lot for other people. You're also filling in the gaps for a lot of other people.

So I paint this picture with so much detail because your why has to matter to you. If you have this many reasons why sleep is important to you, you're probably going to be willing to fight for it. So you need to be really clear, not just on your why but all the reasons that support your why, and I just listed a lot of things to make a compelling case for why you need eight hours of sleep because it's hurting your life in one area.

And in order to protect that, you're going to have to set a boundary because people aren't just going to automatically intuitively be like, oh, how can I help you set a boundary? Rarely are you going to find that in your life.

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I mean, there are healthy people that would say that but most people aren't going to offer that as a solution.

So you need to learn how to do this for yourself. So a person without boundaries, using the example we just talked about, would just continue doing life as is and "suck it up." You tell yourself the story that this situation isn't changeable and that you're stuck in a cycle of no sleep.

So I want to call this out real quick because if this is some of your thought process and I say this with love, that's a victim mentality. It's not a good color on you. And it's also not going to produce fruit in your life. So thinking that poor me, I'm stuck in this situation isn't going to make you feel good. Even the way I said that, it brings on a negative emotion with it.

So we need to change the story that we tell ourselves so that we can feel better, and that is actually a tip for a future episode when we talk about changing our thoughts and how that impacts our emotions. So that's a little sneak peek into that, into an upcoming episode.

So let's go back to that statement that we're working. So a person without boundaries would just continue doing life as is and suck it up. You would tell yourself the story that the situation isn't changeable and you're stuck in a cycle of no sleep.

So here's the problem with thinking that way; you always have choices and options, but if you think like that, your brain won't search for any of them. It will deem the situation a "closed case." Close the file and continue in survival mode since that's the path that you've chosen. The brain will always accommodate your decisions, so it may not be an enjoyable process, so that's why we want to be intentional and conscientious of what we're telling ourselves so that the brain can get on board and help us out.

So in other words, you have to try something different so the brain can find a solution that will help you get enough sleep and feel better, since we're using that as our example. So here we go. Maybe a feasible solution for

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you is putting a hard boundary around bedtime for yourself. Because you're so worn out and exhausted, that is your why. I am putting up a boundary because I need sleep to function at my best. End of story. Literally a period after that.

That is a good enough reason to put up a boundary no matter what a boundary-crosser tells you. So I emphasize on the period because a lot of times when people are putting boundaries, they tell me paragraphs and paragraphs of the reasons why and the truth is your reason is good enough. End of story. You need sleep so you can function best. Great. That's a good decision for yourself. I support it.

So let's move into the second part of this. The what. So the what or the boundary you come up is this; I do not take calls or engage in any activities after 10pm. I start my wind down process at 9pm, drink tea, I read a book, I watch a show, but I do not engage with an activity or a person that will activate me before bed. My bedtime is precious, my sleep is essential, and I am going to protect it with everything I have.

So do you hear that? We just went through your why. Why do you need the boundary, and then what, what the boundary actually is, which is I do not take calls after 10pm. So we've got parts one and two. Let's bring it on home. Let's take it on to number three, and this is the tricky part. This is where people fall apart because usually, the why and the what are pretty simple for people to figure out.

But now we come into the how. How to implement this stuff is where people get squirrely. So most people get past the why and the what logically, but then when we get to the how, it activates all of our emotions and that's when things get confusing.

This is where you're going to get tripped up by all kinds of internal and external messaging. They usually come in the form of a but. But what if this happens? But what if I miss out? But what if that person really needs me?

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Or what if I don't sleep? Like, oh my goodness, what if I'm being selfish? And on and on and on it goes.

And if you have a boundary-pusher in your life that wants you to be available after 10pm, they will play right off all of your own internal insecurity and they're going to magnify it and that my friends is how you get hooked and guilted into not implementing your boundary.

And let me add a word of caution here. Every time you let someone sway your boundary, you teach them how to treat you. You teach them your boundaries don't matter and they're negotiable because the evidence you have given that person to support that idea is this; all I have to do to make you cave is guilt and shame you and all of a sudden that boundary is gone. We're chatting on the phone until 11 o'clock at night or until I feel like I've gotten my needs met and I'm finished talking to you.

And that is just not a good way, like why have a boundary if it's going to be pushed? We never want to implement boundaries if they're just going to be pushed to the side and negotiated with because it defeats the purpose of a boundary. Boundaries are used to teach people how to treat us and when we negotiate with those boundaries, we're teaching them we're negotiable.

It's really that simple. It's the same idea with parenting. When you think about little kids, little kids learn by action. Not so much by words because they don't have all of that brain development yet, so they learn by actions. So if your actions say this boundary stays no matter what, kids learn you're serious and it's true with adults as well.

If you stick to your boundary, you teach people that you're serious and they should believe you. But if you cave, you teach people what comes out of your mouth is negotiable and they will treat you as such. So this is why you have to be super, super clear on your why. Your why has to be important enough that you will fight for it because in this moment, when you're ready to give up your boundary and negotiate, you have to go back to your why

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and dig in your heels and say to yourself no, this is important, and this is why, and I'm not negotiating on it.

I will not be available after 10pm. I've decided with a great amount of thoughtfulness that this is what I need to do to feel healthy and well in my body and in my mind. I need sleep. I am not 911. I am not a crisis hotline. I am not a human who is available 24/7. I am a human being and I have basic needs such as sleep that are critical to my health and wellbeing. If you need me, I am happy to be available to you the next day after a full night's rest. I'll be able to respond better and feel better at the same time.

So how I said that was a way for you to narrate this in your head when you are thinking through this. And then end of transaction. Like literally, that's the end of it. Your no is a complete sentence. In fact, that's where I'm going to end teaching on this because I want to demonstrate to you it's enough. That's it. End of it.

So our no means no and this is why. A person can like it or dislike it or have whatever emotional response they want to have but it's really not your concern. You're offering a reasonable alternative in the form of I'll speak to you tomorrow when I'm rested, and protecting your emotional and mental energy in the process. So the transaction is complete. Good night. Literally.

So I know this bedtime example doesn't work for everyone but it's a great example of the what, why, and how of boundaries. So even if bedtime boundaries isn't your thing, find out what your thing is. And try out this thinking process that we just went through in this episode to try to apply that in your life. And if you notice that it's hard, take that as a sign that maybe you need some additional support sorting this out in a safe place.

So in other words, what I want you to get from today's episode is I'm trying to teach you how to think differently about boundaries so you can make educated decisions based on your own life and what you need to do to support yourself. So again, this is about how you think. You get to fill in the

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blanks on what a boundary might look like for you using the example we worked through.

Boundaries is a huge topic. I mean, I teach a whole course on it so I mean, there's a lot here. So again, have grace for yourself. I'll talk about other aspects of it in future episodes, but I hope you found walking through this one aspect of boundaries helpful to your journey in figuring out what works for you.

And as always, I want to do a little disclaimer here as a way to empower your sense of wellbeing. If you notice things come up for you when you're listening to this podcast such as strong emotions, feeling triggered, or feeling stuck, I highly recommend you seek support from a mental health professional in your local state of residence. You have to remember, triggers and emotional responses are just information that something in your emotional world needs support and there is absolutely no shame in seeking out mental health support from a licensed therapist, doctor, or professional in your local state of residence.

Lastly, if you enjoyed today's show and you don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can subscribe on Apple podcasts or wherever you listen to your podcasts, and if you haven't already, I would really appreciate if you could leave a rating and a review to let me know what you think and help others find this podcast.

You can visit my website at [nicolesymcox.com/podcastlaunch](https://nicolesymcox.com/podcastlaunch) for step-by-step instructions on how to subscribe, rate, and review. Alright my friends, I will see you next time.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Mental Health Remix. If you like what you've heard and want to learn more, go to [nicolesymcox.com](https://nicolesymcox.com).

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