

## Ep #48: Setting Boundaries at Home



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Nicole Symcox**

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And so, when you take a step back to calm your nervous system down and really pull apart what's going on, that's what empowers you to find solutions and give yourself the internal support you need. We can't fix a problem we don't know.

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 48. So, today, I want to talk to you about boundaries because a lot of us are doing a lot of life from home right now and we don't have as many options to create physical space from the people that we live with. And there's a lot of blurred lines between working from home and trying to unwind at home.

And sometimes, when there's not clear boundaries established, it can really blur, for our internal worlds, how to turn off one aspect of ourselves and turn on another. So, for example, when you work from home, we have parts to ourselves. And so, one of the parts that shows up when you're working, you're in work mode. You're in professional mode.

You are getting stuff done for your own business or you're getting stuff done for a company. But you are in work mode. And that requires a skillset. That requires a whole part of your being that is different than, let's say, your mom part.

So, sometimes, things can get blurred from when we're just in boss mode into mom mode. And so, believe it or not, a lot of it has to do with setting the right boundaries so our brains know how to click on and off and show up in appropriate ways given the situation.

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But all of this can get really blurred and difficult to navigate when everything's in the same house, right? And this is a new thing because of COVID, but we're finding we have less options in terms of going to the office or going to school or being able to create those physical boundaries like we used to.

Because it used to be really easy. Kids went to school. Mom goes to work. That is actually like physical boundaries because we're actually leaving the house and we're going to a place of work. And when you're at that place of work, it's filled with energy of work.

Your coworkers are working. There's tasks to be done. That part of you that is professional and needs to get stuff done is alive and well. And really clear that, when I step into the office, I'm expected to work. And the same thing at home. When you get home and your five-year-old is hungry for dinner, you turn on mom mode; making dinner, talking about your day, seeing what they have to say, that kind of thing.

But what's difficult though is a lot of people are burning out right now because a lot of the self-care things are not as readily available, or it's just a little bit more difficult to obtain. And so, boundaries are actually a critical component of self-care, being able to differentiate what task I'm completing at this time. Otherwise, your energy gets completely spread too thin. It goes in way too many different directions.

So, if we don't close off that professional boss mode part of our brains and we're looking at emails while our kid is eating and all of that stuff, what it's doing is it's blurring the boundary lines of physical boundaries. And when we do that, our brain starts to get overwhelmed because it's actually taking on too many tasks.

Now, we're all guilty of this. So, I'm not calling you out for doing this. This is just a part of modern-day life, especially having emails on our phones and text messages and all of those things. But I think this is a big component into why we burn out so quickly and why we feel so worn down. It's

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because we're doing too many tasks at once and the brain really likes finishing one task to completion and then moving onto the other one.

But of course, that would be a perfect world where no chaos exists. That's why we have the ability to multitask, because that's not reasonable all the time. It's not reasonable for us to just do one task at a time, especially if you're living in crisis mode or there's a lot going on or a lot of people are depending on you. So, that may not be completely realistic.

But I'm calling it out because that is where we feel the most calm and collected. As we go through – if you think of your best most productive days, it's the days where you're literally checking off boxes. You're like, "I got that done, that done, that done," because you're focused. And when you're focused, we're singularly focused on one thing.

So, that is an illustration of what I mean by that. When we are setting boundaries in that way, we are training our brain to focus on one thing, complete it, and move onto the next thing. So, using this example of working from home, you're singularly focused on work, getting those tasks done, finishing and completing what you need to do within the time increments that are allowed.

Then, you close your laptop. You leave the spot that you do your work, and you mark it as done. That's the key point. You want to mark it as done. And then you move onto another aspect of your life, which is having dinner with your five-year-old or talking to your husband or talking to your friend.

But whatever that is, it's going to use a different part of you. And this is a way to not get worn down. The thing is, when we use certain internal muscles, internal emotional muscles, that's what I mean by that, they get depleted really quick because they get overused because we're not closing them out. And so, they just stay alive.

And so, if you don't close it out and you walk in, that professional side is still going, and now your mom side is going. So, now you've got two engines that are going. And then your friend just called you about the

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breakup with her boyfriend and she's hysterical and now you're in friend counsellor mode. And then, the dog brings in something from the back yard and now you're in problem-solving mode.

So, now you've got, quote unquote all these different tabs open in your brain. You've got all these different emotional muscles that are opened up in your brain. So, likely by 10 o'clock at night, you're exhausted. There's like 500 things that went 100 different ways.

And so, to the extent that is within your control – again, I want to be really reasonable about this. It is important for us to set up physical boundaries. Now, there's no way to put a boundary on when a dog brings in something or the washer – we can't always control those things. So, we need to have emotional availability for when those things happen.

But what I am talking about is identify the things that are in your life that feel like they are within your control. So, within your control is setting a boundary from nine to two, let's say, you are in work mode. Let's say you're working from home and you have your own business. So, from nine to two, you are just working.

And the kids are in school. So, they're in school mode. You're in work mode. And then you find a spot in your home that your brain can emotionally identify as workspace. So, otherwise, if you're working all over the house, you're translating that I'm working all over the house. I mean, right?

And a lot of times, we don't stop and think about this. But if you just even have a chair or a table or a corner that you can just identify as workspace, then all that work energy knows that when I sit in this chair – this is setting a boundary – when I sit in this chair, I am working. I'm not doing other things. I'm staying singularly focused on work. When I step out of this chair, I am in mom mode, or problem-solving mode, or I'm in friend mode, or this different aspect of yourself shows up.

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And so, it's important if you have kids because you can say things like, "When mommy's in this chair, she's working." And you need to go to whoever's watching them or, you know, whatever setup you have going on that's taking care of your children in that time, "You need to go to the nanny. You need to go to grandma. You need to talk to daddy. When mommy's in this chair, she's working."

So, thinking about physical boundaries in that way. And the same thing you can do for your kids. So, if your kids have school, it's important to give them a space, whatever you can create. And it doesn't have to be an elaborate space. I mean, obviously best scenario that everybody has their own room or space to do their work. But that may not be realistic.

And so, it's the same thing for kids. When you sit in this desk, you are doing homework. It becomes like the schoolwork desk. And that way, kids feel more empowered that when I'm here, this is what the expectation is. It's just setting expectations for kids. And boundaries for them. Like, when they get up from that chair, then they're allowed to watch TV or eat lunch or whatever.

And so, when you think about this, we do this automatically in our homes. We have a kitchen. That kitchen space is really supposed to be for food, eating, prepping, all of that stuff. We have a living room which is usually for TV or games or what have you.

So, I'm saying that because it's an example of physical boundaries. If you think about your house and how it has all these different rooms that are used for different purposes, the same metaphor applies for us as humans. We have different rooms inside of our emotional wellbeing that need to be taken care of, that need to be supported, and that are used for a specific goal.

There's different aspects of ourselves. But when we're burnt out, freaking out, it's really hard for us to differentiate that because everything gets thrown into the pot and it gets really confusing and we're really

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overwhelmed. And once we're overwhelmed, it's really difficult. And at that point, people always tell me, they're like, "Everything feels wrong," or "Everything feels bad." Because it does. Everything does.

But once we pull things apart, which is my favorite thing to do with people is to pull things apart, break it down into simple steps, and understanding what's going wrong and how to give yourself support, people leave those sessions feeling remarkably better. Because when we get overwhelmed, we can't see the problem anymore. We just feel like shit.

And so, when you take a step back to calm your nervous system down and really pull apart what's really going on, that's what empowers you to find solutions and give yourself the internal support you need. We can't fix a problem we don't know.

And sometimes, we have to talk to a therapist. We have to talk to a friend, or a supportive safe family member, whoever that might be for you. You know, to kind of break down, what is going on? Do I have too many files in my brain open right now? Am I trying to accomplish too many things? And really trying to set up realistic goals for that.

So, I know you've heard me talk about with boundaries in the past, it's really important to understand your why, knowing why you are setting a boundary. So, we're using physical boundaries for this particular episode. But there are lots and lots and lots of boundaries, okay.

So, when you think about this, physical boundaries, you want to understand your why. Why do I need to set this? And it might be because I'm getting too worn down. I'm not giving my best to anything because I'm just spread too thin.

So, perhaps in this case, your why is, "I need to get back some of my internal energy because it is just spread too thin because all of the things are going on." And so, when you understand that the why is really important, it becomes easier to enforce boundaries. Because if you don't

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know the why, it's really hard to really set a boundary because you don't see the point.

And any time you get any kind of opposition or someone questions it, you're like, "Well, whatever, maybe I don't even need this boundary." So, take some time and write out, like, why would a boundary like this be important to you? What are its potential benefits? And then think about, like how can you enforce that? How can you put this boundary in motion?

Because you have to remember, boundaries are about protecting your emotional and mental energy. I see all the time that people are like, "Boundaries are about putting yourself first." And sort of it is, but really, I would reframe that and think about it more – it's really not about putting yourself first so much. It's just adding value to your internal world needing support.

And so, when you do that, I mean, you can call it putting yourself first. But what it is, is it's putting value that your mental and emotional and physical resources matter and that you need to take care of that first before you can be an effective human and taking care of someone else.

So, that's really why boundaries are so powerful. Because boundaries really fuel you taking care of you. And when you do that, you are able to fully express and experience healthy dynamics and healthy relationships because you're not muddled and blurred in the relational dynamic.

So, just as we were talking about physical boundaries, this also shows up in relational boundaries. Like, things can get really messy. We can get really confused on, you know, what's mine and what's yours. And so, it's really, really important when you take a step back and you only own what's yours and you allow another person to own what is theirs, that empowers healthy relational dynamics.

But let me tell you, my friends, all the feels come up in this. Now, this is emotional as fuck. So, if you're like, "I've tried that and it's really hard," you're right. It is really hard. But it is completely doable with the right tools,

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strategies, and support. Like, absolutely. Boundaries are an active practice that you do every day once you learn how to do them.

So, it's really, really important to learn these kinds of things because, just as I was talking about with physical boundaries, relational boundaries, if we're getting pulled in so many different emotional directions, like being someone's counsellor for this or someone asking you for a favor or whatever it may be, we can get really confused relationally.

Like, what is my job and what is your job? And that gets really murky and difficult to navigate because guilt and anxiety show up. We're like, "Well, I probably should do this thing for this person." And it's hard to know that if you're not clear on boundaries.

When you're clear on your boundaries, it starts to become clear what is yours and what is someone else's, what you are emotionally available to do for another person. And this is really important because I see this all the time relationally, is people get passive aggressive and they get mean over something because they feel like they're doing too much for someone.

But the problem with that is you've never set a boundary. You've never communicated to that person that you wanted help or support or you were not available for certain things. So, in some ways, throwing passive aggressive shade at someone isn't really fair.

You need to set the boundary first. That way, everybody's clear about the expectations. Like, when you're saying something like, "I don't want to be the person to always host every single event, I feel put out by that." If you had had that conversation with your friends and you're constantly saying, "Yes, I'll host a party. Yes, I'll have people over. Yes, I'll pay for all the food." Like, if you're just constantly saying yes, the information you are giving other people is you're good, this is great, cool, she's willing to do it.

This is why boundaries are important because what you need to do is have a healthy assertive conversation that says, "You know what? I'm open to hosting once a month. But beyond that, I'm just not available for it." That is

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a boundary because you can enforce it, which means you're not going to have any parties beyond one month.

But sometimes, we have to discover this for ourselves, like figuring out for ourselves what is the right boundary before we can enforce it. So, have grace for yourself as you figure it out because I think, sometimes, we hope that people are just going to get the hint. And that's sometimes why we resort to passive aggressive tactics. Because we're like, "Oh, well if I show them how unhappy I am without actually saying it, maybe they'll get the hint and then I don't have to have the conversation."

But that is very unhealthy. Passive aggressive communication is considered the most aggressive communication. And it's funny because every person that does passive aggressive communication thinks they're off the hook. They're like, "Well I didn't actually say anything." You did.

And so, thinking about that, there is a whole new way of communicating. So, what goes with boundaries is assertive communication. And we've talked about that in previous episodes. But you have to learn how to say what your boundary is. You can't expect people to be mind readers.

And then, if they're continuously pushing your boundary or crossing your boundary, that's a new thing. You're like, "I have set this boundary. If you cannot respect it, that is you. That is on you because I've clearly stated what feels good and safe for me in a clear, articulated way. And if you don't want to respect that, I'm really sorry that you feel that way, but the boundary still sticks."

So, you have to remember, boundaries have to be done with a lot of thought and care because I see this all the time, people are reckless with boundaries. They're like, "Well I'm sick of her shit, so I'm just putting up a boundary and I'm saying no."

But then, they don't think about what the no is. They end up going to an overly dramatic no. Like, "Well, I'm never picking your kids up from school

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ever again because I'm sick of being the person who always does it. So, I'm over it. We're done now."

And it's this extremism which – and maybe, if that is realistic for you, to just completely sever a relationship and not pick up someone's kids anymore, maybe. But it has to be done with thought and care. But a lot of times, we get so pissed off that our boundaries are getting pushed and we haven't communicated well up until that point that we just go all or nothing.

And all or nothing doesn't really support healthy relationships. And what ends up happening is if it's too extreme, you end up going back on it. And there's nothing worse than trying to set a boundary and going back on it because now you've taught people your word doesn't matter and that when you get emotional and stressed out, you just say shit. That's how people hear it.

So, anyways, I think I'm going to end it there because I just realized, I've given you guys so much to think about. There is so much here when it comes to boundaries. I actually just opened registration for my boundaries course, which is at [mentalhealthremix.com/boundaries](https://mentalhealthremix.com/boundaries).

So, if you want to learn more about this, I would highly recommend you consider looking into this course because it is – there's just a lot of things. There are so many different aspects to setting boundaries. And really, what you're most up against is all the emotional feels and all the confusion and figuring out how to be assertive in your communication.

And this course covers all of those things because, at one point in my practice, I felt like I was literally on autopilot answering the same questions every hour all day long. And so, I finally decided, I'm just going to put this in a course. That way, people can get the information at their own pace and we can talk about it if they want to process that, if they were a client of mine.

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But in this case, you don't have to be a client of mine. You can absolutely just go at your own pace and work with your own therapist on it. So, at any rate, I just want to let you know that that is available to you as a resource.

If there was a lot moments in this episode where you were like, "Whoa, I need to work on this. I need to work on that," and kind of coming up with a strategy of how you want to move forward with setting boundaries in your life. Because there's really no shame or blame in not being able to do this right because boundaries are hard. Boundaries are emotional.

On paper, they look really, really easy. They look simple and straight forward. But you have to internalize and support the emotional aspects of it in order to make a go of it. So, have grace for yourself and understanding.

Like, if there were several things in this episode that made you feel like you were called out or whatever, if you felt kind of convicted in this episode, just know, boundaries are a skill we all have to learn. None of us are actually good at it. We are not born being good at boundaries unless they were modeled to us.

But most of us weren't raised that way. Most of us don't have a model for healthy boundaries. And so, have grace and patience for yourself as you learn how to do these things.

So, at any rate, additionally, if strong emotions came up for you when you were listening to this episode or any of the podcast episodes, take it as information that something in your internal world needs support. There is never shame or blame in getting mental health support in your local state of residence, especially if boundaries are something that are really hard to you due to a traumatic event in your life.

There are a lot of reasons boundaries are hard for us. It's not black and white, okay. It's not all or nothing. And so, definitely, if you have a trauma history of sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, mental abuse, whatever that might be, please seek out mental health support because it will make setting boundaries so much easier.

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Like, sometimes, we have to heal from our past before we can move forward in empowered ways. And sometimes, that's where clients get stuck. They're like, "I want to set a boundary but my brain keeps going back to this other time where my boundaries were completely violated."

So, I want to just normalize that for you, that that is part of trauma recovery. Boundaries are part of trauma recovery. And so, if there's aspects of yourself where boundaries just feel impossible, it might be a signal to your system that you need to heal from some past traumatic events or heal and unpack those stories that are keeping you stuck. And EMDR is a great, great thing for this. So, find an EMDR therapist in your local state of residence if that feels like the right kind of therapy modality for you.

Lastly, if you enjoyed today's episode, make sure you rate and review it on Apple Podcasts. It helps other people find the podcast and get access to this info. 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](http://nicolesymcox.com).

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