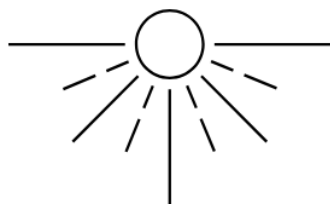




THE HOLISTIC COUNSELOR PODCAST



From the Mic to the Community

How to Set Boundaries When You Feel Guilty

A practical guide to people-pleasing, honest limits, and respectful connection



Diana S. Rice

Florida Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC)

Certified Integrative Mental Health Professional (CIMHP)

Qualified Supervisor (QS)

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You can care and have limits.

Boundaries & guilt | Begin here

How do I set boundaries when I feel guilty? Start with one specific limit you can realistically keep, communicate it respectfully, and allow some discomfort. Feeling guilty is a reason to reflect; it is not automatic proof that the limit is wrong. Safety and your circumstances matter.

Hello there, fearfully and wonderfully made human. Maybe you say yes before you check your calendar. Maybe you keep explaining until the other person approves. Maybe your family, workplace, or faith community has taught you that being needed is the same as being good.

This guide is an invitation to notice the cost of your automatic yes and practice a more honest response. Your relationships, cultural responsibilities, resources, and safety all deserve consideration.

1 What do we mean by a boundary?

In this guide, a boundary is a clear limit around your participation, time, energy, body, or belongings. It may involve a request, but you cannot guarantee another person's agreement. A workable limit describes what you can choose or do.

Example: "Please call before visiting" is a request. "I can host on Saturday afternoon; I cannot host on weekday evenings" makes your availability clear. A boundary need not be a threat or a punishment.

Read the examples, then use the reflection page to prepare one low-risk conversation. If expressing a limit could put you at risk, use the safety guidance first.

General education for adults, not personal counseling, diagnosis, medical advice, or a treatment plan. Reading or downloading this guide alone does not create a therapist-client relationship. Diana S. Rice is a Florida Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC) sharing these resources as a podcast host and educator. Do not delay or change professional care because of this guide. Seek a qualified professional authorized to practice where you are. Reflections are optional; stop if they become distressing.

Why does saying no feel so difficult?

Boundaries & guilt | Understand

1 People-pleasing is a description, not a diagnosis

You might avoid disagreement, take on too much, or repeatedly seek permission to have a preference. These habits can have different histories. Rather than deciding you are broken, ask what you expect will happen if someone is disappointed.

2 Try a more direct form of care

Assertiveness involves stating your perspective clearly while respecting other people. It differs from staying silent about your needs and from trying to overpower someone else. Practice can help you communicate without assuming you must either surrender or fight. [1]

3 Does guilt mean I did something wrong?

Sometimes guilt points to a real responsibility: a promise you broke, a person you hurt, or a repair you want to make. Sometimes it arrives because a different choice feels unfamiliar. Ask: "What exactly did I do? Was I disrespectful, or am I uncomfortable with someone's disappointment? Is there a responsibility I need to address?" You can apologize for speaking harshly while keeping the limit itself. You can also reconsider a boundary when new information changes the situation. Flexibility and self-respect can coexist.

4 What about family, culture, or faith?

Supporting family and serving a community can be meaningful choices. Consider what is freely chosen, what is realistically sustainable, and what is expected under pressure. Your answer may be different from someone else's. The goal is an honest decision that acknowledges your context.

Faith reflection | optional: What does responsible care look like in this situation, including care for the body, commitments, and relationships entrusted to you? You do not have to use guilt as the only guide to service.

5 When the issue is safety

Threats, intimidation, coercion, stalking, or violence need more than a better script. Confronting someone can increase risk. A domestic-violence advocate can help develop an individualized safety plan; do not use these exercises to test an unsafe person. [4]

Words you can adapt to your own life

Boundaries & guilt | Put it into practice

Choose a low-risk situation to begin. Keep the message specific and brief, and rehearse it if that helps. You do not have to provide a long defense. Respectful communication can improve clarity, but it cannot ensure that someone responds well. [2,3]

1 When you need time to decide

"I need to look at my commitments. I will let you know tomorrow."

2 When a family member wants more time

"I want to spend time together. I can stay until three on Sunday."

3 When your work is already full

"I can complete this by Friday if we move the other deadline. Which should take priority?"

4 When you are asked to serve again

"I care about this ministry. I am not available for another role this season."

5 When a conversation becomes disrespectful

"I want to discuss this. If the insults continue, I will pause the conversation and revisit it later." Use only when pausing or leaving is safe.

6 What if the person keeps asking?

A short restatement may be enough: "I understand that this is disappointing. My availability is still the same." You can listen without negotiating indefinitely. If you have an obligation that needs another arrangement, name it and discuss a realistic alternative. [2]

7 How will I know I am making progress?

Look for clearer decisions, fewer automatic commitments, and more consistency with the limits you choose. The first sign of progress may be an honest sentence, even if your voice shakes. If fear or distress keeps interfering, consider professional support. [3]

Prepare one honest conversation

Boundaries & guilt | Pause and reflect

Choose a situation that is safe enough to practice. These are reflection prompts, not a test of whether you are a good person. You may write a few words and stop.

The request or situation I want to respond to:

What I can offer, and what I cannot realistically offer:

One short sentence I want to say:

A practical step I can control if the limit is not respected:

Afterward: What happened? What would I keep or change?

Check before you act: Have I considered safety, dependents, shared responsibilities, work expectations, and any commitments I have already made? I can seek advice without handing over every decision.

Support for the next conversation

Boundaries & guilt | Listen and learn

Episode 103 | Jon Waller, LMHC

Emotional expression, people-pleasing, and the ways anger may be expressed indirectly.

Episode 118 | Lynn Kearney, LMFT

A parts-work perspective on protective patterns and approaching yourself with curiosity.

Episode 125 | Shirley Barthelemy

Divorce, people-pleasing, grief, and rebuilding a sense of self.

1

Sources for the teaching

1. [Centre for Clinical Interventions | Assertiveness resources](#)
2. [Centre for Clinical Interventions | How to Say No Assertively](#)
3. [Mayo Clinic | Being assertive: Reduce stress, communicate better](#)
4. [National Domestic Violence Hotline | Personal safety planning](#)

2

When you need more support

For U.S. domestic-violence support, call 800-799-SAFE (7233) or visit thehotline.org. Use a safer device if your browsing or communications may be monitored. For emotional distress, call or text 988. Call 911 for immediate danger or a medical emergency. Outside the U.S., use local services.

[Explore finding a therapist who fits](#)

Source notes: communication teaching draws on the sources above. Scripts, faith reflections, and worksheet prompts are original examples, not a tested treatment protocol. Episodes offer education and perspectives, not endorsements of every claim. Sources checked October 8, 2026.

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