Boundary-setting worksheet

Consider safety and power differences first. Keep wording brief and concrete; use support when needed.

Editable PDF: replace or delete the fictional examples. Blank PDF: print and write. Guidance follows.

Situation / effect on me

e.g. Extra work would mean missing an agreed break.

What I want to explain

e.g. I have two deadlines today and no room for another task.

My request or limit

e.g. Which task should take priority?

A possible alternative

e.g. Offer a later date if it is workable.

Timing, safety and support

e.g. Speak privately; seek support if the situation feels unsafe.

A likely reply	A response I could use
e.g. Can you fit it in today?	e.g. I can do this if we move one of the other deadlines.

Outcome / follow-up

e.g. Write down what was agreed and when to review it.

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Using this resource

Boundary-setting worksheet

What this helps with

A boundary describes what you can realistically offer or what needs to change. It does not guarantee that another person will agree or feel pleased. Planning the conversation can help you be clear about the demand, its effect and the request, without overexplaining or promising more than you can manage. In situations with a power imbalance, practical support may be needed. A safe and fair context matters as much as wording.

How to use it

1. Identify the specific demand and its effect on your work, health or responsibilities.
2. Decide the request or limit in clear, realistic terms.
3. Draft a brief statement and any workable alternative.
4. Consider likely responses and how to repeat the request without overcommitting.
5. Choose timing and support; review what happened and whether further action is needed.

A fictional worked example

Haroon was regularly asked to take on additional tasks near the end of his shift. He prepared a discussion with his manager: "I can complete the urgent report today. If I also take this new task, the other deadline will need to move. Which should I prioritise?" His aim was to clarify workload, not prove that the manager was wrong. He brought a factual list of current tasks and noted the agreed priorities afterwards. The conversation did not remove all pressure, but it replaced an unspoken assumption that everything would be done. He planned to seek further support if the pattern continued.

Keep in mind

Do not use a direct boundary experiment where it could increase abuse, coercion or retaliation. Seek suitable support first, such as a trusted professional or workplace representative. Do not remove essential caring or safety responsibilities without an appropriate alternative arrangement.

Sources and attribution

Health and Safety Executive. Work-related stress and how to manage it: Causes of stress at work.

Health and Safety Executive. Management Standards: Control.

Original material informed by the sources above. No outside organisation endorses this worksheet.

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