



Healthy Boundaries and How to Set Them

Resource Guide

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Introduction to Setting Boundaries

Your personal boundaries protect the inner core of your identity and your right to choices.

”

Gerald Manly Hopkins

There are networks of boundaries that we navigate daily that influence how we feel and act which impacts our overall well being. When we set healthy boundaries, we help others understand what’s important to us and how we’d want to be treated. They maintain and protect our authenticity which improves the quality of our relationships. So let’s work together to identify healthy boundaries and develop ones that empower you and those around you.

Learning Objectives

During this session, you will:

- Evaluate the impact of healthy boundaries
- Assess perceived barriers to boundary setting
- Examine what healthy boundaries are
- Practice setting a healthy boundary

Impact of Healthy Boundaries

Healthy boundaries keep us safe and support us in recognizing our unique values, tolerances, and thresholds. As Nedra Glover Tawwab, a licensed therapist, states in her book, *Set Boundaries to Find Peace*, “when boundaries aren’t clear we may experience resentment, fear, frustration, and guilt.” Experiencing negative emotions like these can lead to maladaptive behaviors like gossiping, complaining, avoidance, or cutting people off. By setting healthy boundaries, we’ll be able to better manage and operate our relationships with ease.

Common signs that your life lacks boundaries:

- Constantly feeling overwhelmed and/or exhausted
- Having a tendency to daydream about disappearing or running away
- Lacking the amount of personal time you might need or want
- Expressing resentment or envy towards others
- Frequently avoiding situations and/or people

Establishing healthy boundaries empowers us to:

- Resist overextending ourselves
- Safeguard our energy investment
- Practice self-care unapologetically
- More clearly define roles and expectations within different relationships

Types of Boundaries and Where They Exist

We share the common life areas where boundaries are established in the table below. Check off the ones where having healthier boundaries would support your overall wellbeing.

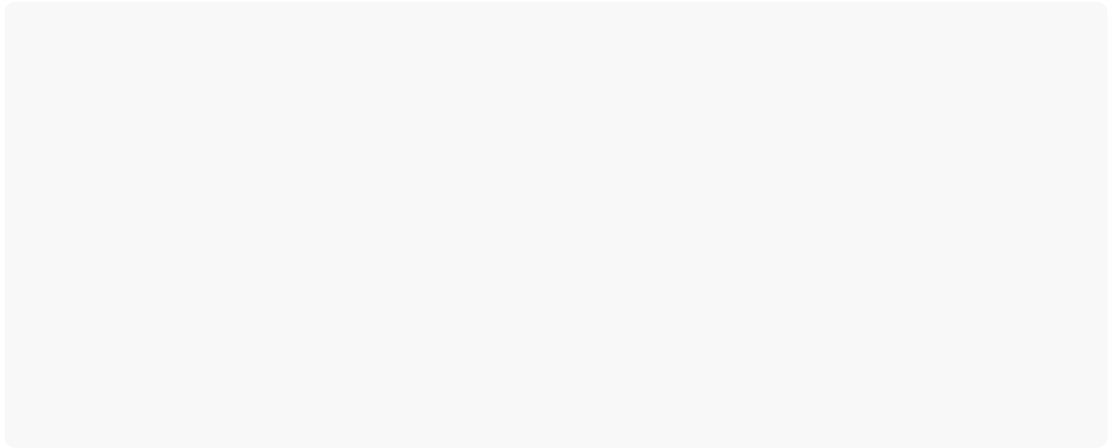
- Time
- Work-Coworkers
- Exes
- Myself
- Family/Friends
- Neighbors
- Social Media
- Strangers

Now let's further clarify the type of boundary you want to set. Select the types of boundaries from the list below that you want to develop next.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Mental/ Intellectual	Engaging in respectful correspondence around your thoughts, values, and opinions.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Emotional	Stop yourself from sharing information too readily, taking everything personally, or feeling guilty for someone else's issues or negative feelings.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Time	Determine how you manage your time and allow others to use your time.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Workplace	Legal, ethical, and organizational frameworks that protect both clients and employees from physical and emotional harm.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Physical	Determine parameters set around personal space and physical touch.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Material/ Financial	Determine how others may or may not access your material possessions.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spiritual/ Religious	Protect your right to believe in what you want, worship as you wish, and practice your spiritual or religious beliefs.

Types of Boundaries and Where They Exist

Take a moment to reflect on what might be different in your life with these types of healthy boundaries in place.



Perceived Barriers to Setting Healthy Boundaries

In order to create consistent habits around boundary setting, it's imperative to realize what barriers are preventing us from doing so. By identifying barriers, we enable ourselves to recognize and release ingrained beliefs and behavioral patterns that no longer serve us and our relationship dynamics.

See below for a list of common boundary-setting barriers. These come from the work of licensed therapists and boundary-setting experts, Terri Cole and Nedra Glover Tawwab.

Select the barriers that prevent you from honoring your wants, needs, values, and expectations with yourself and others:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Super Hero Syndrome	I can handle it all and rarely ask for help.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Perfectionism	I try to control the whole situation to create my desired outcome.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Secondary Gain	I benefit from the lack of a boundary by not having to face or deal with something.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Disease to Please	I say yes to everything because I feel the need to be everything to everyone.

Continued on the next page

Perceived Barriers to Setting Healthy Boundaries

<input type="checkbox"/>	Conflict Avoidance	I excuse bad or disrespectful behavior to avoid conflict.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Focus on Worst Case Scenarios	I refrain from setting a boundary because I choose to focus solely on the worst possible outcomes.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of Awareness	I have little awareness around the feelings that signal a need for establishing boundaries.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hyper Positivity	I tend to be uncomfortable with others' emotions so I offer unsolicited surface-level explanations or advice.

What is a Healthy Boundary?

Healthy boundaries are needs and expectations that have been communicated in an assertive manner to support feelings of your own safety and well-being within a relationship. To further clarify what a healthy boundary is, we will review other common ways that boundaries are set and communicated.

Scenario

Bill is a project lead and oversees a team of 8 for his current project. There are multiple deliverables due by the end month. Each team member has their own deliverables but need to work with each other to complete them. Bill adheres to his own deadlines and works during his regular working hours to complete his work with his colleagues.

However, Ted, a member of the team, has poor time management skills. He emails continually after working hours and on weekends to meet his own deadlines and expects people to help him at the last minute. Bill has tried to help in the past but it has been interfering with his personal time. He has asked Ted in the past to give him more advance notice to collaborate. Ted says he will but still continues with his behaviors. It's Friday afternoon at 3 PM and Ted asks Bill over email, "Can you help me this weekend to prepare for our deadline on Monday?"

Bill feels obligated and annoyed.

What is a Healthy Boundary?

3 Ways to Set Boundaries



Porous Boundary Setting

Example	<i>Bill says yes and helps Ted finish his work but ends up not making it on time to his daughter's soccer game.</i>
Communication Style	Passive: Letting it slide and enabling the behavior without consequence.
Qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pushover, peacekeeper, influenced by other people's thoughts, feelings, and problems more than their own• Overshare personal information• Say yes when they want to say no• Find themselves taking on or overly investing in the problems of others• Tolerate abusive or disrespectful behavior



Rigid Boundary Setting

Example	<i>Bill never acknowledges the request and pretends he doesn't see it till their meeting on Monday.</i>
Communication Style	<p>Passive-Aggressive: Acting upset without clearly stating your needs to the other person</p> <p>Aggressive: Being focused on establishing control, acting inflexible, and demanding what you need.</p> <p>Manipulation: Acting in a coercive manner to get your needs met</p>
Qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create strict rules, inflexible, closed off and unavailable, write others off without explanation• Will not ask for help when they need it• Avoid close relationships to minimize rejection• Perceived by others as detached and cold• Tend to isolate themselves

What is a Healthy Boundary?



Healthy Boundary Setting

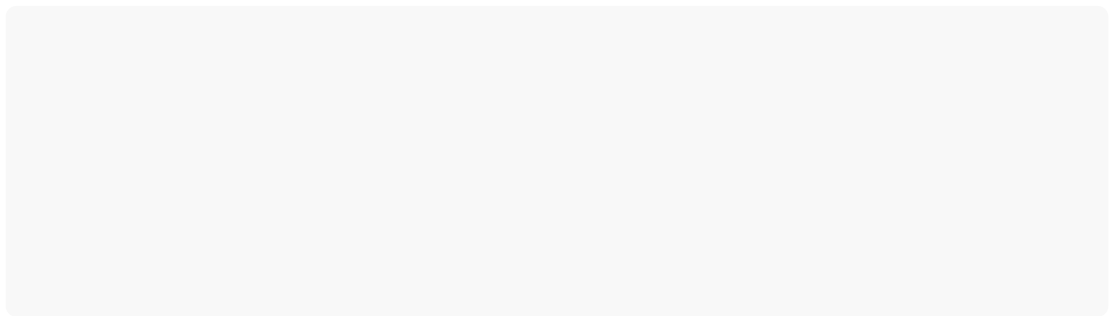
Example	<i>Bill informs Ted that he is not able to help him this weekend but would be willing to offer him 45 minutes of support before the meeting. Additionally, he reminds Ted that he will be unable to support him with his work going forward if he continues not to give advance notice.</i>
Communication Style	Assertive: Stating what they expect concisely and firmly
Qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dependable, trustworthy, confident, keep their word, communicate effectively, take responsibility for their own happiness, not emotionally reactive• Value their thoughts and opinions• Feel comfortable asking for or accepting help• Know when to share personal information and with whom• Can accept and respect the boundaries of others including someone saying no to a request

What is a Healthy Boundary?

In the boxes below, identify any themes you recognize in your boundary-setting habits:

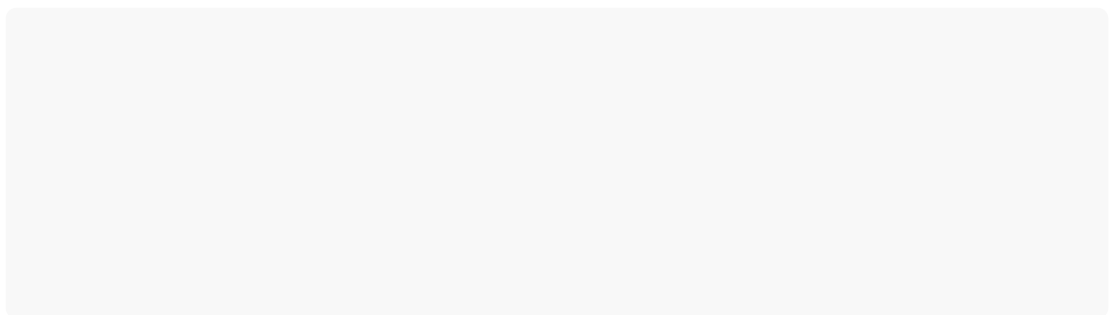
Personal Life

Example: I notice porous boundaries with my in-laws and siblings but more rigid boundaries with my partner.



Professional Life

Example: My boss advocates for healthy boundary setting but I continue to exercise porous boundaries with my co-workers.



Building a Healthy Boundary

When you increase your awareness of how your current boundaries are functioning, you can then use the four steps below to create more healthy boundaries:

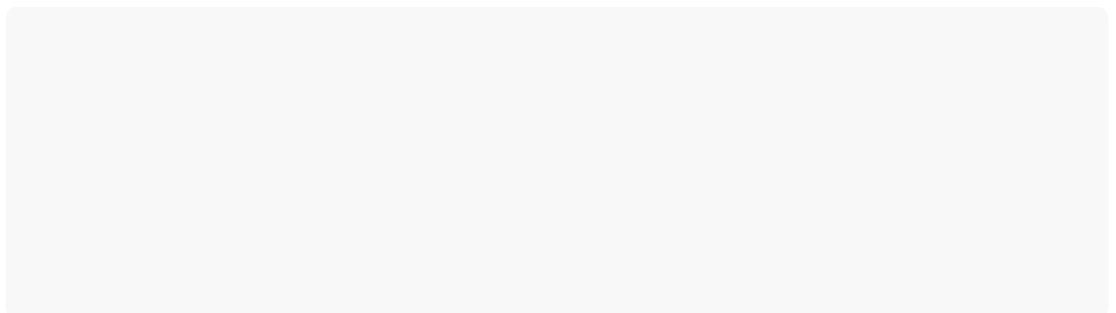
1. **Recognize your emotions:** Identify the emotional impact of setting this boundary
2. **Communicate your boundary:** Decide how you want to communicate your boundary and what you want to say
3. **Prepare for pushback:** Acknowledge the possible reactions or responses from those you are imparting the boundary upon
4. **Keep it consistent:** Outline the resources that will support the integrity and consistency of your boundary in the long-term

Step 1: Recognize your emotions

Select one of the areas you identified on page 5 that you'd like to set healthy boundaries for then use the four steps above to clarify your plan of action.

Where or with whom are you wanting to establish a healthier boundary?

Example: Bill needs to communicate a clear boundary with Ted contacting him after work hours.



Building a Healthy Boundary

What boundary would you like to establish?

Example: Bill wants Ted to communicate with him during normal business hours and provide ample time to review and collaborate.

What emotions are present when you bring this situation to mind?

Example: Bill feels annoyed, obligated, and resentful.

List any expectations that will be acknowledged through the establishment of this boundary.

Example: Bill expects Ted to meet the deadlines that he agrees to and respect Bill's work-life balance.

Building a Healthy Boundary

Step 2: Communicate your boundary

As you look to convey your boundary to others, it's important to consider not only what you want to say but also how, when, and where it will be done.

Decide how will you convey your boundary:

- Verbal communication
- Written correspondence
- Modeling of the behavior

Tips for Boundary Communication

Verbal and Written Communication	Modeling the Boundary Behavior
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep it short• Be clear and concise• Directly state your needs, expectations, or simply say no	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decide when you are available• Cease engagement• Excuse yourself from a space• Showcase the behavior in the manner you expect from others• Acknowledge when someone honors the boundary

Building a Healthy Boundary

Clearly state your boundary using one of the starters below:

(Note: Even if you choose to model the behavior on your end, it can be helpful to have it clarified mentally and emotionally for motivation, momentum, and consistency)

- I want...
- I need...
- I value...
- I expect...
- Next time...
- No *(this is a complete sentence)*
- I need to take time to consider this. When do you need an answer by?
- Not at this time but thank you.
- This would be better suited for...
- I can offer you this but not that.
- How would you like me to support you with this?
- I am not looking for advice or solutions. I just need to vent.
- Please respect my decision.
- This isn't the best time for me to talk. I will call you back when I can give you my full attention.
- I know you meant well, but what you said wasn't _____.
- I feel more than one way and I don't have to pick one way to feel.
- I feel _____ in this interaction.

Building a Healthy Boundary

Try using different starters to state your boundary and find the one that resonates with you:

Examples:

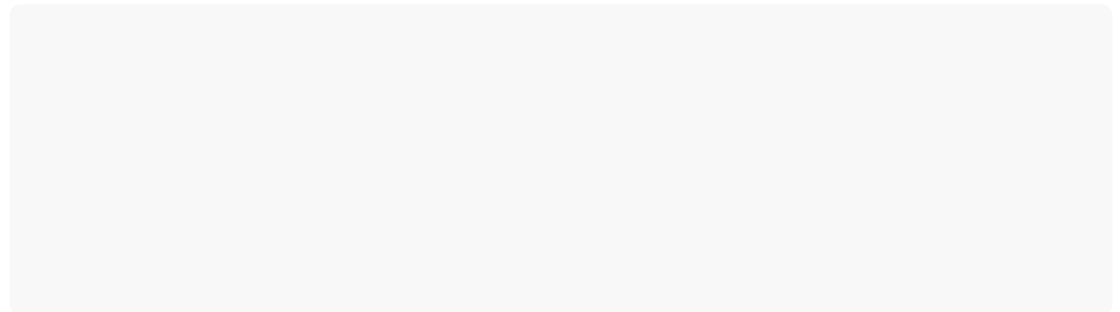
I can offer to support you with this project but I won't be available this weekend.

Please set up a 30-minute meeting with me between 8-4 PM (EST) next week.

I want to help you with this but I am not available this weekend.

I won't be available this weekend and would like to set up time with you next week to discuss solutions so as to avoid these last minute requests going forward. I can commit to a bi-weekly sync.

No.

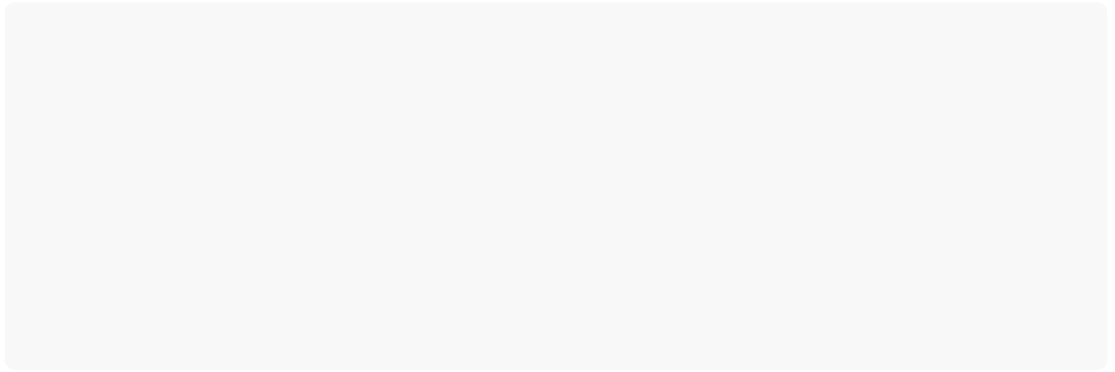


Other things to consider when communicating your boundary to support comprehension:

- Emotional state of yourself and other people
- Timing (*conduct a quick calendar review, consider the time of day or week*)
- Form of communication (*text, email, virtual or in-person meeting, 1:1*)
- Space or place where it will be conveyed
- Personal blindspots
- Your body language

Building a Healthy Boundary

What might you need to take into consideration before setting your healthy boundary?



Building a Healthy Boundary

Step 3: Prepare for pushback

As humans, we aren't perfect. Changing our behaviors can be hard, even when it's necessary for the well-being of our relationships. When we start establishing new or different expectations of ourselves and others through boundary setting, there's a possibility we'll receive pushback while they go through an adjustment period. It's important to note that when we are setting healthy boundaries and informing others of our needs and expectations, we are responsible for upholding those boundaries. We are not responsible for how they choose to react.

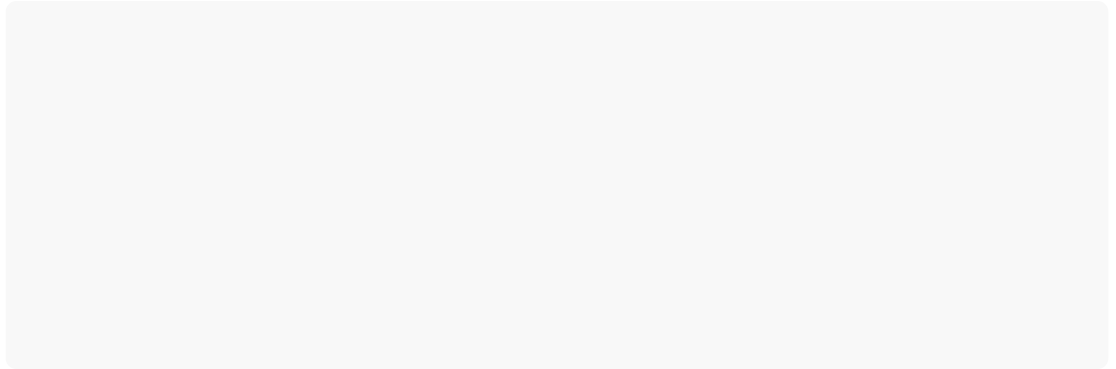
Here are a few common examples below:

- **Ignoring:** choose not to acknowledge and keep doing it
- **Testing limits:** try to manipulate or sneak around your request
- **Rationalizing and questioning:** challenging the reason for the boundary and its validity
- **Defensiveness:** challenge what you said or make excuses about how their behavior is okay
- **Love Bombing:** stating that your feelings for them are in conflict with the purpose of your boundary (e.g., If you loved me...)

Building a Healthy Boundary

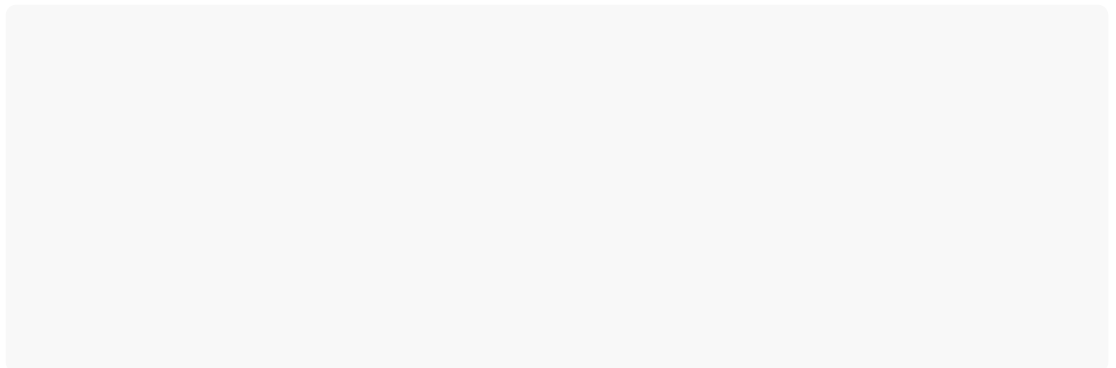
What kind of pushback are you expecting once you establish your healthy boundary?

Example: Bill is expecting Ted to not understand why he is unable to support him this weekend since he has always done so in the past.



Brainstorm a few different ways that you might respond to their pushback in the moment. This will empower you to not lose sight of the boundary's purpose and impact.

Example: I know that in the past I have been willing to extend my working hours into the weekend to support you with your work. But I have come to realize that this doesn't support my work-life balance and well-being.



Building a Healthy Boundary

Step 4: Keeping it consistent

Let's take a moment to outline the choices that support the consistency of your new boundary. If you find that someone is unable or unwilling to honor your boundary then you have the option to change your participation and behavior in that relationship.

This may also be the time when communicating consequences will be necessary to prevent being overrun by someone else's boundary. As Terri Cole notes in her book, *Boundary Boss*, "As humans, pain or discomfort is commonly the driving force behind behavioral change, which is why consequences may be appropriate."

Select ways you will create consistency with your boundary:

- Share less information
- Say yes less automatically
- Pause before committing
- Justify less
- Re-clarify to support adherence
- Not let it slide or revert
- Acknowledge when the boundary is honored
- Set consequences
- Acknowledge when a boundary is overrun in the moment or early in the relationship

Building a Healthy Boundary

Fill out your consistency statement. You can fill in the template below or create your own.

Example: Bill will no longer accept last minute requests from Ted. If Ted continues to ignore this request then Bill will advocate for himself to no longer offer additional support when asked.

I've set the following boundary to not take after hours or late appointments with Ted and they refuse to honor my boundary. Since they have shown that they cannot, or will not honor my boundary, I will decline future requests without making additional accommodations.

I've set the following boundary

with

and they refuse to honor my boundary. Since they have

shown that they cannot, or will not honor my boundary,

Create your own

Healthy Boundary Setting at Work

Our individual well-being and organizational outcomes can be impacted by how we establish and maintain healthy boundaries at our workplace. There are different opportunities to set healthy boundaries at work—from how we perform our responsibilities to how we engage with the organization’s cultural norms. Use the spaces below to outline the healthy boundaries that can benefit both you and your organization going forward.

Within your role or organization, identify the opportunities in which you can set healthy boundaries:

Share below an example of how you can set healthy boundaries at work:

”

You teach people how to treat you by what you allow,
what you stop, and what you reinforce.

Tony Gaskins

Calm Resources



[A Secret to Better Boundaries with Jeff Warren](#)

An exploration of boundary-setting to prevent being overwhelmed around other humans.

[Healthy Boundaries with Jeff Warren](#)

A short session reviewing how healthy boundaries protect your inner sovereignty.

[Boundaries with Tamara Levitt](#)

An exploration of personal boundaries.

[Relationship with Others Series by Tamara Levitt](#)

A meditation series to cultivate healthier and happier connections.

[Emotions Check In with Professor Megan Reitz](#)

A short meditation to support the development of ease with how you feel right now.

[Saying No with Jay Shetty](#)

A session reviewing how to defend your time and prioritize what matters.

[How to Say No with Jay Shetty](#)

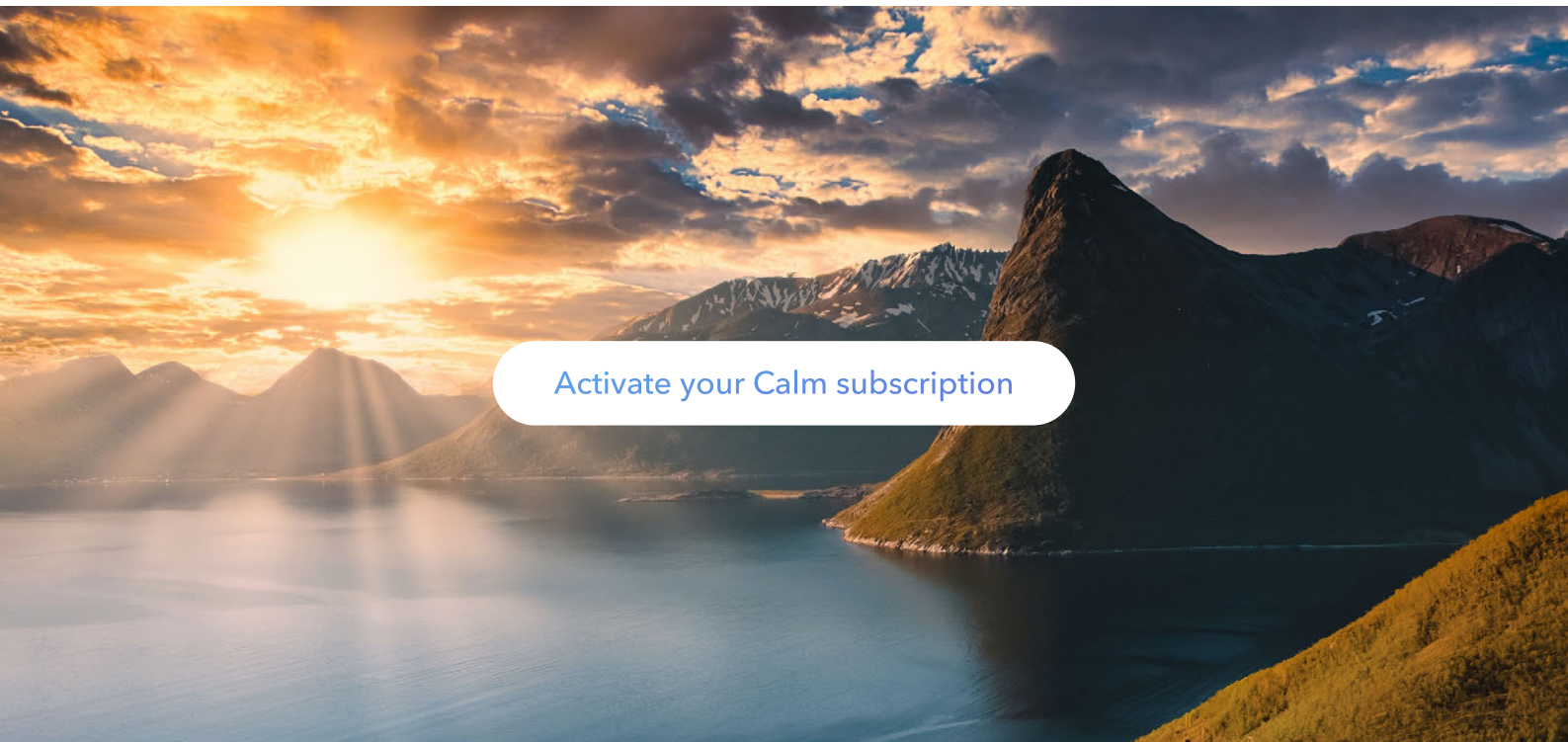
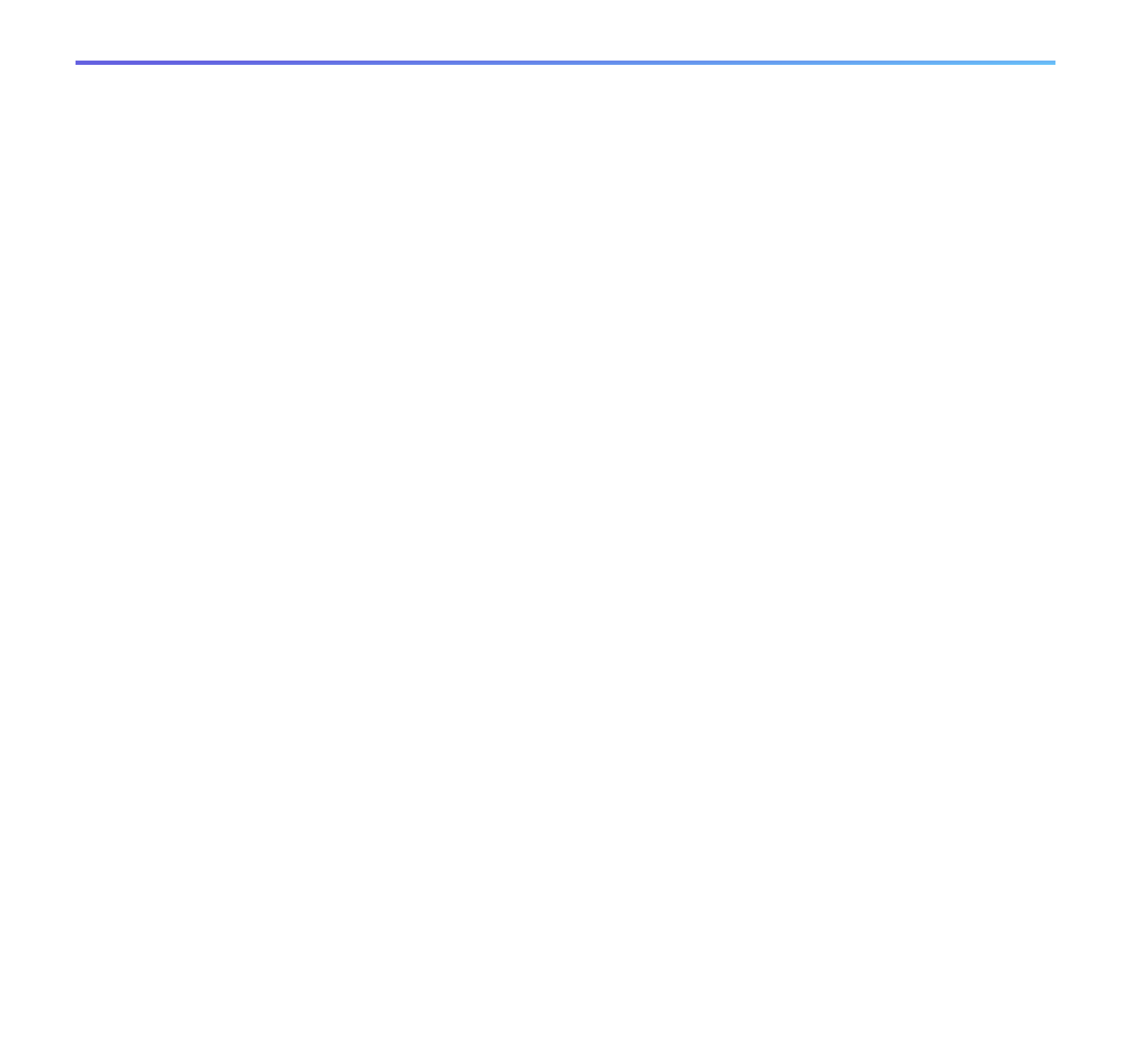
A review on a way to decline invitations with grace.

[Work Boundaries with Mel Mah](#)

A short movement session outlining the ways to create boundaries with others and for yourself.

[Social Media and Screen Addiction Series with Dr. Adam Alter](#)

An educational masterclass outlining the reasons why screens and social media are so addictive. You'll learn practical steps for managing screens and social media in your life.



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