Boundaries:
Why are they so hard?

Angie Arora, MSW, RSW
Veterinary Social Worker specializing in Veterinary Mental Health & Wellbeing
Boundaries are limits we set with ourselves and others to honour our values, beliefs and needs.
Staying home when I’m sick

Prioritizing family dinner instead of staying late

Saying no to a client when the schedule is full

Expressing when something is out of my scope

Taking a break when my body needs rest
The lack of boundaries in vet med may be normalized, but this doesn’t make it normal.
Factors Impacting Boundaries
If it were as simple as “no is a complete sentence”, we’d all have phenomenal boundaries!
Maladaptive Responses

Do You?

1. struggle to feel ‘seen’ by others
2. have a hard time saying ‘no’ to people
3. struggle when you’re angry or upset with others
4. feel responsible for other people’s reactions
5. find yourself compromising your values
Fawning

“A trauma response where a person develops people-pleasing behaviours to avoid conflict and to establish a sense of safety”

-Pete Walker, M.A., MFT
Threat/Stressor → Nervous System Activation →
- Fight
- Flight
- Freeze
- Fawn*

* Maladaptive Response, not State of Activation
Tools & Resources
Unpack your Fawning Response

Learn to Regulate your Nervous System

(Re)Connect with your Values

Improve Conflict Management
Where in my life do I have difficulty saying no?

What’s the impact of me not saying no on me?

What’s the belief that makes me not say no?

Who would I be if I didn’t believe that?

What am I not saying yes to, that wants to be said no to?

-Dr. Gabor Mate
(Re)Connect with your Values

1. Recall a moment where your life couldn’t get much better.

2. Describe this peak experience or moment in detail.

3. Reflect on what values are recognizable in this experience or moment.

4. Choose the top 3 - 5 values most important to you.

5. Define what your chosen values mean to you.

Adapted from Anne Loehr, Training & Development Expert
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Boundaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I VALUE</td>
<td>SO I NEED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner Peace</td>
<td>Quiet time alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>Time with friends and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest</td>
<td>A morning and sleep routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day of Week</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>😊</td>
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</table>
Improve Conflict Management

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument
Nervous System Regulation

Become your own medicine & free yourself from the toxic effects of past trauma.

LEARN HOW WITH NERVOUS SYSTEM EXPERT & SOMATIC PRACTITIONER,

Irene Lyon, MSc

https://irenelyon.com/
How Trauma Can Affect Your Window Of Tolerance

HYPERAROUSAL
Anxious, Angry, Out of Control, Overwhelmed
Your body wants to fight or run away. It’s not something you choose – these reactions just take over.

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE
When you are in your Window of Tolerance, you feel like you can deal with whatever’s happening in your life. You might feel stress or pressure, but it doesn’t bother you too much. This is the ideal place to be.

HYPOAROUSAL
Spacy, Zoned Out, Numb, Frozen
Your body wants to shut down. It’s not something you choose – these reactions just take over.

When stress and trauma shrink your window of tolerance, it doesn’t take much to throw you off balance.

Working with a practitioner can help expand your window of tolerance so that you are more able to cope with challenges.
| **FIGHT**  
  (sympathetic branch) | May become overly aggressive when trying to establish a boundary by silencing the other person and leaving little room for discussion, cooperation, or collaboration. |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **FLIGHT**  
  (sympathetic branch) | May avoid establishing an internal or relational boundary to avoid conflict |
| **FREEZE**  
  (parasympathetic branch) | May struggle to effectively connect with what they need and therefore struggle to verbalize boundaries |
| **FAWN**  
  (behavioural modification response) | Disconnecting from self to focus on others  
People pleasing, no boundaries, ignoring one’s needs, loss of self, overlistening, overgiving |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FIGHT</strong></td>
<td>Discharge: squats, scream into a pillow, clench fists and release, cry, laugh, etc. Breathwork: exhale needs to be longer than inhale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FLIGHT</strong></td>
<td>Fast Forward Movement: run, walk. Shake: discharge panicky energy. Grounding: Sit outside, visualize energy leaving your body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FREEZE</strong></td>
<td>Conscious Breathwork: e.g. Wim Hoff, Voo Breathing. Focus on one small thing you can do. Co-regulate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FAWN</strong></td>
<td>Increase awareness of our own emotional, physical needs. Boundaries, Assertiveness. Griefwork</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Resourcing Tools

| Breathwork                        | Diaphragmatic Breathing (double breathing)  
|                                  | Longer Exhale (4-7-8, 7-11)  
|                                  | Five-Finger Breathing  
| Grounding                        | 5-4-3-2-1, Feet on ground, Visualization  
| Easeful Movement                 | Stretch, Walk, Yoga, Muscle relaxation, Dance  
| Nature                           | Mindful experiencing  
| Self-Soothe                      | Hand over heart, Hold your own hand, Hug yourself, Hum, Sing, Weighted blankets  

Practical Approaches
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Assertion</th>
<th>Empathic Assertion</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I cannot help you.</td>
<td>I appreciate you need some help. I have a lot on my plate right now, and will let you know if I can help after I’m done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to finish what I was saying.</td>
<td>I can tell you’re feeling very passionate about this. Once I’m able to finish speaking, I’d love to hear your thoughts.</td>
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How to Set Personal Boundaries

DEFINE
Identify desired boundary

COMMUNICATE
Say what you need

STAY SIMPLE
Don’t overexplain

SET CONSEQUENCES
Say why it’s important
Remember ...

Guilt will likely come up.

Boundaries often need to be reinforced.

Boundaries can come from a place of compassion and gentleness.
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