KESTON SCHOOL

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# Healthy Boundaries

*Say no without guilt and protect your time, energy and relationships*

CHAPTER 1 + WORKBOOK SECTION

BEFORE YOU START

# How to use this book

By the last page you will know where your limits are, how to state them in one or two sentences, and how to hold them calmly when people push back.

1. Read one chapter at a time. Each one gives you a single idea and a single action.
2. Open the Healthy Boundaries Workbook and complete the matching section while the chapter is fresh.
3. Do the “Try this” action within seven days. Reading changes what you know; the action changes what you do.
4. Finish with the checklist in chapter 12 and come back to it whenever you slip.

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CHAPTER 1

# The Yes That Costs You

*Most people do not decide to overcommit. They say yes on autopilot, and this chapter helps you catch the moment it happens.*

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It is Thursday afternoon. A coworker leans over your desk and asks if you could "quickly" look over their slides before tomorrow. You already have two deadlines. You know exactly how this evening will go if you agree. And yet, before you have finished thinking any of that, you hear yourself say, "Sure, no problem."

Later that night, eating dinner in front of the laptop, you feel the familiar mix: tired, a little proud of being helpful, and quietly furious. Not at your coworker. At yourself. Again.

If this sounds like you, you are not weak and you are not a pushover. You are someone who has learned that saying yes keeps things smooth. That skill has probably served you well. It has made you liked, trusted and useful. The trouble starts when yes stops being a choice and becomes a reflex.

## The automatic yes

Most overcommitment does not come from big, considered decisions. It comes from tiny moments where yes comes out before thought arrives. Someone asks, there is a small pause, and your mouth fills the silence with agreement.

You can spot an automatic yes by three signs:

1. **Speed.** You answered in under two seconds, without checking your calendar, your energy or your priorities.
2. **The sinking feeling.** A moment after saying yes, something in your stomach drops.
3. **The story you tell afterward.** "It is only an hour." "They really needed it." "It would have been awkward to refuse."

None of these mean that saying yes was wrong. Sometimes you will want to help, and that is a good thing. The goal of this book is not to turn you into someone who says no to everything. It is to make sure that every yes you give is one you actually chose.

## What a boundary actually is

The word “boundary” gets used a lot, and often in ways that sound harsh or cold. In this book, a boundary is simply this: **a clear line between what you are willing to do and what you are not, said out loud when it matters.**

A boundary is not a wall. It does not mean shutting people out or refusing to compromise. It is closer to a fence with a gate. People can still come in. They just cannot walk through your garden whenever they like and trample everything on the way.

Boundaries also are not rules you impose on other people. You cannot make your mother stop commenting on your weight or make your boss stop sending emails at night. You can decide what you will do in response: change the subject, end the call, reply in the morning. That shift, from controlling others to choosing your own actions, is the foundation of everything that follows.

> **Key idea:** A boundary describes what you will do, not what other people must do. That is why it works even when they do not cooperate.

## The many shapes of a missing boundary

Missing boundaries do not always look like saying yes to favors. They show up in many forms:

- Answering work messages at 10 p.m. because “it only takes a second.”
- Lending money you cannot really spare because saying no feels mean.
- Listening to a friend vent for an hour every evening while your own needs wait.
- Letting a family member make decisions about your life “for your own good.”
- Staying on a call, at a party or in a conversation long after you wanted to leave.
- Laughing along at a joke that bothers you because objecting would make it a thing.

Each one is small. Together they add up to a life that is shaped mostly by other people’s requests, with your own priorities squeezed into whatever is left.

## Resentment is your alarm

One of the most useful signals you have is resentment. When you notice that slow, simmering irritation toward someone, it is often not because they did something terrible. It is because you agreed to something you did not want, and part of you is keeping score.

Resentment is not a character flaw. It is information. It points almost directly at the place where a boundary is missing. Instead of pushing it away or feeling guilty for it, start treating it as an alarm: something here needs a clearer line.

## Why this matters now

People-pleasing tends to get worse under pressure. When life is busy, the automatic yes becomes even faster, because thinking takes energy you do not have. That is exactly when it costs the most: you take on more at the moment you can least afford it.

The good news is that boundaries are a learnable skill, not a personality type. You do not need to become tougher or colder. You need a few tools, a bit of practice in low-stakes situations, and a clearer picture of your own limits. That is what the next eleven chapters give you.

## Try this

For the next seven days, keep a “Yes Log.” Every time you agree to something, whether a favor, a meeting, an invitation or an extra task, write it down. Next to each one, add two quick notes:

1. Was it a real yes or an automatic yes? (Did you actually think about it first?)
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much resentment did you feel afterward?

Do not try to change anything yet. Just count. At the end of the week, look at the log and circle the three yeses that cost you the most. Those are the boundaries you will work on as you go through this book.

In the next chapter, we look at why saying no can feel so surprisingly dangerous, even when the request is small.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- An automatic yes is a decision made before you have thought about it.
- Resentment is the most reliable sign that a boundary is missing.
- You cannot fix a pattern you have not noticed, so start by counting.

→ Workbook, section 1

# 01 The Yes That Costs You

*Count your yeses for seven days before you try to change anything.*

FILL IN

## My Yes Log

| What I agreed to | Real or automatic? | Resentment 1-10 |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**The three yeses that cost me the most this week:**

**Where do I feel resentment most often, and toward whom?**

YOUR NEXT STEP

# Want the whole book?

You just read chapter 1 of Healthy Boundaries and tried the first workbook section. The full e-book has 12 chapters, a complete workbook and a final checklist. Here is everything inside:


**01** The Yes That Costs You

**02** Why Saying No Feels Dangerous

**03** What Weak Boundaries Cost

**04** Know Your Limits First

**05** The Two-Sentence Boundary

**06** The Pause Before Yes

**07** Holding the Line

**08** Boundaries in Real Life

**09** When They Push Back

**10** Defaults That Protect You

**11** Respect That Grows

**12** Mistakes & Checklist


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