

Stress Reduction Strategy: Setting Strong Boundaries for the Holiday Season

The holiday season, while joyous, often brings along a whirlwind of demands and commitments. Balancing expectations and personal obligations during this time can be overwhelming and impact mental health and overall well-being. If you're feeling the holiday stress, learning to set stronger boundaries for yourself can help alleviate this.

Embracing Healthy Boundaries:

Dr. Brené Brown, a respected research professor at the University of Houston, defines healthy boundaries as “personal guidelines determining acceptable behaviour”. These boundaries reflect an individual's needs for stability and security.

Understanding and adhering to these boundaries is crucial to maintaining our overall sense of stability and avoiding emotional strain. However, setting boundaries can be difficult because of external influences. When our boundaries are poorly managed, it can lead to burnout or resentment in relationships.

The Benefits of Firm Boundaries:

1. Enhanced Health and Relationships: Clear boundaries not only prioritize your self-care, but also set a solid foundation for all relationships. Recognizing and respecting your personal limits will not only foster mutual understanding but also enhance your trust and satisfaction within relationships.

2. Boosted Self-Confidence: Setting firm boundaries communicates self-respect. It shows a willingness to prioritize personal needs and cultivates decision-making skills and assertiveness, ultimately enhancing your autonomy and confidence.

4 Tips for Boundary Setting:

1. Know Your Limits:

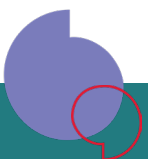
Understanding your personal limits helps you understand whether a situation positively or negatively impacts your well-being and if it is something you need to communicate to others.

Perhaps your manager or employer is unexpectedly assigning more work than usual for year-end. If you believe this exceeds your current workload capacity, it is healthy and reasonable to speak up about it.

Communicating this can help strategize workload distribution and prevent overwhelm, which can increase productivity for the team and yourself overall.

2. Prepare to Assert Yourself:

Effective boundary-setting sometimes demands speaking up. Articulating boundaries can open up opportunities for fostering mutual understanding, preserving mental well-being, and working towards alternative solutions that may be more effective.



However, it is important to assess the situation to determine whether speaking up is appropriate. For example, it may be more acceptable to communicate boundaries with friends and family compared to colleagues at the workplace, as the expectations and responsibilities in these relationships are different. Thinking critically about your specific situation will make boundary-setting much more successful.

3. Communicate Directly and Respectfully:

Some techniques can communicate boundaries better than others. Using “I” statements while expressing boundaries promotes respectful communication. The key is to be respectful and refrain from blame.

A simple structure to say this could be:



*“I feel (emotion) when/about (disliked behaviour) because (how that behaviour affects you).
Do you think we can (desired solution for your boundary)?”*

Being direct and clear about how certain behaviours negatively affect you and proposing a solution will help maintain harmony and balance in relationships.

If you have trouble speaking up, know that feeling anxious and uncomfortable is a completely normal response. To feel more confident communicating your concerns, try: 1. Writing out your anxious thoughts; 2. Taking five deep belly breaths; 3. Speaking with a trusted confidant first to get a second opinion.

4. Embrace Saying “No”:

It’s acceptable—and often necessary—to decline when you feel your limits are being pushed.

Generally, it is more acceptable to say “no” to friends and family, while professional relationships may not be as flexible. It can still be important to set boundaries at work to express your concerns and gain understanding, but external pressures can make it more difficult for these relationships to be open to alternate solutions.

Remember, setting healthy boundaries isn’t selfish, but essential for personal well-being and work-life balance. Although communicating these effectively can be difficult, it is an important aspect to fostering healthier relationships, increasing your productivity, and enabling a more fulfilling holiday season.

