

WORKBOOK

# CODEPENDENCY & BOUNDARIES IN RELATIONSHIPS



*Terri Cole*



Terri Cole is a licensed psychotherapist, global relationship and empowerment expert, and the author of ***Boundary Boss-The Essential Guide to Talk True, Be Seen and (Finally) Live Free.***

For over two decades, Terri has worked with a diverse group of clients that includes everyone from stay-at-home moms to celebrities and Fortune 500 CEOs.

She has a gift for making complex psychological concepts accessible and actionable so that **clients and students** achieve sustainable change.

She inspires over 250,000 people weekly through her blog, social media platform, signature courses, and her popular podcast, **The Terri Cole Show**. For more information go to **terricole.com**.

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- Boundary Meditation
- Simplify & Do Less Guide
- The Simplify & Do Less With Boundaries guide will help you identify where in your life you are expending additional time and energy doing for others and give you tips, scripts, and strategies to bring more balance into your life and relationships.

## **Codependency & Boundaries**

Codependency isn't just limited to romantic relationships. Codependent behaviors and patterns can happen in friendships, sibling, and parent/child relationships — even with colleagues and coworkers.

Codependency is a dysfunctional boundary pattern where you are overly invested in the feeling states, decisions, and outcomes of other people to the detriment of your own internal peace or emotional, physical, or financial wellbeing.

There is an urgency to help, fix or correct the other person's situation. This can feel like an honest desire to be of service or help reduce another person's suffering but if you can't NOT do it - your behavior falls into the category of codependency. And it's exhausting! Having healthy boundaries means taking care of yourself first and taking care of the people you love in an appropriate and mutual way.

You can make different choices that support YOU, your mental, physical, and emotional health, and still be a deeply caring, loving person, partner, and friend.

## **The Disease to Please**

For so many of us, we are raised to be nice above all else.

Sacrificing what we want and need for others is, in many cultures, held up as a virtue. Frankly, that's bullshit. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with being nice. But there is a critical difference between being genuinely nice and people-pleasing.

Are your actions driven by love and your generous heart? Beautiful. Keep it up.

But if you're overgiving, over-functioning, or finding it difficult to say no because you don't want to create conflict or disappoint someone...that's a different story. Dr. Harriet Braiker, whom I deeply respect and whose work heavily influenced my work on codependency, used the term the Disease to Please to describe compulsive people-pleasing behavior and she found that it is actually a "self-defense camouflage" that can have far-reaching emotional consequences.<sup>1</sup>

**So how do you know if you have the Disease to Please? Ask yourself the following Q's:**

- Do you say "yes" when you really want to say "no"?
- Do you apologize often – not only when you're not sorry, but also when you're angry?
- Do you avoid confrontation at all costs?
- Do you put everyone else's needs above your own?

To raise your awareness - I invite you to take 24 hours and write down every time you do one of the items above.

While it might not seem like a big deal, it is.

Here's why: if you are always deferring or acquiescing to others and putting their wants, needs, and preferences first, you're not really being honest.

If you're making decisions based on fear and what you think other people want from you, you're not representing your true self.

Think about it: if you say yes when you want to say no and hold back your own feelings, the people in your life can't ever authentically know you. You are basically giving them faulty or corrupted information about who you are and what you want in life.

How can anyone authentically love you if they don't authentically know you?

Because of this, those who suffer from the Disease to Please can often end up exhausted, burnt out, and eventually resentful and bitter. It can be incredibly painful and isolating to wake up one day and realize that no one actually knows the real you.

## Overfunctioning

Have you ever been in a relationship (romantic or platonic) where you regularly did more than your share of the work and they regularly did less than theirs (under-functioned)? Or did it start out more balanced and then developed into an over/under-functioning dynamic?

This type of behavior is a form of codependency and it's exhausting. The first step to changing it is to recognize it.

Check out a few over-functioning characteristics below and assess your own behavior to see if this might sound like you.

## Over-functioning Behaviors:

- Being overly focused on actively solving another person's problem. Frequently giving unsolicited advice.
- Doing things that are part of another person's responsibilities.
- Feeling like the weight of the world is on your shoulders (if you don't get it done, even if it's not yours to do, no one will!)
- Feeling exhausted from doing too much.
- Feeling underappreciated and resentful from doing too much.
- The thought of stopping over-functioning for loved ones creates anxiety and a sense of being out of control.

### **Raise Your Awareness with an Over-Functioning Inventory**

1. Name the individual for whom you over-function.
2. Name exactly what you do that is not your responsibility.
3. Name the benefit you believe YOU receive from this behavior.
4. Name what you think would happen if you decided to stop.

Raising your awareness is the first step to combatting overfunctioning. Once you see where you are doing it, you can begin to make small changes to stop.

## Stop the Auto-Yes

You don't owe anyone an immediate response, so when someone asks something of you, take pause. If you can just stop automatically saying yes to things that you really don't want to do, you are stopping the process and creating space to breathe. There are some easy ways and some easy language to use to interrupt this behavior.

- ***“Thank you, I’ll have to check my calendar.”***
- ***“I will need to sleep on that. For my sanity, I’ve implemented a 24-hour decision-making policy.”***
- ***“I want to check with my partner (or sister, roommate, friend, etc.) before committing.”***
- ***“I will need to get back to you on that but thank you for thinking of me.”***

Just planting it in your mind that you don't owe anyone an auto-yes can save you because the more things you do that you don't want to be doing, the more resentful you become.

## Learn How to Say No

Understanding that you have a right to set boundaries and say no is key to being successful at this. Boundaries are not to punish other people, boundaries are to protect your energy, your health, your emotional safety, and your relationships. When you don't protect it, or tell the truth about how you feel, you end up angry and resentful.

Directly saying no and drawing a boundary isn't just protecting you, but it's also allowing people to know you.

Examples of how to say no:

- ***“I can’t make it on Wednesday but hope you have an amazing time!”***
- ***“I’m sorry. I don’t have the bandwidth to help with your project right now.”***
- ***“I have decided to keep my Sundays open for family/volunteer/solo time so I will have to say no but appreciate you thinking of me.”***
- ***“Thank you for thinking of me but I won’t be able to make the party.”***
- ***“Gotta say NO to dinner at 11 but I’m always a YES to you, my friend. Let’s have brunch next weekend.”***

The more honest you are about what you like and don’t like and what you prefer, the less you will do a bunch of crap that you don’t want to do, and the better your relationships and self-esteem will be.

## **Helpful Tips**

Start setting simple, but firm boundaries with a graceful or neutral tone.

Be sure to vent out any anger with a pal, a therapist, or journaling before you approach the conversation.

Be simple and direct in your language and remember you do not need to convince anyone of anything. Avoid being defensive or aggressive.

It’s OK if someone doesn’t like what you decide (since it’s your life.)



### **Practice Saying No**

To help you get comfortable using new boundary language, practice saying different phrases from above in the mirror.

Then you can practice with a pal and then start to employ your version of the phrases when needed, working from lower priority people to higher priority.

**THE MORE YOU DO IT - THE EASIER IT BECOMES!**





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