

— A BOUNDARIES
TOOLKIT FOR —

messy reality

Your Companion Workbook



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Introduction

Welcome to a bite-size opportunity to reflect and experiment in real life. Life is messy. Humans are messy. Boundaries can be messy too.

Pick one question or exercise and start there. You don't need to complete everything, and you definitely don't need perfect answers.

The goal isn't to get it right. It's to get curious.

There are no gold stars for finishing every page. A few words that genuinely matter to you are enough. You can work through in order or dip in and revisit as needed.

Part 1: Start With You

Based on Chapter 10 – Start with You: Self Boundaries

What Matters Most to You?

When we're caught in the daily rush or constantly responding to other people's needs, it's easy to lose sight of our internal compass. Boundaries aren't just about saying no. They're about knowing what matters enough to say yes to.

Already completed the Core Values exercise in Chapter 10?

Write your current top three below.

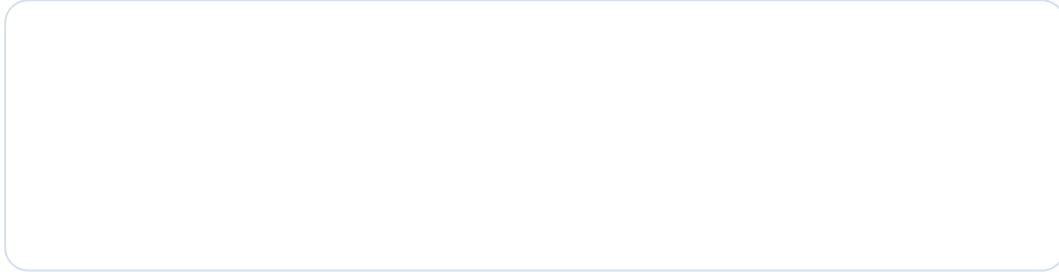
My Core Three Values

Keep it honest, not impressive. This is a snapshot, not a life sentence.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

When something feels off, ask yourself:

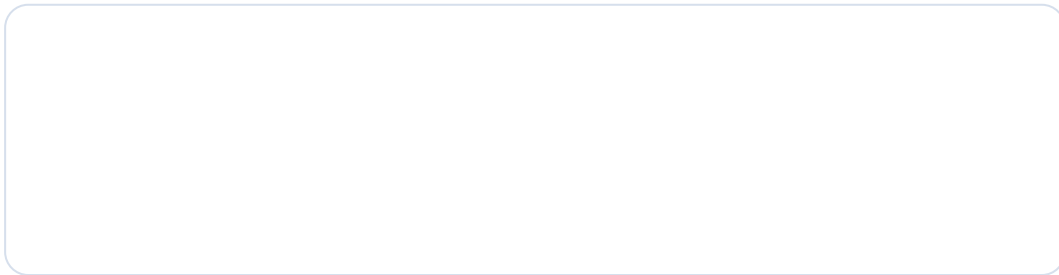
Which value am I standing by, or what matters most to me right now?



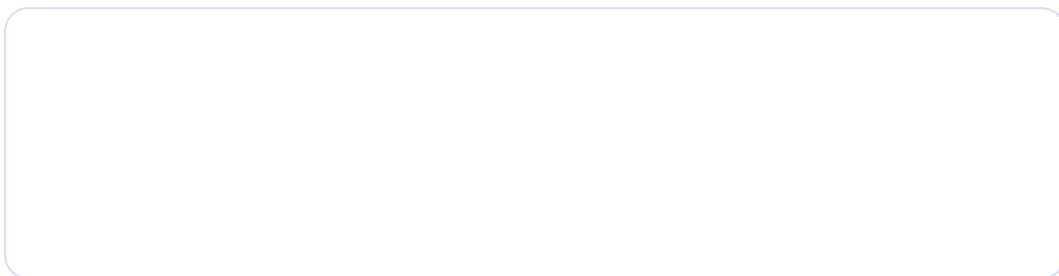
New to the exercise? Use the questions below to help you explore.

Reflect

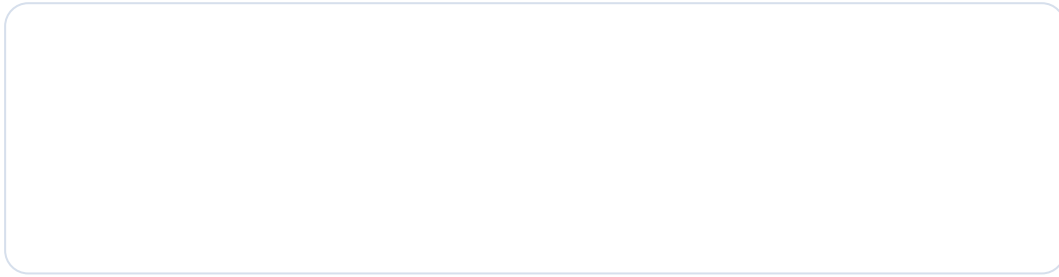
When have I felt most proud or fulfilled?



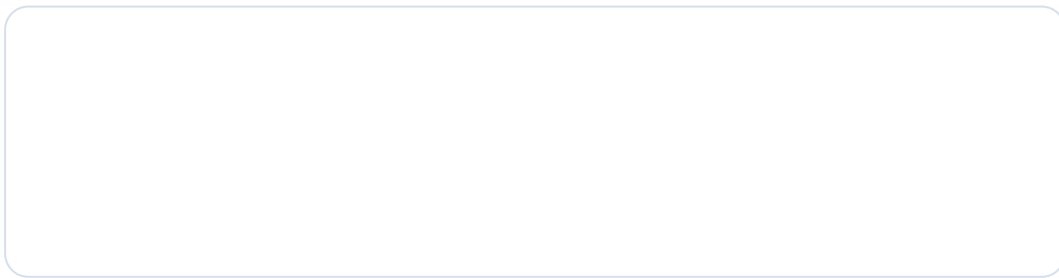
What value might I have been honouring?



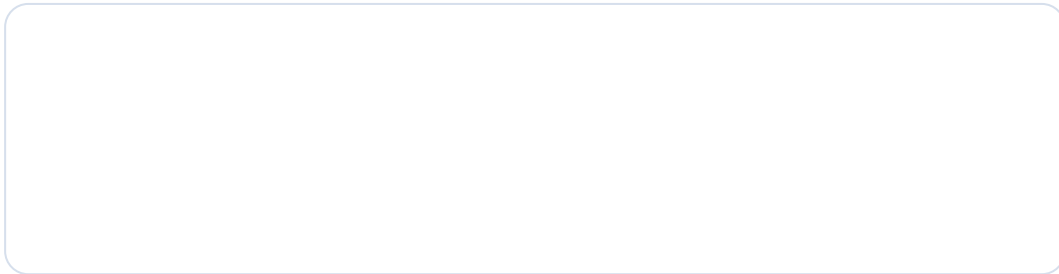
What tends to irritate me?

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for the user to write their response to the question above.

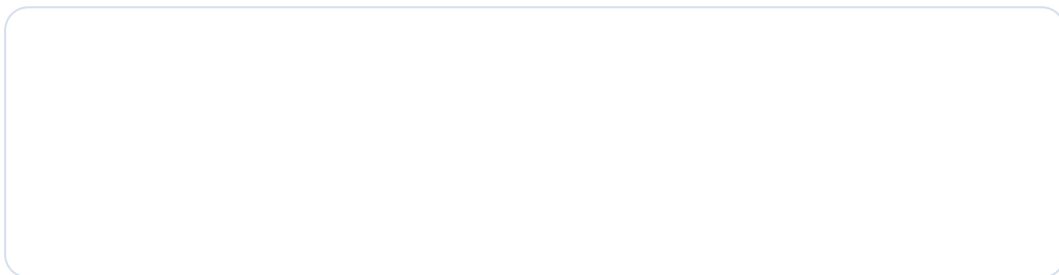
What value might sit underneath that reaction?

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for the user to write their response to the question above.

What do I want more of in my life?

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for the user to write their response to the question above.

Are there any values I'm living that belong to someone else?

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for the user to write their response to the question above.

Friend or Foe?

Knowing what matters is one thing. The next challenge is noticing what happens inside your head when life gets messy.

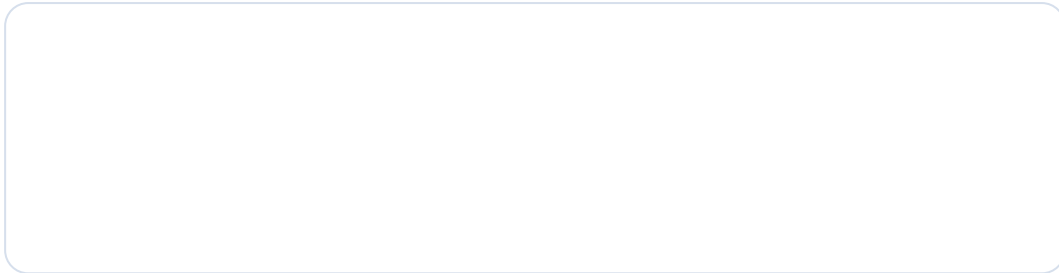
If you have a running commentary going on throughout the day, ask yourself:

Would I talk to a friend like that?

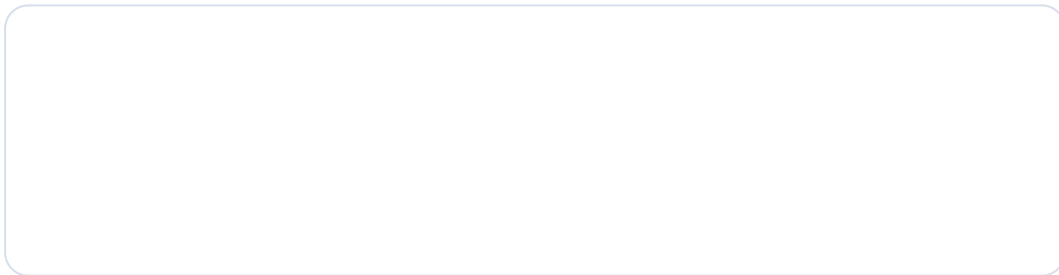
Is it time for an upgrade?

Try a different track

When something goes wrong, what does your inner voice tend to say?



How does that leave you feeling?



The goal isn't to stop thoughts, it's to notice them

Change the Record

This isn't about pretending everything is fine or forcing positive thinking.

It's about finding something kinder, more helpful, and realistic enough to believe.

For example:

From: "You idiot!" **To:** "Oops, classic." Or:

From: "I messed up. I'm such a failure." **To:** "Okay, what can I learn from that?"

What phrase could you use instead?

Have a phrase to match your personality and humour. Whether you call it a mantra, affirmation, power phrase, or something else entirely, keep it memorable enough to stick.

Third person helps too: "Right Emma, you've got this."

Pause and Perspective

What are my strengths?

Where am I getting in my own way?

What's one tiny thing I could do consistently that would help me feel less jaded or more valued?

For now, simply noticing your patterns might be enough. That takes courage.

Part 2: Focus Your Energy

What's Actually Yours to Carry?

Life pulls at our attention from every direction: work demands, family worries, headlines, group chats, unfinished tasks, and the judgy voice in our own head.

It's easy to end up carrying things that were never really ours to carry.

A simple reminder:

Focus your energy on what you can influence and loosen your grip on what you can't.

You don't have to solve everything. Just notice where your attention is going.

Your Stress Container Check-In

Based on Chapter 12 – Work-Life Messy Management

Picture your stress container – maybe one of those iconic glass drink dispensers with a metal tap.

Some things increase pressure.

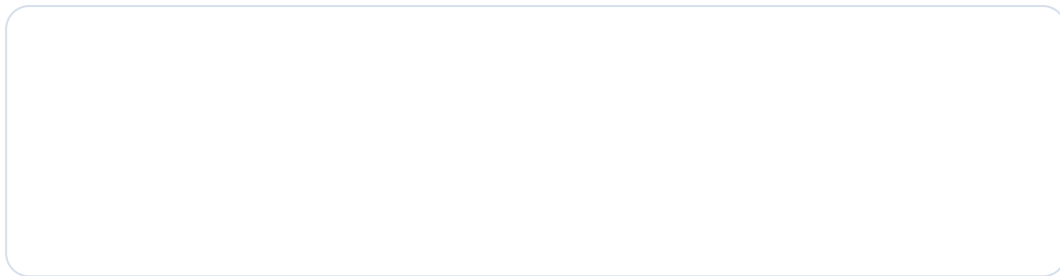
Some things help release it.

Stress flowing in

What's currently filling your container?

Big or small. Serious or seemingly silly.

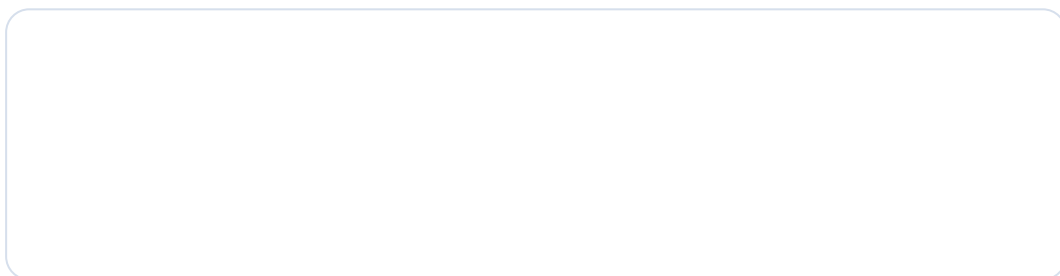
Write down whatever comes to mind.



Opening the tap

What genuinely helps release pressure for you?

Think about things that leave you feeling more grounded, connected, rested, or clear-headed.

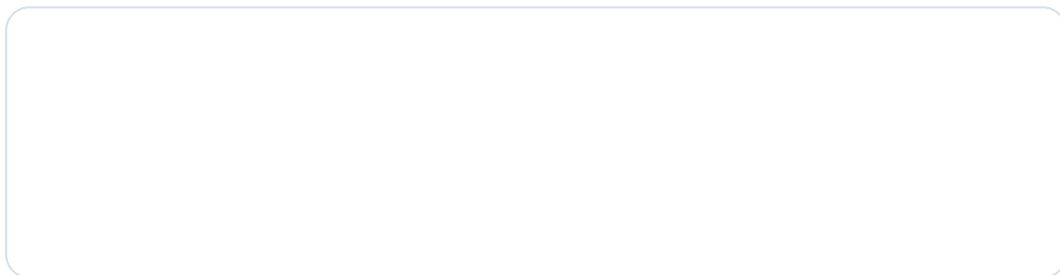


Blocking the tap

Sometimes we reach for things that bring relief in the moment but leave us feeling worse afterwards.

What tends to block your tap? What's blocking it right now?

These might look like doom-scrolling, avoiding difficult conversations, excessive checking, or anything that leaves you feeling more drained than restored.

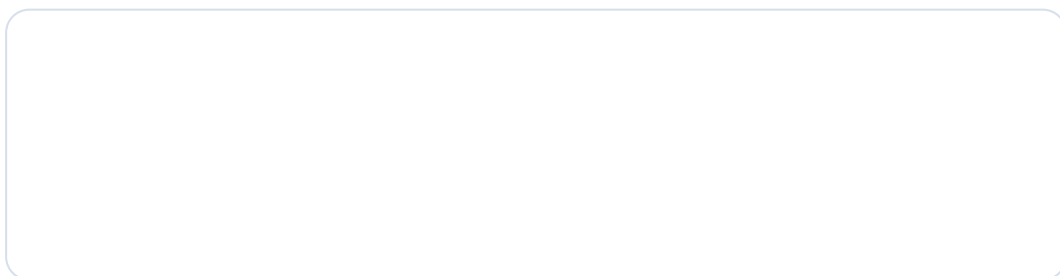


Reality check

When your container feels full:

What tends to happen?

What's your stress signature e.g. tight jaw and head, getting snappy...



What's In My Control?

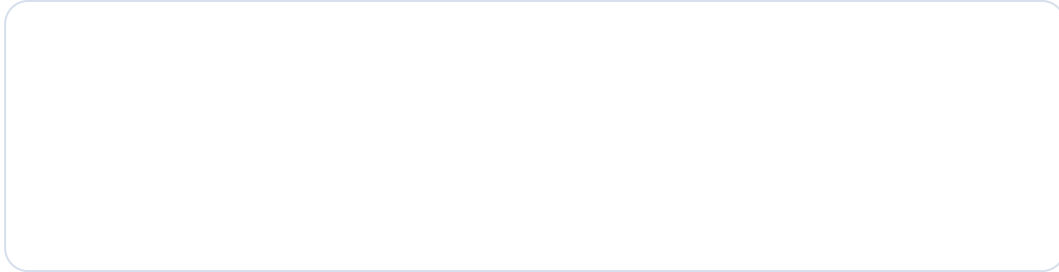
Based on Chapter 11 – What's Really Yours to Change?

Look at what's filling your container and how it's showing up.

Now sort through it gently.

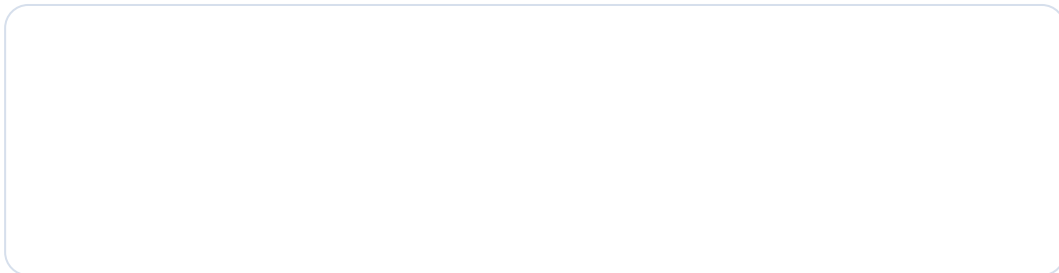
Things outside my control

Things I care about but cannot directly change.



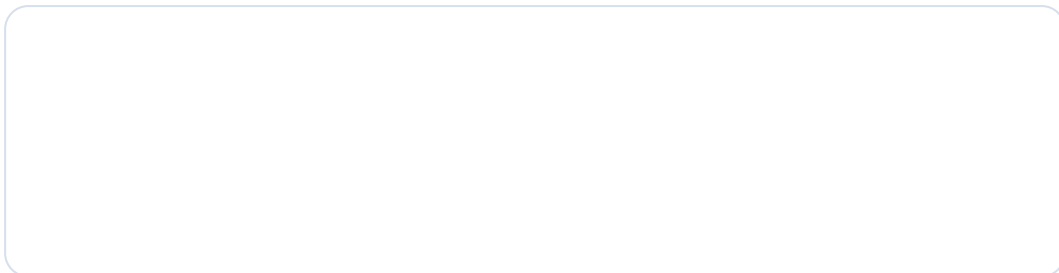
Things I can influence or control

My actions, responses, choices, and next steps.



Reflection

Where might I be clinging to control I don't have?



Small Experiment

Sometimes opening the tap isn't about doing more.

It's about doing less. Or saying no.

Choose one small experiment for this week:

- ☐ Say no to something that doesn't fit my priorities.
- ☐ Ask for help.
- ☐ Let someone solve their own problem.
- ☐ Leave a message until I'm ready to respond properly.
- ☐ Create my own experiment:

What happened after the experiment? What did I learn, even if it didn't work out?

Key takeaway

Messy Reality Reminder

Letting go of what's outside your control doesn't mean you don't care.

It means you're protecting your energy so you can show up where it counts.

Part 3: What's On Repeat?

Based on Chapter 13 – Tools for Typical Tendencies

We all have familiar patterns we drift into when life gets messy. You might recognise several. That's normal.

If you've read Chapter 13, you'll recognise the habit loop:

Cue → Behaviour → Reward.

The questions below help you spot yours.

Which tendency feels loudest right now?

- ☐ Anxious Worrier (including What-If Thinker)
- ☐ Impostor-Perfector (including Never-Enough)
- ☐ Fiercely Independent (including Cautious Connector)
- ☐ Micromanager (including Over-Functioner and Fixer)
- ☐ Peacemaker (including Conflict Avoider)
- ☐ People-Pleaser (including Over-Giver, Rescuer and Serial Yesser)
- ☐ Digitally Distracted (including Doom-Scroller)
- ☐ Something else:

What's On Repeat?

This step matters: whether you rush ahead or linger, stay curious.

What situation tends to trigger this pattern?

How does it tend to play out?

How is this pattern trying to help or protect you?

What's the short-term 'reward'?

Your Bigger Better Offer – this is your 'why' to change

The goal isn't to get rid of the pattern. It's to notice it and experiment with something more helpful.

What could be your **Bigger Better Offer (BBO)**?

- A phrase.
- A reminder.
- A different action.

- A more helpful coping strategy.

Something that helps you move forward rather than getting stuck in the loop.

One Small Experiment

What's one thing to try this week?

Key takeaway

Messy Reality Reminder

Long-term change isn't built on willpower alone.

Noticing is the first step.

Curiosity is enough for now.

Inspired by Dr Judson Brewer's work on reward-based learning and habit loops. His book *Unwinding Anxiety* is well worth your time.

And if things feel bigger than what a small experiment can manage, talking to someone you trust is always an option.

Part 4: Putting Boundaries into Practice

Adapted from Chapter 14 – Boundaries in Action Checklist

Setting a boundary is one thing. Holding it consistently and kindly, without the TED Talk explanation, is where the learning happens.

Messy reality is easier to navigate with low-stakes situations before tackling the bigger ones.

Step 1: Pick one area to address

Pick one situation, relationship, or habit you'd like to work on.

Start small.

Step 2: Do a Messy Reality Check

With the emotional volume turned down:

What's within your control?

Is there anything you could loosen your grip on?

Notice any familiar tendencies that might be showing up.

Step 3: Set Your Boundary Thoughtfully

Before deciding what to do, ask yourself:

What matters most here?

Which values, priorities or needs am I trying to protect?

Draft a way to start the conversation or challenge your self-talk.

Writing often improves clarity and confidence.

Full permission not to over-plan.

Step 4: Communicate Your Boundary Clearly

Express what you need simply and without over-explaining.

A boundary is about what you will do, not what you're demanding someone else do.

Sometimes that's communicated directly.

Sometimes it's a quiet decision you hold privately, especially if you've already been clear.

What might that look like here?

Step 5: Be Consistent and Compassionate

Allow time for yourself and others to adjust.

Apply the **Goldilocks Principle**. Am I being:

- Too rigid?
- Too flexible?
- Or just right?

Remember:

An honest no is more respectful than a resentful yes.

Acknowledge both your messy reality and theirs - without getting caught up in it.

Step 6: Reflect and Adjust

How did it go?

What worked?

What would you do differently next time?

Helpful reminders

- Every yes is a no to something else.
- Clarity and consistency beats over-explaining.
- Practise makes progress.
- Small experiments count.
- A boundaries buddy helps

Part 5: My Wobble Emergency Kit

Inspired by Chapter 16 – Navigating the Bumpy Road

Call this anything you like: Back Pocket Toolkit, In Case of Overwhelm Kit... anything that makes you smile.

My Anchor

When life gets messy, what matters most?

Which values, priorities or needs help guide me back to myself?

My Kinder Script

What do I want to remember when unhelpful patterns show up? Like guilt doesn't mean I've done something wrong.

What Helps Open My Tap?

What genuinely helps release pressure and supports me?

My Minimum Viable Action (MVA)

When everything feels too much, what's one small thing I can do? Something as simple as standing up, opening a window, or making a drink.

Remember: choose one easy thing.

Key takeaway**Messy Reality Reminder**

Whatever your messy journey looks like, I hope you've found something worth trying.

Small experiments often teach us more than grand plans.

If things wobble? That's the reality part.

Remember what matters. And you don't have to do this alone.

You can always make a cuppa and try again.

Emma

A gentle reminder: If the tough stuff is lasting longer, hitting harder, or disrupting daily life, consider talking to someone you trust.

Want to keep exploring?

For additional resources, articles, and updates, visit:

www.emmasaccomani.com

You can also find details of my book *A Boundaries Toolkit for Messy Reality* and other support materials there.