TOOL 04

THE BOUNDARY CHECK

A practical exercise for recognising limits, making conscious choices and identifying the support needed to work sustainably.



REFUGEE YOUTH SERVICE
LEARNING HUB

PART OF THE LEARNING HUB

This Tool is part of the Refugee Youth Service Learning Hub, which brings together Insights, Practice Guides and Tools built from ten years of working alongside displaced children and young people.

Our Tools draw on experiences from frontline practice. They help individuals and teams explore difficult questions, think through their responsibilities and make more considered decisions, particularly when there are no straightforward answers.



COMPANION READING · INSIGHT 02

Beyond Personal Sacrifice

We recommend first reading Beyond Personal Sacrifice. It explores the pull towards personal sacrifice in caring work, why it happens, when it can be necessary, where it can become harmful, and what helps us find a more sustainable way forward.



BEFORE YOU START



This Tool will help you pause, reflect and make decisions about your work, so you can set and maintain healthy boundaries.

It is designed for anyone in a supportive or caring role, and can be used on your own or in a supervision session with a colleague or manager.

A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



This Tool focuses on individual decisions, but healthy boundaries cannot be maintained through individual choices alone.

Organisations must create realistic expectations, provide appropriate support, and respond when people identify limits that cannot be managed individually. A supportive working environment makes it easier for everyone to set and maintain healthy boundaries.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

The Tool guides you through three simple steps. You can work through these in order, or focus on the step that feels most relevant right now.

1 RECOGNISE THE PRESSURE



Explore what is being asked of you, where the pressure comes from and how it is affecting you.

2 CHECK WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE



Consider whether it is realistic for you to take this on, looking at necessity, willingness, capacity and support.

3 PUT YOUR DECISION INTO PRACTICE



Decide what to do and identify the practical steps needed to follow through, including who to involve and when to review.

STEP 1
RECOGNISE THE PRESSURE

The first step is to notice what is being asked of you and how it is affecting you. Caring and support work can bring real pressure, especially when people are facing difficult circumstances, when resources are limited or when you feel a strong personal connection. Taking time to pause and be honest about what you are feeling, thinking and experiencing can help you see the situation more clearly.

COMMON SOURCES OF PRESSURE

Pressure can show up in different ways, including:

Increased workload
Being asked to take on additional tasks when you are already busy.

Responsibility
Feeling responsible for someone's wellbeing outside of your role.

Emotional impact
Feeling emotionally affected by people's stories or situations.

Limited resources
Trying to do more with less time, staff, funding or support.

Personal connection
Feeling a strong personal connection with someone you support.

Unclear expectations
Not knowing what is expected of you or feeling pulled in different directions.

HOW PRESSURE CAN SHOW UP

Pressure can affect you in different ways. You might notice:



Constantly thinking about work during personal time.



Feeling exhausted or drained.



Feeling anxious, stressed or on edge.



Finding it hard to make decisions.



Feeling guilty when you set a limit or say no.



Not having time for other responsibilities or your own wellbeing.



PAUSE AND REFLECT

Pressure is a normal part of caring and support work. Noticing and understanding it is the first step towards making conscious choices about what is realistic and sustainable.

STEP 1
YOUR REFLECTION

Use the space below to reflect on a real situation. You might find it helpful to write freely, make notes or discuss these questions with a colleague.

1 WHAT IS BEING ASKED OF ME?



What is the request or expectation? By whom, and what does it involve?

2 HOW AM I FEELING ABOUT IT?



What are my initial thoughts, feelings or physical reactions?

3 WHAT IS DRIVING MY RESPONSE?



Is it a sense of responsibility, loyalty, fear, guilt or something else?

4 WHAT PRESSURES ARE INFLUENCING ME?



Are there time pressures, limited resources, organisational expectations or other factors?

5 WHAT MIGHT BE THE IMPACT ON ME?



How might this affect my time, energy, wellbeing and other responsibilities?

6 WHAT MIGHT BE THE IMPACT ON OTHERS?



How might this affect the person receiving support, my colleagues, the organisation or my wider relationships?

STEP 2
CHECK WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE

Now that you have identified what is being asked of you and how it is affecting you, the next step is to consider whether it is realistic and sustainable for you to take this on. Use the questions below to reflect on the different aspects of the situation. There is no right or wrong answer - this is about being honest with yourself so you can make an informed decision.

1 NECESSARY



Does this really need to happen? Does it need to be me? Could it be done differently, by someone else, or at a different time?

2 WILLINGNESS



Am I genuinely choosing this? Or do I feel pressure, guilt or an obligation to say yes? What would happen if I said no?

3 CAPACITY



Do I have the time, energy and emotional capacity to take this on without compromising my wellbeing or other responsibilities?

4 SUPPORT



What would need to be in place to make this safe and sustainable? Do I need support, clearer information, more time, or additional resources?

BASED ON WHAT I HAVE CONSIDERED, THIS FEELS:

- ○ Sustainable as it stands
- ○ Sustainable with changes or support
- ○ Not sustainable in its current form
- ○ I'm unsure

STEP 3
PUT YOUR DECISION INTO PRACTICE

If you've decided to take this on, take it on with changes, or not take it on, this final step will help you put that decision into practice. Use the questions below to identify what needs to happen next, who needs to be involved and when you should review your decision.

If you're still unsure, your next step might be to seek advice, discuss the situation with a colleague or supervisor, or ask for a decision from someone with the appropriate responsibility. You can return to this exercise once you have more clarity.

1 WHAT HAVE I DECIDED?



Record your decision and a brief note on why you've made it.

2 WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NEXT?



What practical steps are needed to put your decision into practice? This might mean arranging support, communicating a boundary or handing something over.

3 WHO NEEDS TO BE INVOLVED?



Who needs to know about your decision, agree to any changes or take responsibility for something?

4 DO I NEED TO REVIEW THIS?



Is this a decision you need to revisit? If so, when and with whom?
It can be helpful to set a date to check in, especially if the situation might change.

TAKING CARE GOES BOTH WAYS



Caring and support work can sometimes ask a great deal of us. Recognising our limits isn't about caring less, but about making thoughtful decisions that allow us to continue supporting others without compromising our own wellbeing.

Throughout this Tool, we've explored the pressures that can influence our decisions, considered what is realistic and sustainable, and looked at how to put those decisions into practice. The three steps below summarise this process and provide a reminder of how to approach similar decisions in the future.

1. **RECOGNISE THE PRESSURE** — Notice what is being asked of you, where the pressure comes from and how it is affecting you.
2. **CHECK WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE** — Consider necessity, willingness, capacity and support, and decide whether to proceed, proceed with changes, not take it on, or discuss it further.
3. **PUT YOUR DECISION INTO PRACTICE** — Identify what needs to happen next, who needs to be involved and when to review your decision.

BOUNDARIES CAN AND SHOULD EVOLVE OVER TIME

Our boundaries are not fixed. What feels reasonable and sustainable can change depending on our circumstances, capacity, experience and the support available. Something that feels beyond our limits today may become manageable in the future, just as something we once comfortably took on may no longer be sustainable.

Recognising these changes is not a sign of inconsistency or weakness. It is part of making thoughtful, responsible decisions about what we can reasonably take on.

Returning to this Tool as circumstances change can help us reassess our boundaries and communicate them clearly.

THANK YOU FOR READING

Continue exploring

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