

# BOUNDARIES as a Form of Care

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# Boundaries as Care

In survivor-centered work, care is both a value and a practice.

Those supporting individuals impacted by domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking often carry that care in unseen ways, navigating complexity, imperfection, and emotional demand. Over time, carrying care in this way can blur the line between dedication and depletion, especially in work that asks so much of the heart.

This is when boundaries become a form of self-care. Boundaries are sometimes misunderstood as walls, limits, or moments of saying “no.” However, in survivor-serving work, boundaries are something far more generous:

They are an act of care for ourselves, for our colleagues, and for the people we support.

## Why Boundaries Matter in Survivor-Centered Work

Supporting survivors requires deep compassion, presence, and emotional labor. It also requires clarity, consistency, and sustainability. Without boundaries, even the most dedicated advocates can find themselves stretched beyond what is healthy or ethical.

Boundaries help us:

- Preserve emotional and physical capacity

- Prevent burnout and compassion fatigue
- Maintain professional clarity and safety
- Offer survivors reliable, consistent support

Rather than diminishing care, boundaries protect it.

## Boundaries as Care for Yourself

Caring for yourself is not separate from your work. It is what makes the work possible.

Healthy boundaries acknowledge a simple truth: *You are human*. You have limits. You need rest.

Boundaries might look like:

- Ending the workday on time, even when there is more to do
- Taking scheduled breaks between emotionally heavy interactions
- Saying no to tasks that exceed your role or capacity
- Creating rituals to transition out of work and back into personal life

These practices are preventative care.

When we honor our limits, we reduce the risk of exhaustion, secondary trauma, and disengagement, and we model a healthier way of being there for our teams and our communities.

## Boundaries as Care for Survivors

Survivors benefit from boundaries, too, even when it doesn't always feel that way in the moment. Clear, compassionate boundaries:

- Create predictability and safety
- Reduce the risk of dependency or blurred roles
- Reinforce survivor autonomy and choice
- Support ethical, trauma-informed practice

When advocates hold consistent boundaries, survivors know what to expect. They experience a relationship grounded in respect rather than rescue. This reinforces the message at the heart of survivor-centered work: *You have agency, you are not alone, and you are in control of your healing.*

## Boundaries Are Not a Lack of Compassion

One of the hardest truths in this field is that compassion without boundaries can unintentionally cause harm to ourselves and to others.

Over-extending, being constantly available, or absorbing responsibility that belongs elsewhere may feel caring, but it often leads to:

- Burnout and high staff turnover
- Inconsistent service delivery
- Emotional enmeshment
- Reduced long-term support for survivors

Boundaries allow compassion to be steady, not just intense.

## Organizational Boundaries Matter Too

Boundaries are also systemic. When organizations:

- Set realistic caseload expectations
- Protect time for documentation and rest
- Use tools that reduce administrative burden
- Normalize time off and support mental health

...they send a powerful message: *Your well-being matters here.*

Sustainable systems are a form of care. They ensure that the people doing this work can continue showing up today, tomorrow, and years from now.

## Reframing Boundaries as an Ethical Practice

Boundaries are not about distancing yourself from survivors. They're about showing up fully, responsibly, and sustainably. They say:

- "I care enough to be honest."
- "I want to support you in a way that's safe and consistent."
- "This work matters too much to do it burned out."

In that sense, boundaries empower care, because they are care, practiced with intention.

## A Gentle Reminder

If you've ever struggled to hold a boundary, you're not alone. You are human in a field that asks a lot of the heart.

Start small. Be kind to yourself. And remember: protecting your capacity protects your mission.

At Vela, we understand that when caregivers are supported, survivors are too.

*Want to learn new ways to simplify your work or explore features you may not be using yet? Visit [veladirect.com](https://veladirect.com) or reach out to our team. We're always here to help.*



*Developed with input from advocates at every stage, Vela by Element 74 is a trauma-informed case management and reporting platform built specifically for domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking organizations.*

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