Keeping Well After Assertiveness and Healthy Boundaries: Guided Self-Help Programme: Staying on Track and Preventing Relapse

THE TALKING THERAPIES UK SELF-HELP SERIES



Keeping Well After Assertiveness and Healthy Boundaries: Guided Self-Help Programme: Staying on Track and Preventing Relapse

A step-2 NHS-equivalent CBT-based programme

A self-help workbook · 7 modules · about 7 weeks

TALKING THERAPIES UK

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First edition, 2026.

This workbook accompanies the Keeping Well After Assertiveness and Healthy Boundaries: Guided Self-Help Programme: Staying on Track and Preventing Relapse programme on the Talking Therapies UK self-help platform. Its text is drawn from the programme and is kept current with it: whenever the programme changes, the workbook is set again.

Revision 3. This printing was set on 10 November 2026 from the programme as it stood that day.

A note on using this workbook. It offers self-help based on established psychological approaches for difficulties of mild to moderate severity. It is not a substitute for assessment or treatment by a qualified professional and is not designed for use in a crisis. The examples in it are fictional; no real person appears in them. If you are worried about your safety, or your difficulties are getting worse, the page headed “When self-help is not enough” says where to turn.

Set in Poppins and Roboto, the Talking Therapies UK typefaces.

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How to use this workbook

This guided self-help programme builds on the skills you learned in our Assertiveness and Healthy Boundaries course, using evidence-based CBT techniques to help you stay on track and prevent relapse. It combines brief psycho-education, practical exercises and a relapse-prevention plan, all designed for delivery in a step-2 NHS setting. The programme is grounded in research showing that regular review, self-monitoring and support can sustain behavioural change. You will work through seven 30-minute modules that you can complete at home, with optional support from a therapist or peer group.

This workbook is the written form of the Keeping Well After Assertiveness and Healthy Boundaries: Guided Self-Help Programme: Staying on Track and Preventing Relapse programme on the Talking Therapies UK self-help platform. It follows the programme module by module: each part of the book is one module, and each chapter is one piece of the module's teaching, set in the order the programme presents it.

Read the chapters of a part in order, then turn to the worksheets that follow them. The worksheets are the part of the work that changes things, so give them the time they ask for and come back to them as the weeks go on. You may copy or print the worksheets for your own use, as often as you need.

Most people work through one module a week, which takes the whole programme about 7 weeks. Go at the pace that suits you: a module done properly is worth more than two done quickly.

The check-in questionnaires let you see how things are changing. Complete each one when you reach it, note the date and your total, and compare it with the last.

When self-help is not enough

- If you are in danger now, or have seriously harmed yourself, call 999 or go to your nearest accident and emergency department.
- If you need help urgently but it is not an emergency, call NHS 111 or contact your GP surgery.
- Samaritans are there day and night, every day of the year: call 116 123 free from any phone.
- If you would rather not talk, text SHOUT to 85258 for free, confidential support at any hour.
- If your difficulties are getting worse as you work through this book, or you find yourself thinking about ending your life, stop and speak to your GP or a mental health professional. A workbook can be a good start, and some difficulties need more help than a book can give.

What this workbook will help you to do

- You will recall the key principles of assertiveness and healthy boundaries, identify personal challenges you face, and understand how relapse can occur after training.
- You will list personal triggers, develop awareness of emotional cues, and create early warning signs to intervene before relapse.
- You will clarify your core values, use them to justify setting boundaries, and strengthen

motivation to maintain assertive behaviour.

- You will learn to use “I” statements, set limits, and negotiate with confidence, enhancing your communication skills in real situations.
- You will practise relaxation techniques, develop self-compassion, and maintain wellbeing to reduce the risk of relapse.
- You will set long-term goals, anticipate potential setbacks, and identify supportive resources to sustain your progress.
- You will summarise your progress, reinforce confidence, and plan next steps to ensure lasting change.

PART 1

Reviewing Your Foundations

Revisit the core concepts of assertiveness and boundaries

CHAPTER 1

Welcome to Your Relapse Prevention Programme: Reviewing Your Foundations

Welcome to the first module of Keeping Well After Assertiveness and Healthy Boundaries. This guided self-help programme is designed to help you stay on track, protect your energy, and prevent relapse after completing our core assertiveness course. Across seven manageable modules, we will use evidence-based cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) techniques to consolidate your learning, spot early warning signs of slipping back into old habits, and build a robust, personalised maintenance plan. Research shows that regular self-monitoring and proactive review are vital for sustaining behavioural change over the long term.

In this opening module, titled Reviewing Your Foundations, we will revisit the core concepts of assertiveness and healthy boundaries. By the end of this session, you will recall key principles, pinpoint the specific personal challenges that still test your resolve, and understand how setbacks happen when stress or old patterns creep back in.

A NOTE

Remember, building healthy boundaries is a practice, not a one-off event. It is completely normal to experience wobbles along the way; this programme is here to help you catch them early and respond with self-compassion.

Take your time as you work through these exercises at home. There is no rush, and every small reflection brings you closer to lasting balance and confidence.

CHAPTER 2

Welcome to Your Relapse Prevention Programme: Reviewing Your Foundations

Welcome to the first module of your guided self-help programme, 'Keeping Well After Assertiveness and Healthy Boundaries: Staying on Track and Preventing Relapse'. If you have recently completed our foundational course on assertiveness and healthy boundaries, you have already taken a significant step towards valuing your own needs, protecting your time and energy, and communicating with clarity and respect. This self-help programme is designed to bridge the gap between learning new skills in a supportive environment and living them out consistently in your day-to-day life. Over the next seven modules, we will use evidence-based cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) techniques to help you review your progress, anticipate common obstacles, refine your boundary-setting toolkit, and build a robust, personalised relapse-prevention plan. Research in psychological therapies consistently shows that behavioural change is rarely a straight line; setbacks, old habits, and environmental pressures are normal parts of the journey. What matters most is how we respond to those moments and how we maintain the foundations we have worked so hard to build.

To orientate you to the journey ahead, let us briefly look at the structure of this programme. Module 1 focuses on reviewing your foundations and understanding the mechanics of relapse in assertiveness. Modules 2 and 3 help you spot your personal triggers and decode the automatic thoughts that often trip you up before you even open your mouth. Modules 4 and 5 look at managing difficult emotional barriers, such as guilt and the fear of rejection, while fine-tuning your communication styles. Finally, Modules 6 and 7 guide you through creating your definitive relapse prevention plan and setting up ongoing self-monitoring routines. This stepped approach mirrors the support you might receive in an NHS psychological wellbeing setting, empowering you to become your own therapist as you maintain your hard-won interpersonal gains.

Let us begin by revisiting what assertiveness truly means within a CBT framework. Assertiveness is not about winning arguments, getting your own way every time, or bulldozing past the feelings of others. Instead, it sits precisely in the healthy middle ground between passivity—where you sacrifice your own needs to keep the peace—and aggressiveness—where you fight for your needs by violating the rights and boundaries of others. Assertiveness is the outward expression of self-respect and mutual respect. It is the ability to communicate your thoughts, feelings, and boundaries honestly and directly while remaining open to the perspective of the person sitting across from you. When you are assertive, you recognise a fundamental psychological truth: your needs are just as important as anyone else's, no more and no less.

Healthy boundaries are the invisible architecture that supports this balanced communication. Think of boundaries not as rigid walls designed to keep people out in cold isolation, but rather as functioning gates with a secure lock. A gate allows you to decide who and what enters your personal space, your emotional world, and your schedule, and under what conditions. Without boundaries, we often experience emotional exhaustion, resentment, burnout, and a creeping sense that our lives belong to everyone except ourselves. In our foundational course, you likely mapped

out different types of boundaries: physical boundaries regarding your personal space and body; emotional boundaries regarding what feelings you take on from others; time boundaries regarding how you allocate your hours; and mental boundaries regarding your right to your own opinions and beliefs.

A NOTE

Remember that setting boundaries is not an act of hostility towards others; it is an act of radical honesty and self-care. When you say 'no' to an unreasonable request with warmth and clarity, you are actually saying 'yes' to your own emotional wellbeing and capacity to show up authentically in your relationships.

However, understanding these concepts in a classroom or workbook setting is very different from maintaining them when life gets messy. Why do we slip back into old patterns? In CBT, we understand that human beings are creatures of habit. For years, perhaps decades, you may have relied on passive coping strategies—such as over-accommodating, people-pleasing, or swallowing your anger—because those behaviours served an evolutionary or social purpose in your past. They kept you safe from conflict, secured approval, or minimised immediate tension. When you first practice assertiveness, your brain perceives it as a novel, high-risk behaviour. The amygdala, our brain's alarm system, can trigger anxiety because asserting yourself feels unfamiliar and dangerous. It is entirely normal to feel a spike of adrenaline or self-doubt when you first start holding your ground.

Sarah completed an assertiveness course and felt empowered. For two weeks, she successfully turned down extra weekend shifts at her busy healthcare job and told her neighbours she could no longer collect their parcels every day. However, when her manager casually mentioned that the team was under severe pressure, Sarah's old automatic thought flared up: 'If I don't help out, they will think I'm lazy and unreliable.' Overwhelmed by guilt, she immediately volunteered for an extra shift, compromising her planned rest time. Within a fortnight, Sarah found herself back to her old over-committed routine, feeling resentful, exhausted, and disappointed in herself. Sarah's experience is a textbook example of a slip in boundary maintenance triggered by workplace pressure and guilt-inducing automatic thoughts.

Sarah's story illustrates how easily the old grooves of our mental pathways can pull us back in. When we are tired, stressed, or emotionally depleted, our cognitive capacity drops. We resort to mental shortcuts, and for many of us, the deepest mental shortcut is appeasement. This is where the concept of 'relapse' enters the picture. In the context of assertiveness, a relapse does not mean you have failed or lost all your progress. Rather, it is a descriptive term for a period where you notice your assertive skills fading, your boundaries eroding, and your old unhelpful patterns—such as passivity or passive-aggression—taking the steering wheel once again.

To prevent this cycle from deepening, we must first normalise it. Expecting perfection from yourself is one of the biggest hazards in maintaining behavioural change. If you expect that once you learn to be assertive, you will never feel guilty or never struggle to say 'no' again, you are setting an impossible standard. When a slip inevitably happens, an unrealistic standard leads to catastrophic thinking: 'I've blown it. I'm back to square one. Assertiveness just doesn't work for me.' This all-or-nothing thinking is a cognitive distortion that often causes people to abandon their

new skills altogether. CBT teaches us to view a slip not as a catastrophe, but as valuable data. When you notice your boundaries slipping, it is an alarm bell telling you to pause, review your foundations, and recalibrate your approach.

As you move through this module, take some time to reflect honestly on your current baseline. Where do you stand right now? Are your boundaries holding firm, or have you noticed subtle leaks in your emotional or time boundaries over the past few weeks? Perhaps you are finding it easy to be assertive with strangers or acquaintances, but your boundaries crumble the moment you interact with close family members or demanding employers. This distinction is crucial, because our assertiveness is almost always tested differently across different relational contexts. In the next section, we will explore how to conduct a personal boundary audit to pinpoint exactly where your strengths lie and where your current vulnerabilities are hiding.