



Solutions for Life

from **Solutions Counseling & EAP**
by **Keri Forbess-McCorquodale, MS, LPC, LMFT, CEAP**

Yes Or No? Your Life Is Hanging in The Balance!

A segment of my practice is seeing an uptick – people with chronic illnesses. I noticed recently how many more people I am working with that have some kind of autoimmune issue or chronic pain.

Therapy with this population is very different. With traditional cases, a client comes in with an issue and we work to solve that problem. That doesn't apply to this group. Therapy with the chronically ill is all about acceptance and re-defining life. The issues they deal with often are not going to get better. In fact, many times they are going to get worse. We have lots of discussions about "quality of life." We have lots of discussions about finding gratitude in the small things. We have lots of discussions about not looking behind at all the things they used to be able to do. We have lots of discussions about not fighting the symptoms, but riding them out like riding a wave in the ocean.

And . . . we seem to have the most discussions about boundaries. You know, those limits that you set for your sanity? The lines you are not willing to cross? Yeah, those. You see, I have found that across the board, my clients with chronic illnesses were always doers. They were the caretakers. They were the breadwinners. A lot of their identity and worth was connected to

how much they could help others. And now they can barely help themselves.

It's quite a mental shift to go from being very active and taking care of everything to having to let an illness dictate what you can and cannot do. And my clients struggle with this. They have to go through a grief process to say goodbye to their old way of handling life and come to terms with their new life. Many times this new life won't be staying that way either. They will have to grieve again and adjust to yet another new way of life.

That's why boundaries are so important, but not just for my chronically ill clients. Boundaries are important for all of us. Boundaries help us find balance. Setting boundaries allows us to manage and prioritize our energy, which is a limited resource even for the healthiest of us. So, how do you set boundaries? Try this:

Prioritize. What things in life are most important to you? If you are feeling stressed and stretched, I can almost guarantee you are not spending your precious time on the priorities in your life. We are all given the same number of minutes in every day. Why are some people so harried while others seem calm? A lot of that has to do with their time and their priorities matching up.

Wait. Stop immediately responding to requests on your time and talents. It really is okay to say you will think about a commitment before answering. If the asking party really wants you, they will wait. If the asking party demands an immediate answer, it's time to use the old saying "when in doubt, don't."

Balance. I feel like a broken record some days with my clients. "How are you finding balance?" "I'm glad to hear work is going well. What are you doing for fun?" "Boy, your schedule sounds really packed. Where have you scheduled some time to rest?" Healthy lives are all about balance. Healthy people understand we need to work, play and rest. And they make sure they do all three.

The bottom line with boundaries is this: every time you say "yes" to something, you are saying "no" to something else. Just because you really want to do something doesn't mean this is the best time for you to do it. Stop and take stock. Before answering, take the time to make sure your "yes" is for things you are passionate about and bring balance to your life.