# Boundaries, Needs, and Neurodivergent Rights What are Boundaries?

Boundaries are the unseen lines that help us decide what we're okay with and how we expect others to act toward us. They can be about our personal space, our feelings, our energy, our thoughts, and our stuff. Boundaries can help us stay mentally healthy by shielding us from stress and helping us to respect our individual rights. They can also help us feel safe physically.

<u>Types of Boundaries</u>

**Physical Boundaries** are related to personal space and touch.

**Emotional Boundaries** protect your feelings and stop you from shouldering others' emotional burdens.

**Energetic Boundaries** are about protecting your energy from others. If you often feel drained or overwhelmed by others or the vibes of a place, setting an energetic boundary can help.

<u>Mental Boundaries</u> relate to your thoughts, values, and opinions and your right to have them.

**Material Boundaries** are about your personal belongings and money.

<u>Time Boundaries</u> are about how you spend your time.

**Body Boundaries** are about your comfort level and consent concerning touch, intimacy, and sexual activities.

<u>Digital Boundaries</u> are about your online interactions, like privacy settings, the time spent online, and response times to messages.



# Boundaries, Needs, and Neurodivergent Rights Recognizing the Need for Boundaries

Physical Boundaries: Pay attention to your comfort level when people are in your personal space or touching you. If you feel uneasy or unsafe, it's a sign to set or reinforce a boundary.

Emotional Boundaries: T If you find yourself overly invested in someone else's problems or feel like your emotions are not respected, it may be time to establish an emotional boundary.

Energetic Boundaries: If you often feel drained or overwhelmed by others, or the vibes of a place, you might need to establish energetic boundaries to protect your energy.

Mental Boundaries: If you find your opinions are consistently dismissed or belittled, it's a sign that your mental boundaries need reinforcement.

Material Boundaries: If people often borrow your belongings without asking or assume you'll always cover the bill, you may need to clarify your material boundaries.

Time Boundaries: Feeling consistently over-committed or like your time isn't respected indicates the need for clearer time boundaries.

Body Boundaries: Pay attention to your comfort level regarding touch, intimacy, and sexual activities. If you ever feel pressured or uncomfortable, it's crucial to establish clear body boundaries.

Digital Boundaries: If you find your time online overwhelming or invasive, it could indicate the need for digital boundaries concerning privacy settings, time spent online, and response times to messages.

 $\Pi \Pi \Pi$ 

As a woman with ADHD, it can be hard to set boundaries.

#### Why?

Women might not often be taught it's okay to assert our boundaries, and, as neurodivergent individuals, we are taught to ignore our own boundaries. This happens when others teach us we have no rights to them. Understanding your boundaries and learning about your rights can help reduce stress, improve your executive functioning, and enhance your relationships.



© 2023 Flourishing Women LLC. All rights reserved.

#### Boundaries are Related to Your Rights in Society

Our ability to have boundaries is **often related to personal rights.**However, the rights we have personally aren't always the same in society or other systems, like families, couples, or organizations.

Talking about boundaries is now standard and empowering, but this discourse often needs to highlight a crucial point: how **some people** have more power to set these boundaries than others. The more power you have, the easier it is to feel comfortable setting boundaries, and the more likely people will respect them.

Setting boundaries requires the confidence to know when and how to set them, and trust that they will be honored.

Keep this in mind as we learn about boundaries and how it might relate to you.

In some places, you may not be free to articulate your boundaries the way it has been presented to you in social media. In others, you may have more freedom than you think. Setting boundaries in the workplace will require a different approach than in personal relationships, for example. This is an essential topic for us.

The key message is, even if societal rights are disputed, personal boundaries are always valid.

Two Kinds of Boundaries

Boundaries can be classified into two primary categories, internal boundaries (self-boundaries) or boundaries that you set with yourself, and external boundaries, boundaries that you set with others.

When it comes to setting boundaries with yourself, we use the Flourish model's pillars. Self-boundaries often revolve around personal limits that you strive to control.

For women with ADHD, due to your brain-based differences, conventional approaches to self-boundary settings may prove challenging.

It's essential to recognize how your brain-based differences might put you at a disadvantage. Ideas about **motivation**, **willpower**, and **focus** don't apply to you.

Strategies may not help you set internal boundaries in the same way they do for neurotypical people. Instead, you may need differently tailored strategies. We will briefly explore some ideas here and will build on them in future modules.

Remember that the journey towards setting and maintaining personal boundaries is unique and may involve some trial and error. It's essential to approach this process with **self-compassion** and recognize the importance of aligning these boundaries with your **personal values and goals**.

**Examples of Internal or Self Boundaries** 

Personal boundaries are often related to self-care. **Setting a specific bedtime, limiting work hours** to maintain a work-life balance, **controlling social media usage,** deciding on eating habits that you feel are healthy, setting time aside for regular exercise, and even ensuring that you have downtime for relaxation and hobbies, are all self-boundaries.

Self-boundaries are usually a form of self-care. This is why they are so hard. Real self-care isn't easy!

Things That Don't Work to Set Personal Boundaries for ADHDers

<u>Shame or Guilt</u>: These emotions can act as barriers, shutting you down, causing overwhelm, causing avoidance, causing procrastination, and really discouraging you.

<u>Criticism and Self-judgment</u>: We know self-criticism is related to things that don't help you. It triggers shame and hinders progress.

**Willpower:** Willpower doesn't work. It fluctuates and is unreliable for neurotypical and neurodivergent women alike.

**Motivation**: Same as willpower.

**To-do lists, Reminders, and Planners:** To-do lists have their place, but they rarely work in the way that they're designed for neurotypical people. If you try to use them to manage your boundaries, it may leave you frustrated.

<u>Unrealistic expectations</u>: Setting boundaries that are too stringent or ambitious often is a setup. They are overwhelming, discouraging, and make you feel bad about yourself, often triggering RSD.

© 2023 Flourishing Women LLC. All rights reserved.

#### SELF BOUNDAIRES

#### CHECKLIST

Reflect on your personal boundaries and check the areas where you struggle:

Bedtime: Do you need to have one?				
Work Life Balance: Are you working too much?				
Social Media Usage: Too much time making you feel bad?				
Healthy Eating Habits: Are you feeding yourself enough?				
Regular Exercise: Are you moving your body and loving it?				
Relaxation: Making enough time for special interests and downtime				
WHAT YOU TRIED THAT DOESN'T WORK				
Reflect on the strategies you've tried to set personal boundaries				
and check the ones that have proven ineffective:				
Set Big goals to be more disciplined and failed				
Shamed and Guilted myself				
Tried to just just get motivated?				
Criticized myslef				
Tried to have willpower with myself				
]				

What Will Help in Your Quest to Set Internal Boundaries?

<u>Self-compassion</u>: Remembering that personal boundaries can be really challenging for you as an ADHD woman and understanding why is very helpful. It's okay to make mistakes. What's important is that you remember how challenging and complex for this can be.

<u>Self-care:</u> Actively prioritizing your well-being and committing to the fact that you deserve to be loved and taken care of. By you! Taking care of your physical, emotional, and mental health can be a really powerful motivator, but it can also be super challenging. It's likely not something that you were taught, nor is it something that society or maybe even your family did for you.

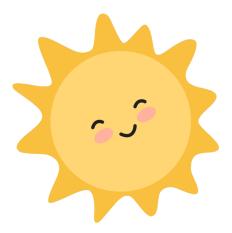


What Will Help in Your Quest to Set Personal Boundaries?

Externalizing language and goals: One useful strategy for women with ADHD is to externalize your goals or areas of focus with notes or sticky notes. Because of potential difficulties with working memory, you can assist yourself by writing things down in key areas that you want to concentrate on. Coaching or reminding yourself through these written cues supports your working memory and executive functioning.

Aligning your values and your needs with your goals: When you make sure that your personal boundaries align with your values and or needs, this can be a very strong motivator. We've talked about your goals, your values before, but we're going to introduce your needs in this section, and it can really help you to adhere to your personal boundaries, even during challenging times.

<u>Being really flexible:</u> Life is dynamic and fluid. A flexible approach to setting boundaries with yourself allowing for trail and error will help you avoid shame and criticism.



### ACTION BRAINSTORMING

WHAT BOUNDARY MIGHT I WORK ON WITH MYSELF?

MY GOAL:		
NEW STRATEGIES TO TRY		
REMINDING MYSELF I DESERVE SELF CARE		
PRACTICING SELF COMPASSION		
CONNECTING WITH THE VALUE BEHIND THE THING I'M DOING		
<u>EXTERNALIZE</u>		

Strategy: Make the Easy Hard and the Hard Easy

This phrase encapsulates a crucial strategy in setting effective boundaries with yourself. The idea is to make it harder to engage in behaviors that aren't serving you (friction) and easier to engage in behaviors that are beneficial by reducing friction.

For example, if you're trying to limit your social media use, make it harder to mindlessly scroll by removing the apps from your phone or logging out after each use. On the other hand, if you're trying to exercise more, make it easier by setting out your workout clothes the night before, or choosing exercises that you genuinely enjoy.

Another example might be if you're striving to eat healthier. You could make it harder to indulge in unhealthy snacks by not keeping them at home (make the easy hard) and make it easier to eat healthily by having fresh fruits and vegetables readily available (make the hard easy).

Remember that the journey towards setting and maintaining personal boundaries is unique and may involve some trial and error. It's essential to approach this process with self-compassion and recognize the importance of aligning these boundaries with your personal values and goals.





### ACTION BRAINSTORMING

#### WHAT BOUNDARY MIGHT I WORK ON WITH MYSELF?

#### MY GOAL:

Set a bed time that's a little more reasonable 12 instead of 2 am

NEW STRATEGIES TO TRY

Self Compassion, values, leaving notes, self talk

REMINDING
MYSELF I
DESERVE
SELF CARE

You deserve to be loved and caring for your sleep is an act of love

PRACTICING
SELF
COMPASSION

How? I will practice Self-soothing touch when I realize I am self-critical.

I like putting my hand on my heart
and remembering to say kind words" I'm doing the best I can"

CONNECTING
WITH THE
VALUE BEHIND
THE THING I'M
DOING

Better sleep helps me show up better as a mother, which is one of my values,

**EXTERNALIZE** 

I am going to write reminders around the house, and also will take out the electronics to make it easy, as well as write down my values or put a picture of the bed time and clock on my nightstand to help,

© 2023 Flourishing Women LLC. All rights reserved.

Example Walk through EASY/HARD Strategy Using Technology Boundaries

One of the things many of my clients will ask for help with is managing their technology use. Here is an example of how to use the make the easy hard and the hard easy formula to set boundaries with yourself. This may not even be a goal of yours, but is meant merely to illustrate this strategy.

- 1. Manage Distractions: To counter the ease of checking your smartphone, physically keep it in a different room or in a drawer while working. This makes accessing it harder and creates a barrier against impulsive checking. To make focusing easier, keep your workspace exclusively for work, free of unrelated items that could distract you.
- 2. Avoid Multitasking: It's tempting to juggle multiple tasks because of the easy access to different apps and tabs. Make it harder by using single-application mode or full-screen mode to avoid easy tab-switching. To facilitate single-tasking, consider using physical tools like a notepad to jot down tasks instead of digital ones that can lead to distraction.



© 2023 Flourishing Women LLC. All rights reserved.

3. Control Working Hours: Set a firm rule to turn off your computer at a certain hour, physically making it harder to keep working.

<u>4. Regain Attention:</u> Notifications easily capture our attention. Disable them on your devices, creating a barrier against the easy distraction they provide. Use apps that block distracting websites or set your device on 'do not disturb' mode during work hours.

#### 5. Implement Behavioral Hacks:

- Time Management: Delete social media apps or move them into a folder that's not on your home screen, making it physically harder to check them impulsively.
- **Space Management:** Set up physical boundaries for your devices. For example, make a rule to never bring your phone into the bedroom, which makes reaching for it first thing in the morning or last thing at night harder. To promote rest, prepare a book or magazine beside your bed instead of a device and get a book light.
- <u>Relationship Management:</u> Set auto-responders for emails and messages outside your working hours, making it harder for others to expect immediate responses.
- <u>Self-Management:</u> Instead of resorting to social media when stressed, disconnect your device and put it out of sight, making it harder to mindlessly scroll. Facilitate stress-relief by having alternatives ready, like stress balls or yoga mats.

6. **Practice Deep Work:** Make it harder to give in to distractions by working in a quiet place free from digital devices, if possible. To make deep work easier, prepare all the materials you need for your task before you start so that you won't need to interrupt your work.

**7. Encourage Deep Reading:** Remove digital reading apps from your devices or move them into a less accessible place, making it harder to default to skimming digital content. To facilitate deep reading, have physical books around your home and carry one with you for idle moments.

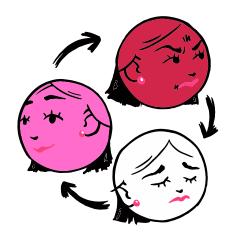
8. **Incorporate Mindfulness:** Make it harder to instantly access your device by keeping it in a bag or drawer, not on your desk or in your pocket. This creates a barrier that interrupts mindless checking. To facilitate mindfulness, keep visual reminders like sticky notes around your workspace reminding you to breathe and be present.



Emotions tell you when you need to set boundaries

Remember, we talked about emotions being clues that help you navigate your environment in units 3 and 4. Often, your emotions might indicate you need to set a boundary. Here are some emotions that might be pointing to the sign that you need to set internal or external boundaries.

- 1. Stress and Overwhelm: Frequent feelings of stress or being overwhelmed can indicate that you're overextending yourself to accommodate others' needs, suggesting a need for better boundaries.
- 2. Emotional Exhaustion: If you often find yourself drained by others' emotions or problems, setting emotional boundaries can help conserve your emotional energy.



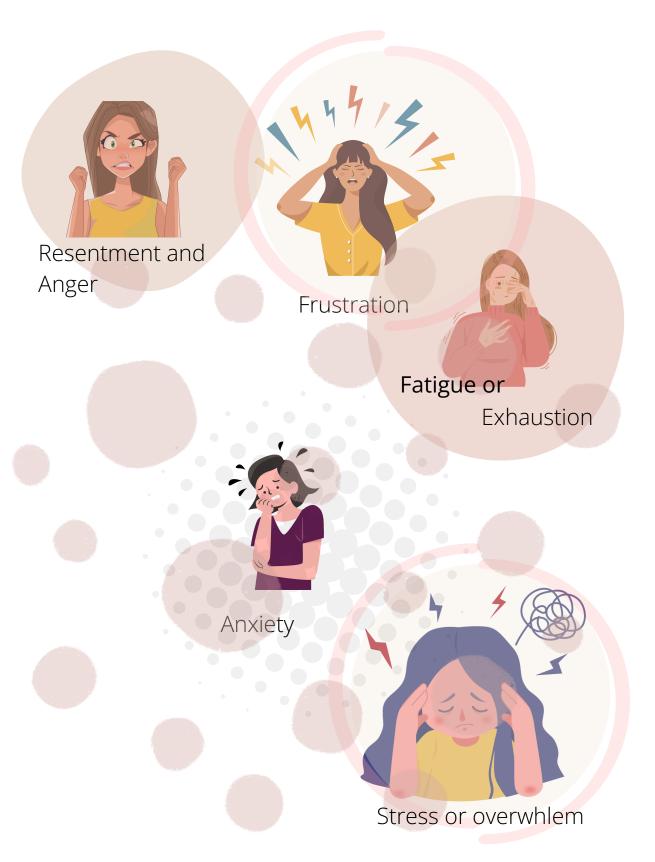
#### Emotions tell you when you need to set boundaries

- 3. Resentment and Anger: These feelings often surface when you perceive your boundaries are being violated, indicating the need for a more straightforward or more assertive boundary setting.
- 4. Frustration: If you often feel frustrated due to infringements on your time, space, or resources, this could signal that your boundaries need strengthening.
- 5. Fatigue: Persistent fatigue might suggest you're neglecting your own rest and self-care to meet others' expectations, hinting at a need for self-care boundaries.



© 2023 Flourishing Women LLC. All rights reserved.

## **Emotions that Indicate You Need a Boundary**



Reflection:



Do any of these signs resonate with you?

If you felt confident and like there were no barriers to setting a boundary, what boundaries would you set to deal with these issues?

Would they be internal (with yourself) or external (with others)?

How might you address these issues by setting or reinforcing boundaries?



#### The Positives of Boundary Setting for ADHD Women

Setting boundaries isn't just about warding off negatives—it also brings many positives, including:

- 1. <u>Emotional Regulation</u>: Clear boundaries can help you better manage your emotions.
- 2. <u>Rejection Sensitivity:</u> Boundary setting can help reduce Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD), a common challenge for people with ADHD.
- 3. <u>Energy Management:</u> Boundaries can help you manage your energy levels more effectively and prevent burnout.
- 4. <u>Empowerment</u>: Asserting your boundaries can be empowering, boosting self-trust and control over your life.

<u>5. Prioritization and Organization:</u> Setting boundaries can aid in managing your time and attention, helping you focus on the things that are most important to you.

<u>Special Issue: Energetic Boundaries and Empaths</u>

Many autistic and adhd women are particularly sensitive to the emotional states of those around them. Setting energetic boundaries is crucial. This sensitivity can sometimes lead to feeling overwhelmed or drained, especially when surrounded by emotionally demanding individuals. It may be that neurodivergent individuals are especially vulnerable to this issue. Here are some tips to help yourself with this:

- 1. <u>Tuning in to Your Inner Voice:</u> Trust it. It's key for empaths to cultivate this, which our group emphasizes over time. It's not a quick journey, but gradual. Through internal dialogue, identify your feelings and needs, which are often overshadowed by others. This self-awareness helps maintain emotional balance, mitigates stress, and establish boundaries with energy-drainers.
- 2. <u>Physical Boundaries and Creative Disengagement</u>: Establish physical boundaries when you need space to pursue your special interests or quiet time. Consider creative disengagement, like excusing yourself or subtly shifting the conversation, when you sense energy drain.



- 3. Body Scan Meditations: This tool, shared in early sessions, eases alexithymia symptoms by promoting body relaxation and tension awareness. Find these widely online; Jon Kabat Zinn's are my preference.
- 4. <u>Visualization Techniques:</u> You can use visualization to create a mental shield or bubble around you during conversations with stressful people, allowing in only positive energy and keeping out the negative.
- 5. Mindful Breathing: Using mindful breathing exercises can ground you in the present moment, create distance from overwhelming feelings, and provide a much-needed energy reset.
- 6. Prioritizing Self-Care: Regular self-care is a form of boundary setting. This can mean setting aside time each day for relaxation or activities you enjoy for special interests. This has a cumulative effect.

For empaths, it's key to balance energy management and boundary setting for emotional health.



Setting Boundaries Looks Like......

#### 1. Physical Boundaries:

• Action: Practice Physical Removal by leaving spaces where you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, such as exiting a crowded room or party.

#### 2. Emotional Boundaries:

• Action: Establish Mental and Emotional Boundaries by disengaging from relationships or conversations that cause emotional turmoil.

#### 3. Energetic Boundaries:

• Action: Focus on Redirecting Energy away from draining individuals or activities towards ones that enrich and fulfill you.

#### 4. Mental Boundaries:

• Action: Safeguard your mental space by Avoiding Toxic Environments or situations that consistently undermine your values and beliefs.

#### 5. Material and Financial Boundaries:

• Action: Uphold your boundaries by not lending belongings or money, representing a form of Limiting Contact in financial contexts.

#### 6. Time Boundaries:

• Action: Implement Time Boundaries by stepping back from commitments that demand too much of your time and energy.

#### 7. Body Boundaries:

 Action: Physical Removal or Ending Relationships can be applied here to distance yourself from situations or people that make you uncomfortable or unsafe.

.

Setting Boundaries Looks Like.....

#### 9. Professional Boundaries:

- Action: In the workplace, **Professional Boundaries** might mean declining additional tasks or choosing to leave a job that consistently violates your boundaries.
- **10. Boundaries in Communication: Action:** Sometimes, **Boundaries in Communication** mean ending a conversation or not engaging in an argument to protect your mental and emotional space.

By implementing these actions, you can effectively set and maintain boundaries that prioritize your well-being. Remember that the need for communication may arise depending on the relationship context and your sense of safety, which can be explored further in future discussions.

But you decide when and how you do this.

#### <u>Using needs instead of feelings when you have</u> <u>alexithymia</u>

For those with alexithymia, often seen in ADHD people and more so in those with autism, identifying needs is especially useful. Needs can act as boundary flags. These universal essentials for well-being are key to our physical, emotional, and social health.

Here are some examples of fundamental human needs:

- 1. **Physical Well-being:** This includes the need for food, water, rest, exercise, shelter, and sexual expression.
- **2. Safety:** The need for security, protection, predictability, and freedom from harm or fear.
- 3. **Connection:** The need for love, acceptance, belonging, empathy, friendship, intimacy, and community.
- **4. Honesty:** The need for truth, authenticity, integrity, and trust in relationships.
- <u>5. Autonomy:</u> The need for independence, choice, freedom, and personal control.



Using needs instead of feelings when you have alexithymia

- **<u>6. Meaning:</u>** The need for purpose, growth, challenge, contribution, creativity, and making a difference.
- **7. Peace:** The need for inner calm, tranquility, emotional stability, and harmony.
- **8. Joy:** The need for fun, laughter, celebration, play, and experiencing joy.

Understanding and articulating unmet or violated needs is deeply therapeutic for neurodivergent women. This process, which may include setting boundaries, can offer valuable insights and may assist in expressing concerns effectively, resulting in a sense of empowerment. Just knowing your needs is empowering.



A Word About Nonviolent Communication

In Nonviolent Communication (NVC), expressing and understanding needs is a core principle. By clearly and directly expressing our needs to others, and empathizing with the needs of others, we can develop stronger boundaries and foster healthier relationships. We will use a modified version of this model to account for possible differences in neurodivergent communication when we work on our last communication unit next week.

Understanding needs will be the first building block of more effective communication.



#### Needs Phrases

These 'needs phrases' are tools for your personal introspection, not intended for others. They help you understand and validate yourself. Women with ADHD, often masking for years, may lose touch with their needs, prioritizing others at the expense of their own. Masking can lead to a self-disconnection and violation of personal boundaries. Utilizing these phrases can aid in reconnecting with your authentic needs.

Need phrases can be simple or more complicated.



#### Needs Phrases

- 1. "I need authenticity to feel connected to myself and others."
- 2. "I need opportunities for growth to feel a sense of personal accomplishment."
- 3. "I need to prioritize my physical well-being."
- 4. "I need a peaceful and quiet environment to focus."
- 5. "I need a more meaningful connection."
- 7. "Stability is a need for me to feel secure and grounded."
- 8. "I need more joy and play."
- 9. "I need a sense of safety to cultivate trust in my relationships."
- 10. "My need for autonomy supports my personal growth and self-understanding."
- 11. "I need more peace."
- 12. "I need to be heard."
- 13. "I need laughter."
- 14. "I need a challenge."
- 15. "I need autonomy."

Needs Phrases show self-awareness which is crucial for setting boundaries and sharing them.

Knowing your Needs and Boundaries Want to practice? Let's try.

Think about a recent situation where you may have been struggling with an issue to communicate a feeling especially if you sense it had to do with a boundary.

#### Situation:

Look at the needs list and see if you can identify a need that you had.

**Group Exercise: Exploring and Expressing Needs** 

#### Objective:

To understand, articulate, and share personal needs. This exercise will help familiarize participants with their needs, which can provide insights into when they might need to set boundaries with themselves or others.

#### Instructions:

- 1. Browse through the list of needs provided. Select three that resonate with you personally, things you identify as your needs. They could be as simple as "fun" or more complex like "authenticity in the workplace".
- 2. Reflect on how it feels to identify and name your needs. What sensations arise in your body when you articulate these needs out loud?
- 3. Write about one need you feel is currently being met and one you are struggling to fulfill. Reflect on how you identified these needs and what it feels like to express them. Remember, it's okay if the answer is "nothing". Everyone has a right to their needs.



#### **Group Exercise: Exploring and Expressing Needs**

\_

•

- 4. Share your reflections with the group. Discuss what it felt like to identify, express, and hear these needs. How did you resonate with the needs of others?
- 5. In conclusion, contemplate on this: We all have a right to our needs, and we inherently know what our needs are. How does it feel to hear and understand this?

Note: This exercise will help familiarize you with your needs, which can provide clues to when you might need to set boundaries with yourself or others.

It also aims to foster a deeper understanding of personal needs, creating a space for introspection, connection, and mutual support.



#### **NEEDS LIST**

1. Affection	27. Mutual Recognition	53. Exercise 54. Cleanliness	73. To be heard
2. Appreciation	28. Nurturing	55. Beauty	74.7.1
3. Acceptance	29. Peace	56. Harmony	74. To be understood
4. Belonging	30. Play	•	75. Touch
5. Clarity	31. Recognition	57. Order	
6. Communication	32. Respect	58. Balance	80. Spirituality
7. Comfort	33. Safety	59. Contribution	
8. Companionship	34. Security		81. To be of service
9. Compassion	35. Stability	60. Effectiveness	83. Inclusion
10. Consistency	36. Support	61. Efficiency	
11. Cooperation	37. Trust	62. Progress	84. Diversity
12. Courage	38. Understanding	G	
13. Empathy	39. Validation	63. Celebrating	85. Community
14. Encouragement	40. Warmth	64. Dreaming	86. Equality
15. Freedom	41. Autonomy	65. Mourning	oor Equality
16. Friendship	42. Independence	66.5.1	87. Fairness
17. Growth	43. Creativity	66. Relaxation	
18. Harmony	44. Skill development	67. Adventure	88. Justice
19. Honesty	45. Challenge	68. Fun	89. Respect
20. Integrity	46. Meaning	00. T dil	os. Respect
21. Inspiration	47. Purpose	69. Discovery	90. Dignity
22. Intimacy	48. Knowledge	70. Space	
23. Joy	49. Learning	·	91. Choice
24. Kindness	50. Health	71. To matter	92. Freedom
25. Love	51. Nutrition	72. To be seen	92. Freedom
26. Laughter		nen LLC. All rights reserved. 73. To be heard	93. Movement