Tab 1

# Week

13

# Day

1

# Day Title

Identifying Needs

# Lesson Name

Needs and Boundaries

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

Identifying personal needs is the foundation of healthy relationships and self-care. Needs are not weaknesses but essential parts of being human. By listening to our bodies, reflecting on our experiences, and creating a needs inventory, we bring clarity to what supports our well-being.

# Daily Passage

Every human being carries a set of needs that must be met in order to thrive. Some are physical, like food, rest, and safety. Others are emotional, like love, respect, and belonging. Still others are spiritual or existential, like meaning, creativity, and purpose. Needs are not signs of weakness. They are part of being alive. Learning to identify and honor our personal needs is the first step toward building relationships and communities that feel nourishing and balanced.

Many of us struggle to name our needs. Perhaps we grew up in environments where our needs were dismissed or punished. We may have learned to minimize them, convincing ourselves we did not need much at all. Over time, this can create confusion. We might sense dissatisfaction or burnout but have difficulty pinpointing what is missing. Identifying needs is not always easy, especially if they were once unsafe to express. Yet bringing them into awareness is essential for healing and connection.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs offers one helpful framework (Maslow, 1943). At the base are physiological needs like food, water, and shelter. Next comes safety, both physical and emotional. Above that is love and belonging, followed by esteem and recognition, and at the top self-actualization, which is the fulfillment of one’s potential. While life is more complex than a pyramid, the model reminds us that our well-being depends on more than survival. Emotional and relational needs are just as vital as physical ones.

To begin identifying our needs, it helps to slow down and notice what feels nourishing and what feels depleting. After spending time with a friend, do you feel energized or drained? After a day of work, do you feel purposeful or empty? These reflections can reveal unmet needs. For example, feeling exhausted after constant socializing may point to a need for solitude. Feeling restless in a job may signal a need for creativity or growth.

Our bodies also carry important clues. Tension, fatigue, or stomach aches can signal unmet needs just as clearly as emotions like frustration or sadness. For instance, irritation may mask an unmet need for rest or recognition. Loneliness may point to a need for connection. By paying attention to both emotional and physical signals, we start to uncover what our deeper needs actually are.

Needs also vary across seasons of life. What we needed in our twenties may look different from what we need in midlife or beyond. Parenthood, career changes, illness, or loss can all reshape our needs. Staying open to this evolution helps us remain responsive to ourselves rather than clinging to outdated patterns.

One common barrier to identifying needs is guilt. Many people believe that having needs makes them “selfish.” In truth, recognizing needs allows us to show up more fully for others. When we deny them, we risk resentment, burnout, or disconnection. Naming needs is not a demand, it is an honest acknowledgment of what helps us feel alive and whole.

A helpful practice is to create a “needs inventory.” This can be as simple as writing down areas like physical, emotional, relational, creative, and spiritual, then listing what feels most important in each category. Examples might include: enough sleep, time with friends, affirmation, space for creativity, or time outdoors. Reviewing this list regularly helps bring clarity to what supports your well-being.

When we identify our personal needs, we create the foundation for healthy boundaries and clearer communication. Instead of expecting others to guess, we can name what matters most. Instead of reacting with frustration, we can respond with clarity. This awareness transforms our relationships, because we are no longer relating from vague dissatisfaction but from honesty about what we require to thrive.

# Alternative View

While identifying needs is vital, it is not always possible for every need to be met at all times. Life often involves compromise and adaptation. The goal is not perfection but awareness, so that we can prioritize and communicate our most important needs while remaining flexible.

# Activity

What signals does your body give you when your needs are not being met?

What needs feel most important to you in this season of life?

Where have you minimized or denied your needs out of guilt or fear?

What might go on your personal “needs inventory” list?

NVC Tool

Tool to create:

Bullseye Tool

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Tab 2

# Week

13

# Day

2

# Day Title

Needs vs Wants

# Lesson Name

Needs and Boundaries

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

Needs are essential conditions for survival and well-being, while wants are preferences and comforts that enrich life. Confusing the two can lead to disappointment and conflict. By naming needs clearly and holding wants with openness, we support both clarity and connection in relationships.

# Daily Passage

When we begin to name our personal needs, the next challenge is often sorting them from our wants. Both are important, yet they serve different purposes. Needs are the conditions that allow us to survive and thrive. Wants are the preferences, desires, and comforts that enrich our lives. Confusing the two can create frustration and misunderstanding, both in ourselves and in our relationships. Learning to distinguish needs from wants helps us communicate clearly, honor what is essential, and appreciate what is extra.

Needs are non-negotiable. They are rooted in our biology and psychology. We need food, rest, safety, and shelter. We also need belonging, love, respect, and meaning. When these needs go unmet, our health and relationships suffer. Psychologist Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943) reminds us that human flourishing depends on more than survival. Safety, belonging, esteem, and purpose are just as vital as water and air.

Wants, on the other hand, are shaped by personality, culture, and context. They may change depending on mood or season. You may want a particular kind of meal, a new piece of clothing, or a vacation. You may want your partner to phrase things a certain way or a friend to spend time with you in a specific activity. These wants matter, but they are not essential for survival or dignity. They add flavor and comfort to life, rather than forming the foundation of well-being.

Consider the difference in relationships. The need may be for emotional connection. The want might be for your partner to text you every morning. The need may be for respect. The want might be for your friend to compliment your work. When we confuse the two, we risk conflict. If we insist that the want is the need, we may feel chronically disappointed. But when we clarify the true need, we give others more flexibility in how they can meet it.

Our bodies often help us distinguish the difference. Unmet needs tend to show up as strong signals, such as fatigue, tension, anxiety, or sadness. Unmet wants may feel more like frustration or longing but are less tied to survival. For example, going without sleep leads to exhaustion and irritability, because rest is a need. Missing out on a particular meal may be disappointing, but your health will not collapse, because it was a want. Listening to the body helps us discern what is truly necessary.

Wants are not unimportant. In fact, honoring our wants adds richness, play, and individuality to life. They are expressions of preference that make us uniquely ourselves. The danger comes when we demand that others meet every want, or when we mistake wants for needs. This can create pressure in relationships, leading others to feel inadequate or controlled.

Instead, we can learn to hold wants with openness and gratitude. It is healthy to express them, as long as we also recognize they may not always be met. When they are honored, we can celebrate them as gifts rather than entitlements. When they are not, we can return to the core need and explore other ways of meeting it.

This distinction becomes especially important in communication. When we tell others, “I need you to…” when it is actually a want, it can create defensiveness. A clearer way might be, “I need connection, and I would love it if you could check in with me during the day.” This communicates both the essential need (connection) and the preference (a midday check-in), allowing more room for collaboration.

Recognizing needs versus wants also supports self-responsibility. Some needs require the presence of others, like belonging or partnership. But many wants can be met creatively by ourselves. If we want a certain kind of rest, adventure, or beauty, we can often take steps to create it, rather than waiting for others to provide it. This balance makes relationships lighter and more sustainable.

Ultimately, distinguishing between needs and wants is about clarity. Needs are the foundation, wants are the embellishments. When we honor our needs and express our wants with openness, we create relationships that are both steady and joyful.

# Alternative View

Although needs and wants are different, they can sometimes blur. A want may point to a deeper unmet need, and a need may be expressed through specific wants. Staying curious about the layers beneath our desires helps us avoid rigid distinctions.

# Activity

What needs feel most essential to you in this season of life?

What wants bring you joy and comfort, even if they are not strictly necessary?

Where have you mistaken a want for a need in your relationships?

How might you communicate a need clearly while also expressing a want as a preference?

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Tab 3

# Week

13

# Day

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# Day Title

Expressing Needs Clearly

# Lesson Name

Needs and Boundaries

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

Expressing needs clearly requires self-awareness, courage, and skill. By using compassionate communication, listening to the body, distinguishing needs from strategies, and practicing in low-stakes moments, we create clarity and connection. Speaking needs honestly honors both ourselves and our relationships.

# Daily Passage

Identifying our needs is the first step toward honoring them. The next step is expressing those needs clearly. This is where many of us stumble. We may fear rejection, worry about being “too much,” or struggle to find the right words. Sometimes we hint, hoping others will guess what we want. Other times we suppress our needs until resentment builds and bursts out in anger. Clear expression of needs is an act of courage, and it is also an act of love; because it gives others the chance to meet us honestly.

Why is expressing needs so difficult? For many, it goes back to early experiences. If our caregivers dismissed or punished us for having needs, we may have learned to silence ourselves. If we grew up in environments where others’ needs always came first, we may have learned that ours did not matter. These old patterns can carry into adult life, leaving us unsure how to speak directly about what matters most.

Expressing needs clearly requires both self-awareness and skill. One helpful approach comes from Marshall Rosenberg’s model of Nonviolent Communication (2003), which emphasizes four steps: observation, feeling, need, and request. Instead of blaming or criticizing, we describe what we notice, share our feelings, name the underlying need, and make a specific request. For example: “When I do not hear from you for several days (observation), I feel lonely (feeling), because I need connection (need). Would you be willing to check in once a day, even briefly (request)?” This way of speaking reduces defensiveness and makes the need visible.

Our bodies can also guide us. Needs live not only in the mind but in sensation. A tight chest might signal a need for reassurance. A heavy fatigue might reveal a need for rest. When we tune into these signals, we can express needs more authentically. Saying, “I notice tension in my body when our plans are unclear. I think I need more structure,” communicates both vulnerability and self-awareness.

Clarity also means distinguishing needs from strategies. A need is the deeper longing (connection, safety, respect). A strategy is one way of meeting it (daily texts, spending time together, using kind words). When we confuse the two, conversations can become rigid. For example, demanding daily texts may not work for a partner, but if the true need is reassurance, there may be other ways to meet it. By naming the underlying need, we create space for collaboration rather than conflict.

Tone matters as much as words. When we speak needs with blame, such as “You never listen to me”, others are more likely to shut down. When we speak with openness, like“I feel hurt when I don’t feel heard, and I need more presence”, we invite connection. Clear expression does not guarantee agreement, but it increases the chance of being understood.

It is also important to practice expressing needs in low-stakes moments. Sharing a need for quiet after work, or for help with a household task, builds confidence. These smaller moments create trust and skill that help us navigate higher-stakes needs with more ease.

Finally, clear expression is not about control. We can name our needs and make requests, but others have the freedom to respond. What matters is honesty. Even if a need cannot be met in the way we hoped, simply naming it honors our truth and strengthens our self-respect. Over time, this practice creates relationships rooted in clarity, rather than confusion or resentment.

# Alternative View

Clear expression does not guarantee that others will meet our needs. Sometimes needs conflict, or others cannot provide what we ask for. While honesty is essential, we must also practice flexibility and resilience when needs go unmet.

# Activity

When do you find it hardest to express your needs clearly?

What bodily signals help you recognize a need before you can name it in words?

What is one small, low-stakes need you could practice expressing this week?

How might you phrase a need in terms of observation, feeling, need, and request?

NVC tool

# Sources

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Tab 4

# Week

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# Day

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# Day Title

What Happens When Needs Go Unmet?

# Lesson Name

Needs and Boundaries

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

When needs go unmet, the effects appear in the body, mind, and relationships. Stress, illness, frustration, and conflict often signal deeper unmet needs for rest, connection, or respect. Recognizing these signals with compassion allows us to respond constructively, restoring balance and intimacy.

# Daily Passage

Needs are the foundation of our well-being. When they are recognized and honored, we feel balanced, safe, and connected. But when needs go unmet the effects ripple through every part of our lives. Our bodies grow tense, our emotions intensify, and our relationships become strained. Understanding what happens when needs are unmet helps us move toward compassion, both for ourselves and for others.

On a physical level, unmet needs activate the stress response. If we go without adequate sleep or nourishment, the body produces stress hormones like cortisol, leaving us tired, irritable, and less resilient. Over time, chronic unmet physical needs contribute to illness, fatigue, and burnout (van der Kolk, 2014). The same is true for emotional needs. When we feel disconnected, unacknowledged, or unsafe, the nervous system reacts as though we are in danger. These bodily signals are not signs of weakness. They are messages urging us to care for ourselves.

Emotionally, unmet needs often show up as frustration, sadness, or anxiety. We may feel resentful when boundaries are ignored or lonely when we lack connection. Sometimes these emotions mask the true need beneath them. Anger may cover a need for respect. Anxiety may cover a need for reassurance. By asking, “What is this feeling pointing to?” we can begin to translate emotions back into needs.

In relationships, unmet needs can create cycles of conflict and misunderstanding. When we do not name our needs clearly, they may leak out as criticism, withdrawal, or passive aggression. For example, someone who needs more quality time may complain about their partner’s work hours instead of naming the underlying longing. Another person who needs recognition may become resentful when their efforts go unnoticed. These patterns often lead to disconnection, not because the needs are wrong, but because they remain hidden.

On a deeper level, unmet needs can echo old wounds. If a child grew up without consistent care, they may carry into adulthood a heightened sensitivity to neglect. When current needs go unmet, it can reactivate those earlier feelings of being invisible or unworthy. This is why unmet needs sometimes feel overwhelming. They are not only about the present but also about the past. Recognizing this helps us respond with compassion instead of shame.

There are also societal and cultural layers. Many people are taught to dismiss their needs in order to serve others, achieve success, or conform to expectations. This can lead to chronic self-neglect. Women, caregivers, and marginalized groups often face added pressure to minimize their needs. Naming and honoring needs in these contexts is not only personal healing, it is also an act of reclaiming dignity.

Unmet needs do not mean we are failing. They mean we are human. Everyone has times when needs cannot be met immediately. What matters is how we respond. Awareness allows us to pause, name what is missing, and choose constructive steps. This might mean making a request, adjusting expectations, or finding creative ways to meet the need ourselves.

Compassion is key. Instead of blaming ourselves or others, we can recognize that unmet needs are part of being alive. They are signals guiding us toward balance. By listening to these signals, we can restore connection and prevent small frustrations from growing into deeper wounds.

Ultimately, unmet needs invite us into honesty. They show us where we are out of alignment, where we are overextended, or where boundaries are weak. They also open the door to vulnerability. By naming what we need, even when it feels risky, we create opportunities for deeper connection and repair.

# Alternative View

It is not always possible for every need to be met right away. Life brings seasons of scarcity, conflict, or compromise. In these times, resilience grows through flexibility, creativity, and seeking alternative forms of support until core needs can be addressed.

# Activity

What emotions usually show up for you when your needs go unmet?

What patterns do you notice in your relationships when you do not name your needs clearly?

How do your body and nervous system react when you ignore your needs for too long?

What small act of compassion can you offer yourself when you notice an unmet need?

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Tab 5

# Week

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# Day

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# Day Title

Expressing and Protecting Boundaries

# Lesson Name

Needs and Boundaries

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

Boundaries protect our needs and values by defining what we will or will not allow. Unlike requests, which depend on others’ cooperation, boundaries rely on our own follow-through. Fear of boundaries often comes from our discomfort with the guilt, shame, or unworthiness that surfaces when others are disappointed. By meeting those feelings with compassion, we can express boundaries with clarity and respect.

# Daily Passage

Boundaries are how we protect our needs, values, and well-being in relationships. They are not walls to shut others out but bridges that help us stay connected without losing ourselves. When we express and protect our boundaries, we honor our own dignity while also giving others a clear picture of how to engage with us. Boundaries create safety, clarity, and intimacy.

Many people confuse boundaries with requests. A request is something we ask of another person that they may or may not choose to honor. A boundary, by contrast, is something we set for ourselves about what we will or will not allow. Requests depend on the cooperation of others. Boundaries depend on our willingness to take action if they are not respected.

For example, a request might sound like: “I would like it if you could lower your voice when we argue.” A boundary sounds like: “If the conversation becomes shouting, I will step outside until we can speak calmly.” The request invites collaboration. The boundary makes clear what we will do to protect our well-being if the request is not honored. Both are valuable, but they serve different purposes.

Boundaries can feel difficult to express, especially if we fear rejection or conflict. Many of us grew up in environments where boundaries were ignored or punished. We may have learned that saying no makes us selfish, or that keeping ourselves safe will cost us love. These old lessons shape our nervous systems, leaving us anxious about asserting limits in adulthood.

A deeper truth is that much of this fear is not actually about others. We often say we are afraid of angering or disappointing someone, but what we really fear are the feelings that rise in us when that happens. We do not want to feel guilty, ashamed, or unworthy. We do not want the discomfort of imagining someone seeing us as bad. So we avoid setting boundaries, believing we are sparing the other person, when in reality we are sparing ourselves from painful inner experiences. Seeing this clearly helps us shift the focus back to self-compassion.

To express boundaries clearly, it helps to use direct, respectful language. A boundary can begin with naming the situation, followed by the action we will take. For example: “I need rest in the evenings. If you continue calling me late at night, I will not answer the phone.” This communicates both the need and the action in a calm, non-defensive way.

Protecting boundaries requires consistency. If we set a boundary but do not follow through, others may not take it seriously. Following through is not about punishment. It is about self-respect. When we act in alignment with our boundaries, we teach both ourselves and others that our well-being matters.

Boundaries come in many forms: physical (how close others can be to our bodies), emotional (how we allow others to speak to us), time (how we protect our schedules), and energetic (how much emotional labor we are willing to carry). Each of these reflects a core need for safety and balance. Naming and expressing them helps prevent burnout and fosters healthier connections.

It is also important to express boundaries with compassion. A harsh tone may trigger defensiveness, while a grounded tone invites understanding. Saying, “I care about you, and I also need to take care of myself,” communicates both love and clarity. Boundaries expressed this way become acts of honesty rather than acts of distance.

Still, boundaries may not always be respected. In these cases, protecting ourselves sometimes means limiting contact, seeking outside support, or even ending a relationship. While painful, this is an act of integrity. True intimacy is only possible where boundaries are honored.

Ultimately, expressing and protecting boundaries is about living in alignment with our values and needs. Boundaries help us stay connected without self-abandonment. They create the conditions for relationships to flourish, not through control but through clarity and respect. And when we remember that the greatest fear is not of others but of our own difficult feelings, we can meet that fear with compassion and take the next courageous step.

# Alternative View

Boundaries are essential, yet they can be misused when expressed as rigid ultimatums or as ways of avoiding vulnerability. Healthy boundaries require clarity, compassion, and flexibility. They should open the door to more honest connection, not simply serve as walls for protection.

# Activity

Where in your life do you need to clarify the difference between a boundary and a request?

What boundary do you struggle most to express, and what fear is connected to it?

How might you phrase a boundary in clear, compassionate language?

How does your body feel when you honor a boundary versus when you ignore it?

When have you avoided setting a boundary because you feared how you would feel if someone reacted negatively?

What feelings arise most strongly in you when someone is disappointed or angry with you?

What is one boundary you could practice expressing this week with clarity and compassion?

How might you remind yourself that respecting your own needs does not make you unworthy or selfish?

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Tab 6

# Week

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# Day

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# Day Title

Types of Boundaries

# Lesson Name

Needs and Boundaries

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

Boundaries come in many forms: physical, emotional, energetic, and time. They protect our needs and values by defining what we will or will not allow. Unlike requests, which depend on others’ cooperation, boundaries depend on our own follow-through. Practicing both boundaries and requests with clarity creates healthier, more respectful relationships.

# Daily Passage

Boundaries are not one-size-fits-all. They take different forms depending on the area of life they protect. Some are about our bodies, some about our emotions, some about our energy, and some about our time. Understanding these types of boundaries helps us notice where we need more clarity and where our needs might be going unmet. Just as important is learning to distinguish boundaries from requests. Both are useful, but they serve different roles in creating healthy, balanced relationships.

**Physical boundaries** protect the body and personal space. They include who can touch us, how close people can stand, and what feels comfortable in terms of intimacy. For example, a physical boundary might sound like: “I do not want to be hugged right now.” Protecting physical boundaries helps us feel safe and respected in our bodies.

**Emotional boundaries** protect our feelings and inner world. They help us decide how much of our emotional life to share, how we allow others to speak to us, and how we respond to criticism. An emotional boundary might sound like: “I will not continue this conversation if yelling continues.” Emotional boundaries are especially important in protecting against blame, manipulation, or emotional overreach.

**Energetic boundaries** protect our capacity for care and attention. We only have so much energy each day, and without clear limits, we risk burnout. An energetic boundary might be: “I cannot take on extra projects right now,” or, “I can listen for ten minutes, but then I need to rest.” These boundaries honor the reality of our limits and help us preserve vitality.

**Time boundaries** protect how we use our hours and days. They allow us to balance commitments, rest, work, and play. A time boundary might sound like: “I am available to talk after work but not during work hours,” or, “I cannot stay late tonight because I need rest.” Time boundaries communicate respect both for ourselves and for others’ schedules.

While each type of boundary looks different, they all share the same essence: they define what we will or will not allow in order to protect our needs and values. Boundaries are about self-responsibility. They are not about controlling others. This is where the distinction between boundaries and requests becomes essential.

A **request** is something we would like others to do. It might sound like: “I would appreciate it if you could call me when you are running late.” Requests are important because they give others clear information about what helps us feel supported. Yet requests depend on others’ willingness and ability. They invite cooperation but cannot be enforced.

A **boundary**, on the other hand, is something we enforce for ourselves. It might sound like: “If you arrive more than 20 minutes late without telling me, I will begin without you.” Unlike a request, a boundary does not depend on the other person’s behavior. It depends on our own follow-through. When we make this distinction, relationships become clearer. We can ask for what we want without confusing it with what we must enforce for our well-being.

Blending the two can create tension. If we label a request as a boundary: “I need you to always text me back immediately”, we place pressure on others to meet a demand they may not be able to fulfill. If we avoid making boundaries altogether, we may become resentful when requests are ignored. The healthiest approach is to use both: express requests with openness and set boundaries with clarity.

Boundaries, expressed compassionately, actually support intimacy. They allow relationships to be built on honesty rather than unspoken expectations. They reduce resentment by keeping responsibility where it belongs. And they give others the gift of knowing how to relate to us without guessing.

Ultimately, learning to name the different types of boundaries and practicing the distinction between boundaries and requests is about living with clarity. It helps us care for our needs while remaining open to connection. By honoring both sides, our responsibility and others’ freedom, we create relationships that are both safe and alive.

# Alternative View

While categories of boundaries are useful, life is not always so neat. Physical, emotional, and energetic boundaries often overlap. Sometimes what begins as a request may evolve into a boundary, and vice versa. Staying flexible and self-reflective prevents rigidity.

# Activity

Which type of boundary—physical, emotional, energetic, or time—do you struggle most to set?

Where have you confused a request with a boundary in your relationships?

How does your body feel when you express a boundary clearly versus when you avoid it?

What request could you practice making this week, and what boundary could you practice following through on?

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