



# Self-Care for the Sensitive Soul: How To Say No, Create Boundaries and Reclaim Your Life

CHERYL RICHARDSON

[www.cherylrichardson.com](http://www.cherylrichardson.com)

Being overly sensitive is often seen as a flaw, but in reality it can be your greatest gift, when you understand how to take care of your sensitive self.

The truth is, we're all sensitive. It is in our basic nature to be sensitive. It's about being tuned in, being present, being connected to our environment and the people around us, and to the energy and the flow of the universe, essentially. In my own case, I can say that I'm very intuitive, I'm sensitive to people around me, I'm perceptive, I feel a deep connection to nature, to beauty, to an empathetic sense of others, the needs of others...

I am sensitive to an intrusive environment, sensitive to intrusive people, to people who aren't sensitive to others or to their environment; these are some of the things that really make it difficult for me!

And all this is wonderful, except that there are moments when if we don't know how to create boundaries, if we don't know how to say, "Excuse me, sir? Can you lower the music, please?" then it really can impact us in a negative way. When we're able to take care of ourselves, however, then it becomes such a great gift because we're able to connect to people's hearts.

Growing up I was a really sensitive child. My feelings got hurt, I cried easily. If my dad or my mother yelled at me, it was really hard. I was sensitive to the actions of kids in the neighborhood. If they didn't include me in something, I felt left out and felt sensitive about that. But here's the thing, nobody had ever told me that my sensitivity might in fact be a gift, or showed me how to protect it.

People-pleasers, who are prone to be bullied, taken over by more narcissistic people, are typically very empathetic. A healthy form of sensitivity is our basic nature. But unfortunately we live in a world that often forces us to numb out and to go unconscious in order to survive. If you just look at the news, for example, or you just look at the amount of information that comes into our inboxes every day, whether it's our mental inbox or our physical computer inbox or whatever, you almost have no choice but to numb out, to dull your sensitivity in



some ways, whether it's through food, through overworking, through alcohol, through drugs, through spending, unless you have good, strong, healthy boundaries. Any form of addiction is often a conscious and/or unconscious way of trying to manage our emotional states, in a world that's pretty harsh.

I have to say that tapping is such a powerful way to manage the energy that gets in the way when our sensitivity is triggered in some way.

Throughout my career I've always found that whenever some strong emotion would get triggered because I was so sensitive, tapping would allow me to calm myself right down, come back to a centered place, so that I could actually deal with whatever was in front of me. So it's one of the reasons why I think it's awesome that we're talking about this topic with tapping.

So let's do some tapping. A good place to start, based on what we covered above, is some tapping on the moment when we know that we're triggered, we're hurt.

So I would invite you to think about a time, maybe something very recent, that has annoyed you, something that feels like it's somehow invading your sensitivity. Or something that's triggering some kind of strong energy that you wish you could get a handle on so you could come back to a more centered place. Describe it here:

Measure it on a scale from one to ten, with one being, "I'm totally fine and calm and feel balanced," and ten being, "I feel so triggered and energetically off balance and thrown." Just measure where it is now: \_\_\_\_

And let's start tapping on the karate chop spot.

Side of Hand Even though I feel so sensitive  
I love and accept myself

Even though I feel like a pincushion in a world full of pins



I choose to love and accept myself

Even though my energy feels overwhelming  
I choose to feel peaceful and calm

Eyebrow	I feel so sensitive
Side of Eye	My energy is overwhelming
Under Eye	I don't like this feeling
Under Nose	Feeling unbalanced
Under Mouth	Feeling triggered
Collarbone	Feeling so young
Under arm	I'm judging myself
Top of Head	I'm so mean to myself about my sensitivity

EB	I hate being sensitive
SE	I love being sensitive
UE	No I don't, it's uncomfortable
UN	I'm learning to deal with my sensitivity in a healthier way
UM	I love myself
CB	I love my sensitivity
UA	I'm even willing to learn to love my sensitivity
TH	I am safe

Take a deep breath, and tune in again to the intensity of your feelings, and notice if there's been any movement. Describe any changes you may have felt:

And write out your new number: \_\_\_\_

Let's talk about boundaries. Many people don't really know what that means in their own life, so let's find a way to explain it.



So let's think about it visually; imagine yourself standing in the middle of several concentric circles, like ripples rolling out from you. So a first very wide boundary would be a circle that's far out. Let's imagine that the circle is about 30 feet from you, and at that circle, at that boundary line, there is a message that reads, "Nobody has the right to scream at me." And so, there's a certain level of behavior and experiences that we have that require wide boundaries so that people don't get too close to produce an upset. And perhaps the next level of boundary that's in closer to us, may read, "I don't allow people to raise their voices in my company." And an even closer boundary could be, "People may not be harsh with me."

There are many different kinds of boundaries, and each of us needs to think about what kind of protection we want in our lives. In my particular case, one of the things that is important to me, that really allows me to protect my sensitivity, is to have a lot of space around me. So if I were to think about the boundary between me and my emails, phone calls, commitments in my calendar, stuff in my life even, I might have a wider boundary. That circle might be out further than it is for other people, because I happen to know that in order to honor my sensitivity, I need space in my life.

So what are the kinds of boundaries that are important to you, and what do you need in order to protect our own sensitivity? What kind of environment do you need? Do you not like loud noises? Do you not like crowds of people? Make a few notes here:

As we get older, our boundaries can change too. We may think more in terms of our environment. We may have changing views on, and struggle with, clutter. I find again, to protect my sensitivity, that I am more and more creating more space in my environment, letting go of clutter, and even, again, if we go back to those rings, the circles around us.



As we learn to protect our sensitivity more and more, we find that we begin to eliminate things from our lives that no longer allow us to be truly present, to be truly connected to ourselves, to our environment, and to others.

One of the hardest things to manage is the intrusion produced by other people's requests, people asking things of our time. It can become very difficult, because if someone needs help, we want to help them! But we can be doing too much of it, and get to a point where we're putting other people's needs before our own. That's a very common pattern, particularly for people who are sensitive.

I feel like every time we turn around, there are more and more ways for people to reach out to us. Telephone, email, now text messages and DMs... it's never ending! And it creates a situation where we need to not be constantly defending ourselves against all this stuff, the people, the requests, the energy, even the media.

So the first step you need to take is to decide and then train yourself not to respond to everything immediately, but to schedule time to reply (to emails, for example). Then you have to train the people around you on your new methodology, for example, that they may not get an immediate reply if it is not urgent.

We need to take our sensitivity seriously, take our sense of presence and availability to others seriously, and sometimes that means making difficult choices, as per the examples I gave in my interview.

Now, there are times where we just have to do things we may not like. Those times are a lot less frequent than most people realize, but when you do, it's really important that you ask yourself, "How can I make this a joyful experience?" Just be outrageous about it, so for example, instead of, "How can I tolerate this?" Ask, "How can I make this a joyful experience? Who can I turn to for support?" And most importantly, "How can I limit the amount of time I'm there?"

When we decide that we want to make a change, whatever it may be, it often means that we have to have a conversation, and that conversation can feel very scary. I tell people they need two things: first they need the language to communicate what they need gracefully, lovingly, but firmly. So you have to work on the language. It often helps to practice with somebody, to role-play.



So practice; talk to a close friend, to your spouse. Practice what you are going to say ahead of time, so that you will be respectfully communicating, both on your own behalf and for the other person. And the other thing you can do to support your sensitivity, when you have to have a difficult conversation, is to have a cheerleader or a support person in place. Do this both before you make the call or you have the meeting, and afterwards, so that the natural anxiety you'll feel after having a difficult conversation can be vented with somebody safe.

And of course, I use tapping as well, even simply collarbone tapping: "Even though I feel anxious right now, because I took this step, I love and accept myself." Or, "Even though I feel so anxious about what I just did, I choose to feel peaceful and calm." Repeat that over and over and over again, "Even though I feel so nervous about what I just did, I choose to feel peaceful and calm." Just tapping on the collarbone can make a huge difference.

If you want to get out of the habit of just saying yes automatically, to everything, you can say, "You know what, let me sleep on that, and I'll get back to you." Or you could just say, "You know, in the past I've had a tendency to impulsively say 'yes' and I'm learning not to do that. So may I get back to you?" The first step is to recognize that impulsive habit of just saying yes, and you'll start to see it big time once you decide you want to become more aware of it, so catching yourself or seeing when it happens. Sometimes you may just say yes anyway, but beginning to see when you do that is a good first step. Then just say to people, "You know what, I'll need to get back to you on that," regardless of what it is.

Let's do some tapping now on what we can do before we have a difficult conversation, to try to feel more centered and strong. We know we want to make a change. So stop for a moment and think about a difficult conversation you might need to have. You may need to call your mother about cancelling an event or not being available to her as frequently, or you may want to have a difficult conversation with a friend who's always calling and draining your energy, or a difficult conversation with a boss.

Whatever it might be, think about a challenging conversation you need to have and describe it here:



Rate your fear, your anxiety, the stress level that you have on a scale from one to ten, with one being no stress and ten being full-on stress \_\_\_\_

Then we'll start to do some tapping on it now.

Start tapping on the side of the hand, the karate chop spot:

Side of Hand Even though I'm so nervous about having this conversation  
I choose to feel peaceful and calm

Even though I don't like disappointing people  
I choose to disappoint them anyway

Even though I hate my sensitivity  
When it comes to having hard conversations  
I choose to love and accept myself

Eyebrow I'm scared to have this conversation

Side of Eye I don't know what will happen

Under Eye What if they get mad at me?

Under Nose What if I disappoint them?

Under Mouth I don't want to have this conversation

Collarbone It makes me feel small

Under arm Oh, that's it

Top of Head I'm actually quite young right now

EB Growing myself back up

SE Becoming an adult

UE I can do this

UN No, I can't

UM I'm afraid to tell the truth

CB What if they don't like me?

UA I don't like the energy I feel

TH Oh, I'm young again

EB Growing myself up

SE Growing up my energy

UE Feeling like an adult

UN Feeling articulate



UM    Feeling empowered  
CB    Feeling brave  
UA    I can do this  
TH    I can be honest  
      I honor my relationships  
      By telling the truth  
      Lovingly  
      Graciously  
      Directly  
      And firmly  
      I am safe

Then just take a breath.

How do you feel about that conversation now?

Rate your intensity: \_\_\_\_

It's important to remember that when your buttons are pushed, when you're scared about talking to someone, you need to stop and ask yourself – close your eyes and ask yourself – "How old do I feel right now?" Because very often we go into a regressed state emotionally and we're no longer the adult having the conversation, we're the 5-year-child; it can be incredibly scary to do that.

So recognize that, "Oh, wait a minute, I'm not the adult, I'm five," and tap around growing yourself back up. This will help you to enter into a functional, articulate, empowered, clear adult state. Because most adults can have an honest conversation about what is and isn't working for them; it's the kid in us that gets scared that they're going to disappoint somebody or hurt their feelings.

If you are doing the tapping on your own, and struggling to find the best words for tapping on, first trust your intuition. Start out with the basics. So if you just start out with, "Even though I'm really scared to have this conversation," or, "Even though my energy feels overwhelming right now," or, "Even though I'm afraid to have this conversation, I choose to feel peaceful and calm." Just doing that over and over again on the karate chop spot or at the collarbone.





I do that a lot myself, on the collarbone. Sometimes actually tapping, sometimes imagining that I'm tapping, depending on the situation. "Even though I feel overwhelmed right now, I choose to feel peaceful and calm." "Even though my energy feels overwhelmed right now, I choose to feel peaceful and calm." If you start there, then pay attention to any thoughts, words, images, whatever it might be that comes up for you when you're doing that and then use that language.

I'll finish with this: saying the word "no" is the most powerful prayer in my life. It is an offering to my soul that allows me the space, the time, the energy I need to be fully present in a way that not only makes life so meaningful for me, but also allows me to make a powerful contribution to others.

\* \* \* \* \*



**CHERYL RICHARDSON** is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Take Time for Your Life*, *Life Makeovers*, *Stand Up for Your Life*, *The Unmistakable Touch of Grace*, *The Art of Extreme Self Care*, and her most recent book, *You Can Create an Exceptional Life* (co-authored with Louise Hay). She was the first president of the International Coach Federation and holds one of their first Master Certified Coach credentials. Cheryl was the team leader for the Lifestyle Makeover Series on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and accompanied Ms. Winfrey on the “Live Your Best Life” nationwide tour. Learn more about Cheryl’s public schedule, newsletter,

and social media presences at: [CherylRichardson.com](http://CherylRichardson.com)