

The Happy Highly Sensitive Life Podcast

Let's Reframe Setting Boundaries (For Highly Sensitive People)

Podcast Transcript

Episode 13

I will confess that there are certain terms that come from the therapy world that lead me to feel a bit put off. Boundaries. Enmeshment. Codependent, to name a few.

You may know that I am a former therapist. And because of that, you may think that, at some point, I had an affinity for these terms.

But, I know first hand, as someone who needed to learn better boundaries in my life, that there's a certain level of shame that goes with discovering you identify with these terms. What ends up happening is that we label ourselves as having bad boundaries. And the word "bad" sticks with how we identify ourselves.

The language we use to talk about ourselves is important. Words assign meaning and also influence how we feel about having the potential to evolve, learn and grow.

After learning about Human Design and how the energy centers function, I prefer to shift the focus from talking about setting boundaries to talking about staying self-connected.

When I talk about staying self-connected, I mean maintaining focus on what's important to you and your own wants and needs in the midst of energy from others that could overpower or disrupt that self-attunement.

As HSPs, we so often find ourselves just knowing or intuiting the wants and needs of others. And our own needs and wants can get pushed to the back burner and remain unspoken as a result.

If you're with someone who is hurting, you push your needs aside to focus on theirs. Over time, if this keeps happening, the relationship becomes one sided.

Here's another way this shows up. Perhaps you have an issue with someone but you're worried there will be emotional blowback if you stand up for yourself. So you

avoid having the conversation. I know this dynamic firsthand.

Or you are afraid if you say no you are letting someone down even though you're really holding yourself to a very high standard of being conscientious.

Learning to stay self-connected is ultimately about staying aware of your wants and needs, feeling assured about speaking up about what's important to you, so that you protect your time, your physical energy, and your emotional energy.

I admit that, at times in my life, when I've considered bringing up a hard conversation, I would analyze the situation from every angle possible, trying to imagine how the other person would respond and what I would say back. It was as if I were preparing to negotiate a hostage release. I was trying to think and feel my way into being ready to take a risk and speak up.

If you've been in this place, please don't give up on saying what you need because it feels overwhelming and hard. When you put your life on autopilot without steering the course of it, reflexively saying yes and agreeing to anything that comes your way, absorbing the emotions and wants and needs of others at the expense of your own, giving what you don't have to give, this leads to frustration, anger, bitterness, or disappointment and the less you thrive emotionally and physically. When you're pushing against your own knowing about what's right for you, eventually your body, mind and spirit start to wither.

In this episode, I'll talk about staying self-connected to what's important to you and your wants and needs. You will learn...

- The open Centers in Human Design and what they show us about challenges that may emerge related to staying self-connected
- How our history shapes how we stay self-connected
- How staying self-connected is a skill that can be learned
- 10 tips for speaking up for what's important to you

My hope is that this episode will give you a new way to view setting boundaries and open a door for you to approach yourself with kindness and to see yourself on a path of evolving, learning and growing and giving yourself grace to try a new way of relating to others.

The open Centers in Human Design and what they show us about challenges that may emerge related to staying self-connected

Let's start by talking about Human Design and what the energy Centers show us about how we absorb the energy of others and how this can make it harder to hear and know what we want and to feel assured about voicing our needs.

First, when you look at your Human Design chart, you will see 9 geometric shapes overlaid over the human body. These shapes are called Centers and they work like the chakras and have energetic themes.

When a center is defined it can also be called closed, you have consistent access to that energy theme. This center will be colored in.

White Centers are called open centers or sometimes undefined centers. Through them we take in and amplify the energy of people we're with. In these centers we are deeply attuned to the energy of others. You may feel absorbed, consumed or influenced by the energy of others or pressured by this energy.

I want to take a moment to go through the energy dynamics created by 6 of the 9 Centers as they relate to staying self-connected.

The first center I want to talk about is the Will Center.

The Will Center is the center of willpower. It is the small triangle located to the lower right of the diamond in the middle of the Body Graph. Most people have an Open Will Center. If it's open, it's white. And you may find yourself agreeing to do something you don't want to do to prove your worth. You may find that you underestimate your value, your time, or your services. You may say yes to things in an effort to prove yourself. You may override your sense of knowing about what works for you and what you need, and to reflexively make overly generous offers without anyone asking you to.

The next center to talk about it is the Identity Center.

The **Identity Center** is the center for love, identity and purpose. It's the diamond in the center of the Body Graph. It's concerned with your life purpose. It aligns you to *who you are* and a sense of yourself. It's the center of love and self-love.

I have an Open Identity Center. Many intuitives and therapists have open Identity Centers, giving you the ability to intuit other people's values, perspective, mission and purpose. You may just know what other people want and need.

With an Open Identity Center, you feel very tuned into who you're with and the space you're in. You may feel influenced by the energy of other people and have a flexible identity and sense of self. It's hard to know where the other person starts and you begin.

You may try to blend in and start to share and mirror the identity of the people you are with and the environment you are in. You can so strongly feel the other person, and their perspective that you may give their perspective the benefit of the doubt, perhaps at the expense of your own perspective. Your own needs and wants can get pushed to the back burner and remain unspoken.

With this center Open, you may question your lovability and feel like you need to prove your lovability. It's funny, when I first learned about the open Identity Center, I didn't relate to the idea that I needed to prove my lovability. I've since come to realize that this shows up for me through worrying about what other people think of me.

Whenever I used to worry about what someone else thought of me, my mom used to encourage me to tune back into myself by saying, "Marya, the most important relationship you'll ever have is the one you have with yourself." She's a wise woman. This helped me to stay connected to myself.

Over time, I learned to do that more and more. I had to deliberately look for my life and really get clear about what was important to me.

The **Throat Center** is the center for communication and manifestation. It's the square located 3 shapes from the top of the Body Graph. With an Open Throat Center (28% of the population), you may find that to be seen and heard and speaking relieves anxiety in the moment. You may be chatty and try to be the life of the party to relieve anxiety. This may lead you to lose track of what you truly want and need. You may find that you agree to do something when you don't really want to, because you're trying to break the tension in the moment. If you've ever been in a work meeting where there's a task up for grabs and dead silence as no one wants to take it on, and you end up volunteering when you don't want to, if you have an open Throat Center, this may be why.

The **Root Center** houses the *adrenaline* associated with taking action. It's the square at the bottom center of the chart. As I mentioned in episode 12, *Exhaustion, Hustle + Burnout: What Human Design Can Teach HSPs About Fatigue*, with an Open Root, if you're around someone with a Defined Root, you may feel pressured by their Defined Root energy. A passing comment or observation from your partner with a defined root may feel like an ask or request when it wasn't intended to be that way. And that others are waiting on you to complete tasks and that you constantly are trying to get free of the pressure to get things done by being super productive. You also may feel that the expectations coming from others are impossibly high. You may find that this pressure leads you to disconnect from your own wants and needs. Suddenly you're taking on too much and saying yes to things you have no desire to take on. With present moment awareness, you can realize that the pressure is energetic and ask questions to clarify expectations and triage what really needs to get done.

The **Solar Plexus** is the large triangle on the bottom right side of the Body Graph that's associated with emotions. As I talked about in Episode 11 (*Empath Overload? What Human Design Shows You About Being an Empath + How to Cope*), with an Open Emotional Solar Plexus, you are an emotional empath, taking in other people's emotional energy and amplifying it.

50% of the world has an open Emotional Solar Plexus. You are here to become wise about feelings. It is easy to think that the emotions you are experiencing are your own. When you take in other people's emotional energy, the emotions feel amplified. Because of how strongly you experience the emotional energy of others, it's hard to be in the negative energy of other people. You feel absorbed by the emotions of others and try to maintain a peaceful environment by avoiding conflict.

If you have an issue with someone, you may sidestep having the hard conversation because you're afraid of emotional blowback that may come from standing up for yourself. So you avoid having the conversation.

There's another dynamic that can happen here too. If you're with someone who is hurting, you may push your needs aside to focus on theirs. If this happens again and again; your relationship becomes one-sided.

The Spleen is the triangle on the bottom left side of the Body Graph. It is an awareness Center and is connected to *instinctual safety, health and well-being*, and *survival awareness*. Through the Open Spleen, you empathically pick up on the instinctive and intuitive pulses and signals about survival and well-being, in a variety

of different ways, based on who you're with. Your instincts are coming in through so many different ways, you may not know which intuitive signals to trust, follow and act on. You empathically pick up on the fears other people are experiencing. This can create anxiety for you. The empathic gift of this Center is that you intuitively know what other people are experiencing. This energy can feel so absorbing that your sense of connection to yourself and what's going on with you can be overshadowed. It's hard to know what are your instincts and what are someone else's.

With an Open Spleen, you tend to want to be prepared for whatever may come your way to counteract your anxiety. You may tend to hold onto things, habits or relationships so that you'll be prepared. Holding on gives you peace of mind and a sense of security. Releasing and letting go of what's not a fit feels hard.

When you know about your Open Centers and how you may become absorbed or influenced by the energy of others you can become more aware of the energy dynamics that are driving your actions in the moment.

But there's another dynamic at play that we have to talk about. Growing up, we adopt habits and patterns about speaking up for ourselves. In our childhood, we have limited power, voice and influence. We learned when to lay low and how to stay out of trouble and keep harmony in an effort to get our needs met. These patterns and habits led to our survival. Our acceptance. And determined how we felt loved and valued.

And the dynamics we experienced growing up unconsciously inform a sense of what's safe or not safe to do and say later in life. Let's explore this more deeply.

How our history shapes how we stay self-connected

As HSPs, everywhere we go, we are reading the energy of people and places. We're constantly engaged in a non-verbal energy exchange. As we move through our day, we get energetic red lights or green lights that either stop us from moving forward or open the door for taking action.

And the energy dynamics we experienced growing up unconsciously inform a sense of what's a red or green light later in life. The habits and patterns we developed in childhood influence what feels safe to do and say later in life. Here's an example of what I mean.

When I was growing up, as much as I loved my dad, he lived with emotional walls up. He was the strong silent type most of the time. And when he was upset, he pulled back even more, not talking to anyone. He made eye contact less. He felt heavy to be around and there was an invisible energetic wall up. Sometimes I would ask him a question and he wouldn't respond. It was as if I hadn't spoken. His moods created tension in our house. I knew something was off, but I never knew exactly what it was. As a result, I would tread lightly and dismiss my feelings. I would shrink down and become invisible, hesitant, quiet and withdrawn. This made an energetic imprint on me.

I adopted certain patterns of relating to him and those patterns became my default blueprint for how I related to men and authority figures as I left home, got my first job and started dating more seriously.

You know that feeling of meeting someone for the first time and getting the sense that they feel familiar to you in some way.

You can't quite put your finger on why but there's an energetic similarity to someone you know or have known. A tone of voice that seems similar. Maybe it's a way they hold their body or make eye contact. Or their energy behind their words or the sound of their laugh. Or an instinctive intuitive sense that you need to tread lightly.

For example, if you are like me and you were energetically imprinted by your father to remain quiet to keep the peace and maintain his approval, with individuals who carry his similar energetic presentation, or who have a sense of authority in your life, you will unconsciously carry and express yourself in the same way around them. The same norms that you had about expressing yourself and saying what you want and need with that person would be a default way of relating in this new situation. It feels safe to fall into this old pattern or habit of relating.

These habits may not serve you as well later in life. But it is possible to become aware of these patterns and how they may be limiting connections. And to change them.

How staying self-connected is a skill that can be learned

When I first started dating, I fell into patterns based on what I'd experienced with my dad.

I was a magnet for men who preferred heavy intellectual debates and who shied away from conversations about feelings. That's what felt normal to me. Relating any other way felt too intimate.

Because I never learned how to express myself, and I wanted to avoid being seen as too sensitive or labeled as high maintenance, I withdrew when I was upset, as I'd seen my dad do.

Then during relationship coach training, I read John Gottman's relationship research and learned that the habit of pulling back in silence is "stonewalling" and it's a top reason marriages don't last.

If I wanted to eventually have an emotionally close and supportive relationship, I had some things to learn. I needed to break my unconscious pattern of pulling back and closing down to be able to have the type of relationship I wanted.

It was through having friendships with men, dating and learning to stay self-connected that I was able to create a new pattern of learning to talk about what was important to me and what I wanted and needed. In the beginning, there were lots of moments of feeling unsure, being afraid to speak up, and being afraid I would be dismissed, and then just holding onto my seat and forcing words out of my mouth and bracing for impact. And eventually it became easier to speak up and I started creating a new pattern for how to talk about what I wanted and needed.

It is possible to learn new skills with speaking up. So let's go deeper with talking about solutions and how to stay self-connected and to speak up for your wants and needs.

10 tips for speaking up for what's important to you

- 1. Learn to tune into and hear your inner truth.** For that I recommend learning about and starting to use your Human Design Strategy & Authority to make decisions. Human Design tells us that we take in so much conditioning and feel influenced by others through messages about what we should and shouldn't do. Our body, rather than our mind, holds the truest wisdom. Learn more about Strategy and Authority by going back and listening to Episode 10, an Introduction to Human Design for HSPs. As an example, 70% of the population, that's Generators and Manifesting Generators, feels an immediate Sacral yes or no response. That's a uh-huh or un-unh in your gut. If you're a

Manifestor, Projector, or Reflector energy Type, listen to episode 10 for details about your strategy for hearing your inner wisdom.

2. **Learn about your Human Design so you know what centers are open and may be driving your responses.** Becoming aware of the centers you can be influenced through immediately begins to change the dynamic. That takes me to strategy 3.
3. **Delay giving an answer so you have a chance to separate from the other person's energy field.** Have you noticed that you feel more clarity about what you want and need when you're away from the person you need to give an answer to? And then you start to soften your stance when you're in the room with the person? Being in the energetic force field of a person can interfere with connecting to your truth. I am a Manifesting Generator and there are times that I won't hear my Sacral response when I'm in the presence of another person. I anticipate the other person's perspective. It's more likely to happen in a situation where there are a lot of social rules. For example, when I worked in an office, I wondered if I could say no without burning bridges. Or when I'm face to face with someone who is just an acquaintance and there are social niceties pressing down. These are the times you want to say "let me check, can I get back to you". And get out of their energy field to tune into your truth.
4. **Know your answer is a no, even if you're not sure how to communicate your truth yet.** Have you ever known your answer was a no, but you weren't sure how you could possibly say no, so you said yes instead? When you've got your answer but you're not sure how to deliver it, just let it sit, let your brain work on a solution for how to deliver your no. Just open yourself up to the idea that there may be a way to honor what you feel. Then see what options emerge. This isn't a sign you should say yes. It's a sign it's time to learn some new ways of saying no.
5. **Reframe saying no as a chance for authenticity.** When you think about saying no, you may get flooded with all the reasons delivering your no will be awful and a hard conversation. I know there have been times in my life I didn't share my truth because I didn't want to feel a rush of strong emotion or worse, start crying. This is the time to change how you're thinking and instead, focus on how setting an authentic limit is a chance to be more fully known. Before the pandemic, we dropped out of our neighborhood monthly dinner group and this was the perspective that helped me get through the fear of the uncomfortable moment. ("Dinner club just doesn't work for us every month. We'd love to get drinks sometime.")
6. **Write a script and research, learn and practice new ways to say no or speak your truth.** Nonviolent communication (NVC) short-circuits conflict by using

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deep listening and compassion. The name for this skill is awful and should be called peaceful communication. Let me share a scenario to describe the four-step process. Your partner changes their mind about going to a show with you at the last minute. Step 1). Make a neutral observation, "I hear you say you can't come to the show with me." 2). Focus on feelings, not issues. "I feel confused or frustrated." 3). Convey your unmet need. "I need consistency or consideration." 4). When there's real understanding, make a request to satisfy the need. "In the future, would you let me know earlier if you've changed your mind?" Some communities offer [NVC practice groups](#). In the show notes I'll share a link to the [NVC website](#) and practice groups.

7. **Do nose belly breathing to support and center you when you're having a hard conversation.** Deep breathing triggers your relaxation response. Aim for 4-6 breaths per minute. That's 10-15 seconds per breath. Focus on expanding the exhale rather than quickly inhaling, which may lead to hyperventilation. Use it before and during "the talk" to calm your nervous system and your racing thoughts.
8. **When you first start setting a limit it may come out really weirdly, that's ok.** Your nervousness about doing something new may make it sound forced or unnatural. That's okay. Give yourself grace, you're still learning. With practice and time, it will become easier and you'll begin to feel calmer doing it.
9. **After you set a new limit, people may get caught off guard that you're behaving differently.** They may push back in an effort to try to get you to revert back to the boundaries they're familiar with you having. If you usually do all the housework and then start delegating tasks to the members of your family, you'll probably get grumbles about it. After all, their life is easier when you do it all. Follow your Strategy and Authority. Be clear about your reasons for asking for what you need, so that you can stick to your guns when the grumbles come. This is part of the change process. Be ready for the possibility, prepare to stay the course.
10. **Afterwards release the stress that came with having a hard conversation.** If your heart was pounding and you started sweating that's a sign you had a stress reaction during the conversation. Afterwards, you may find yourself analyzing and process what went on. Going over every detail of what you said and they said. You need a way to move the stress out of your nervous system. Use the strategies in Episode 3, How to Cope with Intense Situations as a Highly Sensitive Person, I will link it in the Show Notes for you.

There you have it. My hope is that this episode has given you a new perspective that will help you speak about what's important to you, and talk about what you want and

need so that you can release and let go of what's not working in your life to build a life that allows you to thrive and lights you up.

If your intuition is nudging you to learn about your Human Design with me. Use the link in the show notes [to grab a 50-page written guide to your Human Design](#). Receive a downloadable custom blueprint to guide you as you begin to incorporate the principles of Human Design in your life, based on your unique Human Design Chart. Learn how you're designed to create sustainable energy, to work and rest, cultivate relationships, build well-being, and conduct self-care. Plus, how to tap into your inner knowing, attract opportunities and fulfill your life purpose. I lovingly custom create every map myself.

If you'd like to receive regular news from me, sign up for my email newsletter by following the link in the show notes. You can also connect with me on Pinterest at Happy Highly Sensitive Life.

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Bye now.