# Managing Your Time & Saying No

Reclaim your time, set sustainable limits, and protect the energy that makes your clinical work possible

10-Day Challenges

CONTENTS


- Part 1 · About this challenge
- Part 2 · Day 1 · The Cost of Constant Yes
- Part 3 · Day 2 · Why Clinicians Struggle to Say No
- Part 4 · Day 3 · The Difference Between Boundaries and Walls
- Part 5 · Day 4 · Time Mapping Your Week
- Part 6 · Day 5 · Prioritization: Urgent vs. Important
- Part 7 · Day 6 · The Language of Saying No
- Part 8 · Day 7 · Saying No to Systems, Not Just People
- Part 9 · Day 8 · The Role of Guilt
- Part 10 · Day 9 · Protecting Your Deep Work Time
- Part 11 · Day 10 · A Sustainable Practice, A Sustainable You


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# Part 1 · About this challenge

Ten days of practical strategies for reclaiming your time, setting sustainable limits, and protecting the energy that makes your clinical work possible.

Sheamus Moran - Founder of The Recovery Files

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# Part 2 · Day 1 · The Cost of Constant Yes

DAY 1 · AWARENESS

## Reading

Most clinicians are exceptional at saying yes. Yes to the extra client. Yes to the last-minute coverage. Yes to the documentation that could wait. Yes, yes, yes — until there is nothing left to give.

This challenge is about reclaiming your time and energy not as a luxury but as a professional responsibility. A clinician who cannot manage their own workload cannot fully help others manage theirs. This is not selfishness — this is sustainability.

## Reflection

What was the last thing you said yes to that you wish you had declined? What stopped you from saying no?

## Today's Exercise

Track every request made of you today — formal and informal — and note which ones you agreed to, which you declined, and which you wished you'd handled differently. No judgment, just data.

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# Part 3 · Day 2 · Why Clinicians Struggle to Say No

DAY 2 · AWARENESS

## Reading

The difficulty clinicians have with saying no is not a character flaw — it's a training artifact. We are trained to be available, responsive, and accommodating. Helping is the core of the identity. Saying no feels like a betrayal of that identity.

Add to that the very real structural pressures: staffing shortages, high caseloads, guilt about colleagues who are equally stretched. Saying no can feel impossible even when it's necessary. Understanding why is the first step toward doing it differently.

## Reflection

What belief or fear underlies your difficulty saying no at work? Is it about being seen as a team player? Fear of judgment? Something else?

## Today's Exercise

Write down your top three internal barriers to saying no at work. For each one, ask: Is this belief serving me — or is it costing me more than it's worth?

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# Part 4 · Day 3 · The Difference Between Boundaries and Walls

DAY 3 · CLARITY

## Reading

A boundary is not a wall. A wall keeps everyone out. A boundary is a deliberate, communicated limit that protects your capacity to keep showing up. Clinicians with healthy boundaries are more present, more effective, and more sustainable in the field.

Boundaries require clarity about your values, your limits, and what you need to do your best work. They also require the courage to communicate them — not defensively, but directly and respectfully.

## Reflection

Where in your current work situation do you most need a clearer boundary? What has prevented you from establishing it?

## Today's Exercise

Identify one boundary you've been avoiding setting. Write out exactly how you would communicate it clearly and respectfully. You don't have to deliver it today — just practice articulating it.

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# Part 5 · Day 4 · Time Mapping Your Week

DAY 4 · TIME MANAGEMENT

## Reading

Most clinicians have no accurate sense of how their time is actually spent. We have a rough idea — clients, documentation, meetings, email — but the specifics are fuzzy. And fuzzy time awareness makes boundary-setting and saying no much harder.

Time mapping is simple: track how you actually spend your hours over a week. Not how you plan to, or how you think you do — how you actually do. The data is often revealing and sometimes alarming.

## Reflection

If you had to estimate the split of your work time between direct client contact, documentation, meetings, and everything else — what would that look like? How do you feel about that split?

## Today's Exercise

For the next two days, keep a rough log of how you spend each hour at work. At the end, categorize the time. What does the data tell you about where your energy is actually going?

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# Part 6 · Day 5 · Prioritization: Urgent vs. Important

DAY 5 · TIME MANAGEMENT

## Reading

The Eisenhower Matrix distinguishes between what is urgent and what is important. We tend to overweight urgency at the expense of importance. Urgent tasks demand immediate attention. Important tasks advance your core purpose and long-term effectiveness.

Much of what feels urgent in clinical settings is not actually important — and much of what is important gets crowded out by the urgent. Reclaiming your time starts with being ruthlessly honest about this distinction.

## Reflection

Name three things in your work life that are genuinely important but rarely get your attention because the urgent keeps taking over. What would it cost you to protect time for them?

## Today's Exercise

Take your task list for today and sort each item: Urgent + Important / Important but not urgent / Urgent but not important / Neither. Notice the pattern. What would change if you acted on this categorization?

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# Part 7 · Day 6 · The Language of Saying No

DAY 6 · SKILLS

## Reading

Saying no is a skill, and like any skill, it gets easier with practice and better with technique. The key is to say no in ways that are clear, kind, and final — without over-explaining, apologizing excessively, or leaving room for negotiation you don't intend to have.

Effective no language sounds like: "I'm not able to take that on right now." "That's not something I can commit to this week." "I'd be doing you a disservice if I added that to my current load." Direct. Respectful. Honest.

## Reflection

How do you currently say no when you do manage to do it? Does your approach invite pushback? Do you over-explain or apologize too much?

## Today's Exercise

Practice saying no out loud using at least three different formulations. Write down two 'no' scripts you could use this week.

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# Part 8 · Day 7 · Saying No to Systems, Not Just People

DAY 7 · ADVOCACY

## Reading

Sometimes the problem is not an individual request but a systemic one — unrealistic caseloads, mandatory overtime, policies that don't account for clinician wellbeing. Individual boundary-setting has limits in the face of institutional pressure.

Advocating for structural change is also part of saying no. It might mean raising concerns in supervision, documenting unsustainable demands, or connecting with colleagues to address shared conditions. This is professional responsibility.

## Reflection

What systemic factor in your workplace most affects your ability to manage your time effectively? Have you ever raised it directly? What would it take to do so?

## Today's Exercise

Identify one systemic issue affecting your time and professional wellness. Write a brief, clear summary of the issue and one concrete suggestion for improvement. Consider who it could be shared with.

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# Part 9 · Day 8 · The Role of Guilt

DAY 8 · EMOTIONAL SKILLS

## Reading

Guilt is the sentinel of every boundary. The moment you say no, guilt arrives to tell you that you've done something wrong — that a good clinician, a good colleague, a good person would have said yes.

Learning to tolerate guilt without letting it reverse your decisions is one of the most important skills in sustainable clinical practice. Guilt is information, not instruction. It says "this matters to you" — not "you must comply."

## Reflection

When you say no and feel guilty, what story do you tell yourself? Is that story true? What would you tell a colleague who expressed the same guilt?

## Today's Exercise

The next time you say no this week, notice the guilt response. Don't fight it — just name it: 'That's guilt. It makes sense that I feel it. And I'm going to hold my boundary anyway.' Write down what happened.

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# Part 10 · Day 9 · Protecting Your Deep Work Time

DAY 9 · SUSTAINABILITY

## Reading

Deep work — focused, uninterrupted concentration on meaningful tasks — is increasingly rare in clinical environments. Email, messages, impromptu conversations, and constant availability requests fragment the workday into a series of shallow responses.

For clinicians, deep work includes: thorough case conceptualization, thoughtful treatment planning, quality documentation, professional reflection. Protecting time for it requires active defense of your schedule and deliberate communication.

## Reflection

When in your workday do you have the opportunity for uninterrupted focus? Is that time protected — or is it regularly invaded?

## Today's Exercise

Block one 45-minute 'deep work' window into your schedule for next week. Treat it like a client appointment — non-negotiable. Tell one colleague what you're doing and why.

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# Part 11 · Day 10 · A Sustainable Practice, A Sustainable You

**DAY 10 · INTEGRATION**

A Sustainable Practice, A Sustainable You

## Reading

The goal of this challenge is not to make you into someone who says no reflexively or protects their time at the expense of their team. The goal is sustainability — a professional life in which your time, energy, and attention are managed thoughtfully enough that you can keep showing up fully for the people who need you.

Saying no, setting limits, managing your calendar, advocating for structural fairness — these are not selfish acts. They are professional acts. They are how helpers help for the long term.

Helpers helping helpers. That includes helping yourself.

## Reflection

What is the most important shift you want to make in how you manage your time and set limits at work? What is the first concrete step?

## Today's Exercise

Write a brief 'Time & Boundary Commitment' — a realistic, specific plan for how you will manage your time and say no more effectively going forward. Share it with one trusted person in your professional life.

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