

BOUNDARIES

A boundary is a personal property line that defines our responsibilities. It defines what we do and what we don't do. Part of taking on the responsibility of working or volunteering around minors is knowing what our job is and what it isn't. You're a teacher, you're a coach; you're not a pal, you're not a confidant.

Setting limits is not selfish; in fact, it serves to enhance the relationship. Whenever we fail to set boundaries, we fail in our responsibility to our children. When our superiors and administrators fail to set and follow clear boundaries with us, they have failed in their responsibilities to us. Many of us have had the experience of working for someone who violates boundaries. If a relationship changes from employer-employee to friend-friend there can be very difficult ramifications.

In our work with children we can often find ourselves in interactions where boundaries can easily be crossed. We don't want to hurt a child's feelings or we want to be helpful to them. But we need to be aware of the personal and legal risks these situations may pose for us. Often a seemingly harmless but inappropriate action in regard to a child can put us at serious personal and/or legal risk. A serious allegation may be made against us even if we see it as an innocent situation.

A good way to determine if you are overstepping a boundary is to ask yourself what your role in a child's life is. If you are a Scout leader every interaction you have with a minor in your care must be directly connected to Scouting. Anything else is over stepping.

Social networking can lead to boundary violations very easily. It is so fast, and seems so private, although it's really not, a simple communication about a practice or a meeting can turn quickly into personal communication. **The whole issue of social networking has been a tremendous challenge to dioceses everywhere. But the issue isn't the communication methodology, it's boundaries, and how easily social networking can lead to crossing and violating these boundaries. Remember that boundaries can be violated in actions, in face-to-face conversations, on the phone, on email and in social networking. And if the boundary violation takes place on electronic communication, it's there forever.**

The following are some guidelines that address potential boundary violations when you work or volunteer around children:

1. When a parent or child confides in you that information stays confidential unless you determine that it is in the child's best interest that it be reported to the proper authorities.
2. To avoid any hint of the impropriety, avoid being alone with a child behind closed doors unless there is a certain type of opening so that others can see in. If you are

- in a situation that can be misconstrued as being inappropriate be certain to have another adult present.
3. Use extreme caution when appropriately touching a child on the arms, shoulders or head. Never touch a child when it can be interpreted as being punitive.
 4. Guard against becoming overly involved with any one child. If you think a child in your care needs some special attention, talk to the program director, or to the parents, don't take that responsibility on yourself. If it becomes noticeable to others then the boundary probably has been crossed.
 5. The following situations could be construed as inappropriate given the nature of the situation: Taking a child home without parental permission, visiting a child's home without the parent present, frequent telephoning or texting, blogging or emailing a child, sharing your problems with a child, or going on unauthorized trips with children.
 6. Adults need to be aware of when too many of their emotional needs are being met in their work with children. If you work with children all day, you need to be with adults in the evening.
 7. Being liked by those whom we have authority over is not the end-goal. Our concern should be in treating them respectfully and requiring that they treat us with appropriate respect. When we're worried about being liked, it keeps us from having to carry out our duties.
 8. Healthy boundaries as an adult include enforcing rules and policies that should be in effect. When we allow a child to break a rule while in our classroom or office, it sends a message that rules are optional and boundaries are flimsy.
 9. In order to maintain appropriate boundaries, it is recommended that a form of peer supervision be established so that questionable situations can be appropriately resolved.

We need to remember that being aware of appropriate boundaries is in our best interest, the child's best interest and the best interest of the whole community.

REFERENCES

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