

# Practicing Professionalism: Boundaries & Consent

## What are Boundaries and Why are They Important?

Boundaries are the guidelines that we use to set expectations, responsibilities and limits for ourselves and other people. Boundaries determine what is (and what is not) OK in our relationships with students.

### Boundaries include:

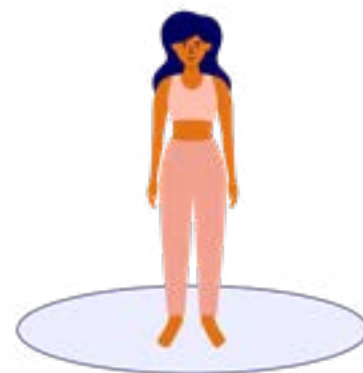
- Guidelines that you use to set expectations, responsibilities and limits for ourselves and other people.
- The emotional and physical space between you and another person.
- The limit or line over which you will not allow anyone to cross because of the negative impact of its being crossed in the past.
- The established set of limits over your physical and emotional well-being which you expect others to respect in their relationship with you.
- The healthy emotional and physical distance you maintain between you and another so that you do not become overly enmeshed and/or dependent.

### Why do we cross them?

- To build rapport.
- To save time.
- To give the student a break.
- To sort out a problem.
- To help a student who can't manage on their own.

### How do boundaries help?

- They provide students a safe environment and a sense of control.
- They build trust.
- They allow us to stay professional and reduce liability.
- They can prevent burnout.
- They teach students how to apply boundaries in their own lives.



### Examples of Healthy Boundaries:

- Expressing your feelings responsibly and in the appropriate setting.
- Addressing conflicts directly with the person involved, rather than a third party.
- Being clear in your expectations, so others don't have to figure them out.
- Defining and responding to only official means of communication.
- Being respectful of schedules and other people's time.

## Warning Signs and Danger Zones

**Watch out for these warning signs that you should have better defined boundaries:**

- Over identifying with a student
- Not recognizing when (not if) you have “favorites” or when (not if) there is an attraction
- Being overly protective of a student
- Not thinking you’re at risk
- Lack of peer and supervisor support
- Oversharing personal/intimate information
- Going against your personal values to please others
- Not recognizing when someone displays inappropriate boundaries

**Be especially aware of boundaries in these danger zones:**

- One-on-one interactions
- Situations where students are in a state of undress (locker rooms, therapy rooms)
- Any activity that requires touching the student
- Interactions with minors
- When you are feeling loneliness, stress, anxiety, or depression
- Working with vulnerable students
- Working with students with poor boundaries
- Working in a secluded area



## Maintaining Healthy Boundaries

- Communicate and maintain healthy boundaries from the start.
- Understand the nature of informed consent, whether written or verbal.
- Remain willing to talk with students about any potential problems and conflicts that may arise.
- Seek supervision when dual relationships become problematic or the risk of harm is high.
- Document any dual relationships beforehand.
- When needed, refer students to another staff member.

## Reflection Questions

- Do you close your door when you’re working? If not, why not?
- If someone knocks, do you jump up to answer the door even if you’re in the middle of something?
- How do you answer the door when people knock? Do you open the door wide or body block the entry?
- Do you nod and maintain prolonged eye contact when people disclose personal information?
- Do you give out your personal cell phone number to students?
- Are you Facebook friends with students?
- Are you responding to student emails in the evenings and on weekends?
- What are your touching practices? (Do you hug crying students, put hands on their shoulders or arms, or grab their hands for reassurance?)