

ACTIVITY 5 HANDOUT:

On boundaries

What is a boundary?

A boundary can be thought of as a protective barrier that helps to keep us safe. For boundaries to be effective they need to be applied on a consistent and ongoing basis. Boundaries teach children what healthy relationships look like and allow them to be children.

Who needs boundaries?

All of us can benefit from having healthy boundaries in our relationships. Exercising your ability to set and maintain those boundaries throughout your mentoring relationship will provide you with an opportunity to challenge your own personal growth.

Although all children need boundaries, they are particularly important for youth who:

1. Come from chaotic and unpredictable environments
2. Have been the victims of abuse
3. Have to take care of the adults in their lives and as a result have not had their own needs met

Are there any signs that can tell me if my personal boundaries have been crossed? Feeling angry, used, violated, drained, or that you need to walk away from the relationship may be signs that you are in a situation where your boundaries are being violated.

How do I prevent my boundaries from being violated?

You should decide what boundaries are important to you before the match begins and certainly before being confronted with a difficult situation. Planning in advance will help prevent being caught off guard and it will also help you plan and rehearse your desired response. Some specific areas where boundaries are important include:

- Money: How much money am I comfortable spending on each outing? How will I respond if on an outing my mentee asks me to buy him/her something? How would I feel if my mentee's family requests help with their finances?
- Behavior: What would I do if my mentee uses foul language, mistreats others, steals, or is disrespectful of me during one of our meetings?
- Self-disclosure: How would I respond if my mentee asks me about my previous experience with sex, drug use, past relationships, or other personal issues?

- Time: How much time do I feel comfortable spending with my mentee on a weekly basis? Am I comfortable receiving phone calls at work? How late is too late to receive a phone call (or too early)? What would I do if my mentee does not show up for a meeting?
- Working with parents/guardians: What would I do if my mentee's father asks me out on a date? What do I do if when greeted at the door, my mentee's mother begins sharing her "laundry list" of complaints about her son? What would I do if my mentee's grandmother begins crying and sharing her problems with me when I drop by for a visit?

Remember that if you are not sure how to respond to a situation, you have every right to request time to think about it. It is best to set boundaries from the start. However, you can and should make adjustments to your relationship as necessary. It is better to adjust a boundary than to walk away from a relationship.

Finally, and most important, remember that you do not have to do this alone. If you are unsure about a situation, need help figuring out how to proceed, or need an intervention, you can go to program staff for support.

Are there any guidelines I can use that can help guide my actions when confronted with situations that challenge healthy boundaries?

Here is a three-step approach you can apply when trying to decide how to handle a difficult scenario:

1. *In mentoring, the relationship is the formula, the strategy, and the intervention.* How can you respond to this situation in a way that protects the well-being of the mentoring relationship?
2. *The implications of your response are as important as the response itself.* What are the short-term and long-term consequences of the way you choose to handle the situation?
3. *Communicate from a place of personal honesty.* How can you effectively communicate with your mentee the importance of the boundary in question in a way that honors your needs without blaming or shaming your mentee?