

Boundaries

Boundaries are limits. They are lines that tell us where we end and others begin. If we have clear boundaries, we know what we feel and we don't absorb or take responsibility for others' feelings just because we are close to them or we love them. With clear boundaries we can determine what is our responsibility and what is the responsibility of others.

Without boundaries, we take on others' feelings, let people use us and do not recognize that we have any rights at all. We may lose the sense of being a separate person and have a tough time keeping our own personality intact around other people.

Consider these guidelines in order to set and maintain healthy boundaries as a parent mentor.

1. Work as part of a team. Know team members and recognize resources. Use the help and guidance of others as you discuss questions about boundaries with them.
2. Be aware of behaviors that indicate that boundaries are not in place in the mentorship relationship, such as telling too much, calling too often, expecting favors, depleting personal energy.
3. Learn to recognize those situations that call for more skilled intervention, such as mental illness, addiction, depression and abuse

Ways We Violate Others' Boundaries

- Disregarding confidentiality – telling people's private matters to others
- Controlling, manipulating, or making decisions for others
- Speaking for others
- Using others' possessions without permission or not returning borrowed items
- Ignoring requests for emotional or physical space
- Relentless questioning, badgering, and criticizing
- Reading others' private papers, letters, journals and prying into others' drawers, purses, and briefcases
- Touching people without asking
- Giving unwanted advice, rescuing, enabling, and taking over others' lives
- Talking about people in front of them
- Abusing others - physically, sexually, emotionally or verbally
- Needling nosiness, pointed or unnecessary questioning



Situational Boundary Violations

Are these situations generally, never or sometimes OK?

1. Stopping in at a family home for an unexpected visit to ‘see how things are going’.
2. Giving a parent a ride to the grocery store because she has no transportation.
3. Hugging a parent as you leave.
4. Sharing the details of your recent divorce.
5. Asking colleagues to bring a grocery item for a family who is struggling financially.
6. Scheduling additional homevisits because of concern about a parent’s safety.
7. Using terms of endearment (‘honey’, ‘dear’) with parents.
8. Correcting a parent when he/she calls another a racist name.
9. Questioning the use of profanity to their children.
10. Lending money to a parent.
11. Having a parent call my home.
12. Offering to care for children during an important legal appointment.
13. Asking detailed questions about family matters.
14. Bringing a small gift during a visit.
15. Complaining or arguing with a family about how professionals are working with the family.
16. Getting in the middle of relationships (parent/child/professionals).



Personal Boundary Violations

(Self-Reflection Exercise)

Be aware if:

1. I always listen to and support others, but I seldom ask anyone for support for myself.
2. If someone helps me, I usually do as much or more in return.
3. If I don't respond to someone else's needs, I feel selfish or guilty.
4. I say yes too often.
5. Once I say yes or commit to something, I will do anything to accomplish it.
6. I avoid conflict at all costs.
7. I only feel appreciated and worthwhile through my work.
8. I will do absolutely anything for the families I work with.
9. I disclose more information to families than I probably need to.
10. I feel like nobody cares about this family like I do.
11. I think I am the only one who can really help this family.
12. I enjoy knowing that someone needs me.
13. I feel anxious about the families I am connected with because they aren't following my advice.
14. I find myself very frustrated with others involved with this family, because they just don't 'get it'.
15. I believe I do know what is best for the families I work with.
16. I think of them and refer to them as 'my families'.



Helping or Hindering

If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. . . But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

Anonymous, Australian Aboriginal woman

Most likely a parent mentor will have a limited role with the families. It is critical for potential parent mentors to give deliberate thought to what personal need is motivating them to serve. By focusing too strongly on our own need to help, we can easily lose sight of the family's need to grow and learn from their own journey. If we see ourselves as a fixer or therapist, then we will treat families as though they need to be fixed. The nature or tone of what occurs between a parent mentor and a family is very important and will color future interactions and relationships.

Help giving will cause further problems if it:

1. Undermines a parent's sense of competence and control.
2. Fosters dependency or seems like the mentor has control of parents' decisions.
3. Implies an obligation and makes parents feel as though they owe someone or need to repay.
4. Is uninvited or comes from someone the parent doesn't trust or value.
5. Is different than what the parent requested or expected.
6. Dominates and controls so that refusal of help is seen as ungrateful by the mentor.
7. Is seen as necessary by the mentor but parent doesn't see the problem or need.

All parents need to learn new skills or competencies to be effective in their role. Good parent mentoring does not get in the way of that process by doing for others, but rather teaches others to do for themselves.



What Parent Mentors Are and Are Not

They are not:

- ... a counselor
- ... a social worker
- ... a physician or diagnostician
- ... a decision maker or advice giver
- ... a moral or ethical judge

They are:

- ... one to one support
- ... a resource
- ... an active listener
- ... a person who has “been there”

Parent mentors offer emotional support and share information regarding resources and services.

