

Staying Within Boundaries

Professional boundaries need to be maintained in all of your interactions with students. Here are some helpful hints for teachers and other staff members when working with students:

1. Know and respect the limits of adult to student relationships.
2. Always put the student first in all communications and activities.
3. Involve appropriate specialists when warranted by the student's needs.

Effective educators & advisors:

1. Understand their own emotional needs.
Teachers or advisors who are in emotional need are most vulnerable to the seductive dependency of an unprofessional relationship.
2. Understand propriety issues related to helping relationships.
Professional and personal boundaries become blurred when teachers take students to lunch, write and receive personal notes or make physical contact.
3. Understand the emotional and physical development of students.
Students who believe no one listens to them often transfer feelings of affection to the teacher or advisor.

Remember –

ANYTHING you post to the Internet can be viewed by everyone with Internet access. This includes students, parents and guardians of students, colleagues, administrators and community members.

Reporting Abuse

School teachers, administrative staff members, practitioners of healing arts and others are required by law to make reports when they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been abused or neglected. RSA 169-C:29 mandates such reporting, and it is a criminal offense not to report child abuse or neglect.

Reports must be made to the New Hampshire Division for Youth and Family (DCYF) at 271-6202, whenever there is a reasonable suspicion that a child has suffered abuse or neglect.

Some school districts have policies requiring staff who suspect abuse or neglect to report it to the principal, guidance counselor, or other designated person. That person, in turn, contacts DCYF. Despite such policies, the staff member is legally liable if the report to DCYF is not made. Staff members must therefore make sure that DCYF is contacted.

Adult-Student Boundaries



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Know Where to Draw the Line

It is important for those staff members who are closely involved with students to understand the difference between friendly and overly friendly behaviors that cross the line between appropriate and inappropriate conduct with students.

Friendly, appropriate behaviors are those that create a safe environment for students to grow and learn, to seek help in solving problems and to develop socially through activities.

Overly friendly, inappropriate behaviors can cross the boundaries separating student from adult and create a personal relationship that becomes peer-to-peer rather than adult-to-child.

Appropriate boundaries should be maintained in all communication and interaction with students. Any communication with students through electronic media should be conducted through approved and regulated channels provided by the school or district.

Staff members and volunteers who work in extracurricular activities or have frequent one-to-one contact with students can be at risk for situations that lead to questions about boundaries.

Even if you are not at risk yourself, you have a role in ensuring that adult-student boundaries are observed in your school. It is important to follow laws for reporting abuse. It is also important to create a school climate in which boundaries and behaviors can be discussed in ways that lead to resolution of issues and problems among students and staff, before they lead to reportable incidents.

The examples shown may help you to determine when some appropriate behaviors begin to cross the line to inappropriate. Ultimately, your professional judgement must be your guide.

Note that the word teacher is used frequently in this pamphlet, but the relationships and behaviors described apply to all school staff and adult volunteers.

Appropriate	Inappropriate
Respect for personal space.	Invading personal space/too close.
Reasonable eye contact.	Maintaining intense eye contact that causes student to become uncomfortable.
Appropriate comments regarding academic and social environment.	Compliments more personal or physical in nature, e.g., "you have great legs," "you should wear that sweater more often;" condoning inappropriate topics for discussion; condoning verbal comments with sexual overtones.
Students assigned to assist teachers work in an environment structured to support learning, with duties appropriate to the academic environment.	Students assigned to assist teachers given duties that meet personal needs of teachers.
Conversations with students support learning and growth for students.	Conversations, e-mails, or phone texts with students become personal in nature and confidential.
Appropriate use of student conferences in a manner consistent with educational purpose.	Pattern of spending time alone with student in conferences beyond educational expectations.
Student-teacher relationship centered on school events and activities.	Student-teacher relationship maintained outside school events, taking student(s) to lunch, gifts, social activities, rides home or receiving or writing personal notes.
Staff member maintains fair and equal treatment of all students.	Pattern of covering for or providing excuses for special students, writing passes repeatedly for favored students to cover tardiness or absences.
Student-teacher communication appropriate and understood by general population.	Student-teacher communication has implied messages and inside understandings not commonly understood by the general population or takes place through electronic or other means not sanctioned by the school.
Staff members set standards and show by example that they will not tolerate harassment.	Staff members encourage an atmosphere of loose and inappropriate boundaries around gender and harassment issues.
Exercising good judgment on when and whether to touch students; for example, whether to pat on the back, shoulder or arm, or whether to hug a young child; being sensitive to individual and cultural preferences.	Touching students who may misinterpret the touch due to individual circumstances, cultural standards or developmental stage, e.g., shoulder massage, lingering touches, and requesting affection. <i>Sexual relations with students and former students are always inappropriate regardless of the age of the student.</i>
Referring serious student problems to guidance counselor or school psychologist.	Staff members acting as helpers for serious student problems without appropriate training and credentials.