

Responding to Crossed Boundaries

It is normal for minors to try to cross boundaries. We must gently remind them what is and is not appropriate.

Do:

- DO inform the minor that they have crossed a boundary. Be clear about rules and what is/is not appropriate.
- DO give examples of appropriate alternatives. Explain to the student that a better way of doing/saying/acting is to _____.
- DO document crossed boundaries. Talk to a teacher or parent if a student crosses a boundary that makes you uncomfortable. It may be more than just testing boundaries, and may indicate something is wrong in the minor's personal life.
- DO recognize your role with the minor you are working with and be clear about your boundaries.

Don't:

- DO NOT ignore a situation a boundary is crossed. Tell a teacher, parent, or supervisor if you are uncomfortable addressing it.

Keeping Situations Safe

Follow the below tips to have positive, safe interactions with minors.

- As a best practice, have at least two adults supervising activities with minors when possible.
- Avoid one-on-one situations. If you must be alone with a student, make sure you are working in a public setting. If you are in a classroom with a single student, leave the door open.
- Have adults of both sexes present in settings where children must be escorted to the bathroom. Wait outside while students use the bathroom. If a situation occurs where you must enter the bathroom, avoid being alone with a student in the bathroom.
- If you see something between any individuals that makes you uneasy, report it.

For questions or to schedule an information session:

CHILD PROTECTION OPERATIONS

Office of Human Resources
childpro@andrew.cmu.edu
412-268-3291

Boundaries when working with minors

Boundaries are limits in what we talk about, and how we interact with others, while respecting each other's limits.

Boundaries are necessary for normal and healthy interpersonal relationships. Different relationships require different boundaries. There are specific boundaries you must set when working with K-12 youth. Setting and maintaining appropriate boundaries will help to keep both you and the minor you work with safe.

Verbal Communication

Words can be easily misinterpreted by minors. Follow the verbal guidelines below when speaking with minors.

Do:

- DO be respectful. You are modeling how respect is given.
- DO give praise. As a rule of thumb, praise publicly.
- DO remind students of the rules and consequences, but this should not be made into a spectacle.
- DO use humor. Humor is a great way to build rapport with minors, but be careful that any humor you use will not be offensive or misunderstood by others.
- DO engage in casual conversation to get to know the student.

Don't:

- DO NOT use harsh or derogatory language. Do not use any language that would embarrass or humiliate others. Do not tease or poke fun.
- DO NOT engage in any sexually-focused conversations.
- DO NOT discuss your personal life or problems.
- DO NOT ask about the minor's personal life (significant others, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, etc.).

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Non-Verbal Communication

How we physically interact with minors is very different from how we interact with family and friends. It is important to be aware of body language (eye contact, posture, sighing, etc.) and our physical interactions.

Do:

- DO make appropriate eye contact.
- DO be aware of your body language, and what you may be saying through your actions.
- DO give handshakes, high-fives, and gentle fist-bumps.
- DO gently pat or tap on shoulder if necessary.
- DO stick to the above appropriate ways of showing physical affection and affirmation. When in doubt, less is better.

Don't:

- DO NOT touch behind closed doors or in isolated areas.
- DO NOT give lengthy hugs.
- DO NOT touch on or near sexual areas of the body.
- DO NOT hit, slap, tickle, kick, kiss, massage, or carry someone.
- DO NOT give gifts, or items that are not program affiliated. (It is okay to give a program affiliated pencil or pen, for example).
- DO NOT give a gift to just one student.

MANDATORY REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE

Anyone at the university who works with minors is a mandatory reporter.

That means that if a student discloses suspected child abuse, or you witness child abuse, you must alert Childline (717-783-8744) AND the university through campus police, the Office of the General Counsel, or your supervisor.

As employees and volunteers working with minors at Carnegie Mellon, you are legally obligated to report suspected child abuse.

REMEMBER:

All Carnegie Mellon programs/events that involve minors must be registered with Child Protection Operations within the Office of Human Resources.

Challenges of Social Media

Social media apps and websites can include a trove of personal information that breaches healthy boundaries that we set with minors.

It also can offer up information that parents are uncomfortable with, and allow direct communication that exceeds the bounds of the work you do together. Here are things to consider regarding social media:

Do:

- DO keep all communications focused on the task at hand.
- DO communicate to the entire group, when possible, instead of individual students.
- DO copy parents on all messages sent to students.
- DO inform the CMU program staff immediately if you receive any inappropriate, worrisome, or strange communication from a student.
- DO tell the students that you are happy to work with them, but will not be accepting friend requests on social media.

Don't:

- DO NOT use your personal accounts on social networking to communicate with students, or send or accept friend requests to or from minors.
- DO NOT send private messages to students.
- DO NOT give your cell phone number to students.
- DO NOT share details about your personal life.
- DO NOT take photographs for personal use, or for purposes unrelated to the program.

About Photographs: Parents or guardians may decide that they do not want anyone to take a photo of their child. Be sure to check that a signed release form has been obtained before taking photographs for any program.