

Establishing and Maintaining Boundaries

- Author:** Elsy Arévalo
- Duration:** 60 minutes (time will cover approximately two to three scenarios)
- Materials:** Chalkboard or newsprint, chalk or markers, Boundary Scenarios
- A/V:** None
- Room set-up:** Round tables for four to five people each
- Description:** Teaching mentors to strengthen their ability to set and maintain healthy boundaries will help them have a positive mentoring experience, provide them with valuable life lessons, protect them from burning out, and, most important, prevent them from walking away prematurely from their mentoring commitment. A mentor's ability to set boundaries will allow the mentee to feel safe, develop a sense of trust and, ultimately, learn how to set boundaries for him- or herself. This exercise will help mentors identify key areas around which boundaries are essential, as well as provide them with guidelines for how to continue to protect those boundaries throughout the life of the mentoring relationship.
- Session goals:** By the end of the session, participants will:
- Understand what a boundary is and why boundaries are needed in mentoring relationships
 - Understand how to prevent and buffer mismanagement of boundaries in mentoring relationships
 - Develop a framework for dealing with boundary issues

Agenda & instructions:

1. *Introductions*

10 minutes

Have mentors introduce themselves and share an example of a situation when one of their personal boundaries was crossed or an instance when they were able to set a strong boundary.

2. Activity

15 minutes

Distribute and have participants review Handout 1: “On Boundaries.” Tell them that they will have a chance to role play these principles in a few minutes.

Distribute Handout 2: “Boundary Scenarios.” Feel free to adapt and change the scenarios to increase their relevance to your program. Ask participants to:

- a. Select a person to record responses as well as another to present to the larger group.
- b. List all the worst ways in which the assigned scenario could be handled. Have a recorder write the ideas down on the newsprint and label it “What not to do.”
- c. Discuss and write down ways in which their group feels the scenario *should* be handled.

3. Review Responses to Scenarios

15 minutes

Ask each small-group representative to go to the front of the room, read the group’s scenario out loud, and explain how they decided the scenario should be handled, as well as what pitfalls to avoid. Invite the rest of the participants to add feedback or ask questions. Summarize key points and clarify agency’s policies as necessary.

Tip for Trainer: Record and save boundary topics and responses from your workshops and daily work to be used for future boundary training sessions.

4. Key Debrief Points

15 minutes

Once you have facilitated and reviewed participant responses to the scenarios, you can add any missing key points and guidelines related to the issue. This time will also serve as your opportunity to provide them with a paradigm or way of thinking about boundaries that will help guide their actions should the need arise. See Handout 1, “On Boundaries,” for key talking points.

5. Final Questions & Closing

5 minutes

As a way to close the meeting, ask participants to share one insight they gained during the meeting that they found particularly valuable. Pass out a session evaluation form. Remind folks about other upcoming events/trainings as they leave.

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?

HANDOUT 1 (continued)

- 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?

Boundary Scenarios

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Scenario 1

You arrive at your usual meeting place and your mentee has not arrived. You had previously called your mentee to let her know what time to meet. You both agreed that you would interview the head of the college art museum for a special school project. What should you do or say next time you talk to your mentee?

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Scenario 2

You have been matched with your mentee for about six months and you are starting to “bond.” One day your mentee asks you if you ever experimented with alcohol when you were younger. You did try alcohol in middle school, and more often in high school. What do you say?

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Scenario 3

Every time you go to pick up your mentee, his father greets you at the door and spends at least half an hour chatting with you. You are glad he likes you, but his long greetings are getting in the way of the time you spend with your mentee. How should you handle this situation?

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Scenario 4

During one of the group activities of the mentoring program, you notice that your mentee is being mean to one of the other children. You’ve noticed this behavior in the past, but have not said anything about it. Your mentee’s attitude toward other children makes you feel uncomfortable. What should you do?

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Scenario 5

You and your mentee hit it off right away. You were very excited about your match until a few weeks ago when your mentee started calling you a few times a day. You are excited she likes you so much, but are unsure if the amount of time you are spending on the phone is appropriate. You don’t want to hurt her feelings, but you are feeling uncomfortable with the calls at work and tired from all the calls at home. What should you do?

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RESOURCES

Becoming a Co-pilot: A Handbook for Mentors of Adolescents. Effective Skills and Strategies for Reaching and Encouraging Middle and High School Youth, by R.P. Bowman and S.C. Bowman (Chapin, SC: YouthLight, 1997).
<http://www.youthlight.com/main.html>

Designing and Customizing Mentor Training, by E. Arévalo, with D. Boggan and L. West (Folsom, CA: EMT, 2004).
<http://www.emt.org/userfiles/DesigningMentorTrng.pdf>

Generic Mentoring Program Policy and Procedure Manual, by L. Ballasy, M. Fulop, and D. St. Amour (Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, National Mentoring Center, 2003).
http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/policy_manual.pdf

Mentoring Answer Book, by C. Klapperich (McHenry, IL: Big Brothers Big Sisters of McHenry Country, 2002).
<http://www.mentoringanswerbook.com>

Mentoring Handbook for Parents, (McHenry, IL: Big Brothers Big Sisters of McHenry Country, 2004).
<http://www.mentoringanswerbook.com>

A Training Guide for Mentors, by J. Smink (Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center, 1999).
<http://www.dropoutprevention.org/publica/books/books.htm>