

# Boundaries

Creating safe, ethical environments  
for students

... and sanity for yourself

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# About IMPACT

Violence prevention & safety programs teach students to **protect themselves, resist coercion, de-escalate conflicts, and communicate their boundaries.**



# School Partners

- Andover
- Wellesley
- Lincoln-Sudbury
- Weston
- Boston
- Everett
- Malden
- Medford
- N. Reading
- Saugus
- Winthrop
- Weymouth
- Groton
- Middlesex
- Rivers
- Buckingham Browne & Nichols
- Phillips Academy Andover
- Chapel Hill Chauncy Hall
- Cambridge School of Weston
- Commonwealth School
- Newton Country Day School
- Shore Country Day School
- Lawrence Academy

# What is a Boundary?

- A line between what is acceptable, safe, or comfortable and what is not.
- A clear limit to the nature of relationships and what types of interaction are/are not part of the relationship.



# Why Are Boundaries Important?

- Ensure safe and healthy interactions between adults and students
- Help students develop healthy relationships
- Make your work life sane and manageable
- Prevent sexual and other types of abuse & misconduct

# In Schools that Emphasize Individualized Learning

- Appropriate interactions between adults and students may be more varied.
- Greater challenges to define types of touch or interaction that are never acceptable.
- In boarding environments faculty roles may that overlap with parents



# Personal & Professional Boundaries





# Personal Boundaries



- My own preferences, values & beliefs
- What feels safe or comfortable for me
- Can be different from my coworkers



# Professional Boundaries

- Parameters of my role at school or in a student's life
- Based on the school's mission and shared values
- What feels right for me is important, but must be reconciled with shared values or expectations of the school





## Personal

How much I like hugs.

## Professional

Whether it's appropriate for adults in my role to hug students.



## Personal

How comfortable I am talking about my personal life.

## Professional

What details of my life are appropriate to share with students.



# Balancing...

...your unique personality with your role at school.

Bringing the best parts of yourself to your work **in a way that supports the shared values, expectations, and goals of the school.**

# The Extremes...

# ONE EXTREME....

- Staff single out students for special gifts or outings
- Staff spend time with students whenever they want outside of school-sponsored activities
- Staff share their personal issues and problems with students
- Hugging, kissing, and all types of touching are common
- Staff help students with anything they need– even if it's way outside their role



# ANOTHER EXTREME...

- The school doesn't allow any type of touch
- Staff are not allowed to drive students anywhere or be alone with them for any reason
- No celebration of birthdays or special occasions in order to avoid the appearance of special treatment

# Revisiting the First Extreme

- Staff and students socialize outside school
- Staff share their personal issues and problems with students
- Hugging & kissing are common
- Staff help students with anything they need

- What could motivate people to this extreme?
- What are the positive intentions?

# Revisiting the Second Extreme

- The school doesn't allow any type of touch
- Staff are not allowed to be alone with them for any reasons
- No celebration of special occasions

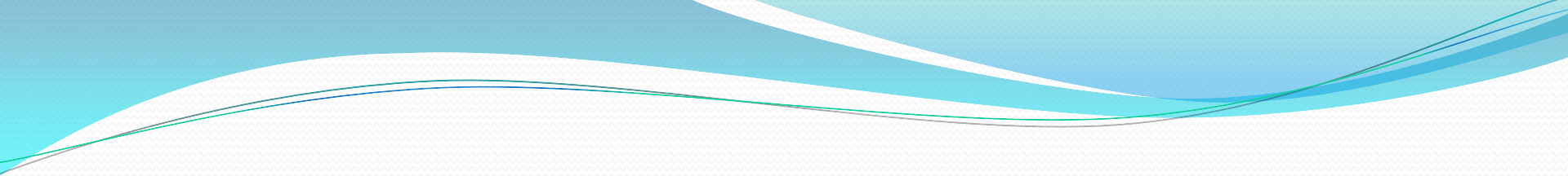
- What could motivate people to this extreme?
- What are the positive intentions?

# Finding Balance Between Extremes

- What values guide us?
- How do we communicate and reach consensus with coworkers?
- When is it OK to have differences in personal styles and choices?

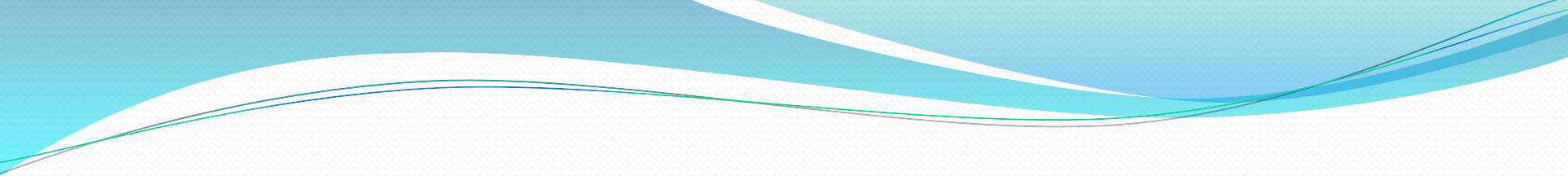


# Scenario



You follow a coworker on social media. One day you notice she has posted pictures of students that she took at a your school's swim meet. The caption reads, "Girls are looking good in those swimsuits!"





You follow a coworker on Instagram. One day you notice she has posted pictures of students that she took at your school's swim meet. The caption reads, "Girls are looking good in those swimsuits!"

- Does this concern you? Why or why not?
- Is there a specific action or behavior that concerns you? What is it?
- How would you address the situation?
- What shared values or organizational values would inform your approach?



Differences and disagreements are healthy and important.

The key is communication within a school community so that everyone understands what is and is not negotiable.

# Addressing Boundary Violations & Concerns

# Boundary Violations on a continuum

Missed Social  
Cues

Inappropriate  
Behaviors

Abusive  
Behaviors

# Boundary Violations on a continuum

**Staff member talks about a student's personal problems in a hallway where others can hear.**

Staff member confides in students that her husband doesn't satisfy her.

**Staff member touches students in sexual or intimate ways**

# When We Observe Boundary-Violating Actions

- How do we initiate a conversation?
- Can we communicate a concern?
- What shared values guide us?
- What responses create trust?
- What responses create more concern?

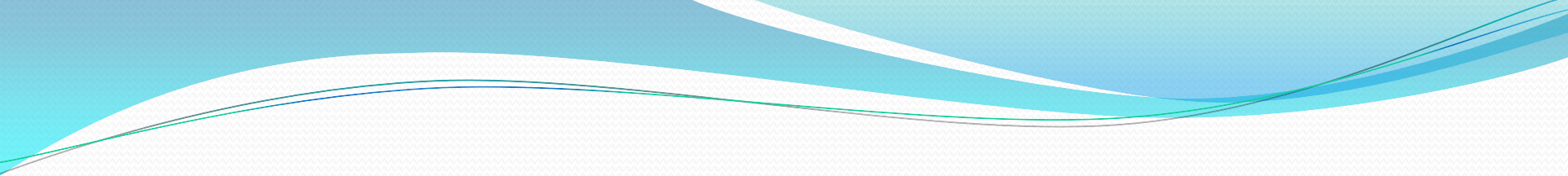
Addressing the behavior can help us determine where it falls on the continuum

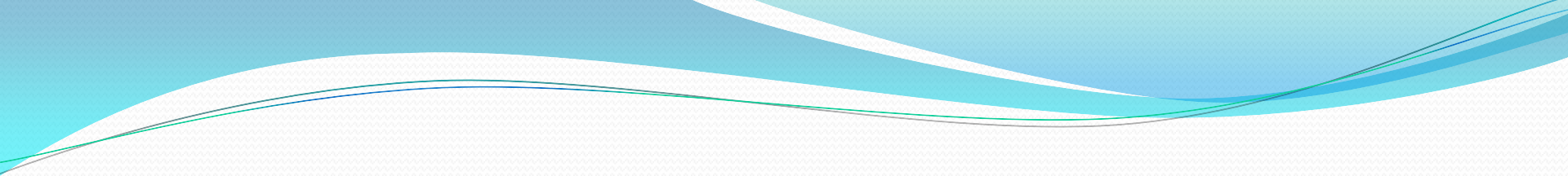


# Awareness of Biases

- Cultural biases
- Staff in certain types of positions
- People who are well-respected & established vs. those who are new or unknown
- Differences in power or authority
  - It may be a bigger risk to speak to a supervisor or administrator than a person you supervise
  - People in **ANY** position can be crossing boundaries

# Communicating Boundaries Through Conversations

- 
- Breathe
  - Clearly identify the problem
  - Say what you want or what the group expects
    - Is this a personal or professional boundary?
  - Assess the response
  - Agree on a next step



I saw (or I heard) \_\_\_\_\_

It concerns me because \_\_\_\_\_

What were you thinking? Why did you make that choice?

At our school we believe/value/practice \_\_\_\_\_

So I hope you will \_\_\_\_\_

# Communicating Boundaries Through Policies

Written policies create a shared understanding of the school's expectations about boundaries.





# Sample Code of Ethics

I understand that, in almost all cases, the appropriate expressions of affection between staff and students are: handshakes, fist bumps, high fives, and side hugs. I understand that kisses and more intimate expressions of affection are not appropriate. If I feel a different type of touch or affection is needed with a particular student I will discuss it with my supervisor and a school counselor, and the result of this discussion will be documented. I also understand that any expressions of affection that occur between students and staff should be chosen by and intended to support the student.

# Maintaining Boundaries with Students

# Types of Boundaries with Students

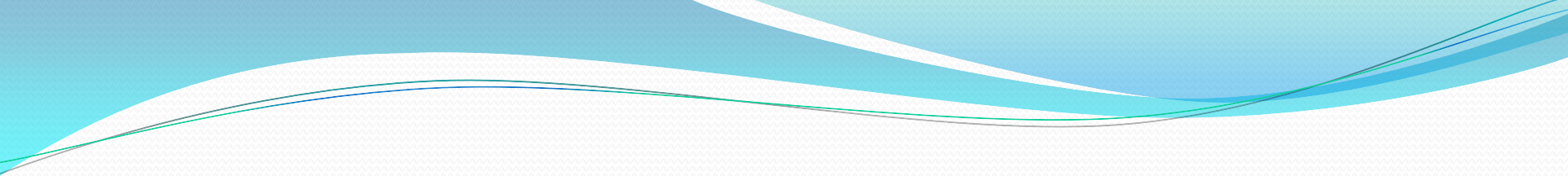
- Personal information you will & won't share
- Ways you can & can't help them
- Ways you show affection, compassion or support
- What you do with information they give you

# Options for Communicating Boundaries

- Casual or serious tone
- Communicate in the moment or have a conversation after the fact
- Is this a time for deliberate education?

# Scenario

A student you like a lot and have a good rapport with comes up behind you in the hallway and gives you a hug. You like the student a lot but are not comfortable being hugged by students or being approached from behind. A coworker sees the hug and gives you a look that you interpret as surprise or concern.



A student you like a lot and have a good rapport with comes up behind you in the hallway and gives you a hug. You like the student a lot but are not comfortable being hugged by students or being approached from behind. A coworker sees the hug and gives you a look that you interpret as surprise or concern.

- How would you address the situation?
- What would you do to make sure the student knows not to hug you again?
- What would you do to make sure the student's feelings aren't hurt?
- What– if anything– would be difficult about talking to the student?

# Your Own Boundaries

Advocating for yourself to make your work life manageable.

# Types of Boundaries

- Workload
- Hours
- Types of work
- Socializing with Coworkers
- Time you have for a specific problem or concern
- Number of committees you can join or extra tasks you can take on



# Communicating Your Boundaries

- **You may need to communicate a boundary if you feel...**
  - Overwhelmed
  - Resentful
  - Frustrated
- **What is/is not negotiable about your role?**
  - Some things are not changeable, others can adjust
- **What is negotiable about the social environment of the school or your team?**
  - Can you speak up if you want to be alone during breaks?

# Respecting Coworkers' Boundaries

## **Responses that create trust**

- Responding positively
  - Welcoming boundary setting
- Attempting to respect the boundary or negotiate
- Acknowledging differences in power and authority

## **Responses that strain trust**

- Defensiveness
- Agreeing to respect the boundary but not doing it
- Minimizing the problem



# Closing & Questions

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

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