



Rules & Boundaries For Volunteers Working With Children And Youth

In our efforts to have a positive impact upon the young people we work with, our greatest tool is unquestionably the quality of relationships we are able to establish with them. Once a relationship of trust is established, they will let down their guard and make themselves vulnerable and receptive to the wisdom, insights and guidance that we have to offer.

Unfortunately, this same strategy is often employed by adults who place their own self serving relationship and sexual needs above the welfare of the children and teenagers they come into contact with. To succeed in this predatory endeavor, the relationship building strategy typically employed is referred to as "grooming" behavior.

Healthy relationships are established and operate with clearly defined rules and boundaries. This is where the distinction between building a helping relationship with youth and grooming behaviors are most clear. Both may start out looking identical, but healthy relationships make clear what the rules and boundaries must be and strictly adhere to them.

The churches in our local community have been particularly vulnerable to negative media coverage for allegations of leaders, employees, and volunteers sexually mistreating children and youth in their congregations. Whether such allegations are ultimately found to be true or false, it is always detrimental to the evangelical mission of the church and the perception that the church is a safe place for them.

With this in mind, it is strongly recommended that each church or church program establish an official policy that incorporates the following rules and boundaries for those working with children and youth:

1. Do not give any gift personally from yourself. The source of the gift should be identified as coming from the church, youth program, specific ministry of the church, etc. This includes lending money or personally purchasing an item for them.
2. Be aware of playing favorites with any one particular individual. Keep your efforts and attention balanced across several.
3. Do not be alone with one individual, particularly in situations outside of sanctioned church events and activities.
4. Do not engage in any physical display of affection in any private setting.
5. Make no promise of confidentiality in private communications. Only clergy, licensed mental health professionals, and other professionals defined by law can do so, and even then there are limits to what may be kept secret.
6. All electronic communication (texting, email, social media, etc.) with youth must also be copied to at least one additional adult. Ideally, this third party should be one of the parents.
7. Be accountable on a regularly scheduled basis to at least one other adult for your interactions with children and youth.
8. If you observe another volunteer or staff person engaging in behavior that appears to be violating a rule or boundary established by your church, do something! Don't let it become the *"elephant in the living room."*
9. "SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING!" (Motto of Dept. of Homeland Security)



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