

Session 5

boundaries and personal safety

the fostering network
helping children to thrive



Session 5: boundaries and personal safety

Introduction

Boundaries are the limits, which define our relationships. In any relationship boundaries are constantly tested. In mentoring situations it is vitally important that mentors work to the boundaries set by the mentoring project in order to create a safe framework for the mentoring relationship to develop.

Equally important is an awareness of one's own personal boundaries when getting involved in a mentoring relationship.

In this session participative exercises help people to examine their own boundaries and to identify the limits of the mentoring relationship.

Purpose

To assist mentors to identify and set appropriate limits in their mentoring relationship.

Application

Effective and appropriate boundaries have to be examined and applied on an ongoing basis throughout a mentoring relationship.

Overview

time

Total session running time: **3 hours**

objectives

By the end of this session you will:

- Have identified your own personal boundaries as a volunteer mentor
- Be able to list and explain the boundary issues from the Guidelines on Boundary Issues
- Be able to outline the project's policy on personal safety
- Have identified your own response to situations involving boundary issues
- Have carried out a risk assessment regarding safety within the mentoring relationship

key issues

This is an important session because of the nature of the subject. It is important to give volunteers a clear understanding of the limits of their role, to avoid any misunderstandings once mentoring is underway and to ensure the safety of both the mentor and the young person.

materials

Flipchart stand, pad and marker pens, Blu-Tack
Paper and pens for note taking

OHP slides:

1. Session objectives
2. Guidelines on boundary issues
3. Pointers on personal safety

handouts:

1. Session objectives
2. Guidelines on boundary issues and project policy on boundaries (policy not included)
3. Pointers on personal safety and project policy on personal safety (policy not included)
4. Boundaries
5. Emergency Contact List (not included)
6. Home task
7. Evaluation sheet

Training session

1. Session objectives

5 minutes

This exercise is designed to let everyone know what is going to be covered in this session.

What to do

- Show slide ①. Reveal and talk about each objective, one at a time.
- Ask if anyone has any questions or is unclear about anything.

2. Ice breaker

15 minutes

This exercise gives people the opportunity to examine their own personal boundaries as regards disclosure of personal information about themselves to others in the group. How revealing or personal people are, will depend on the level of trust which has built up within the group by this stage of the training.

What to do

- Ask everyone to think of one piece of personal information, which they would find very easy to share with the group.
- Then ask everyone to think of one piece of information about themselves which involves taking a bit more of a risk to share (as it may lead to others making a judgement) but which they are prepared to reveal to the group.
- Emphasise that each person is free to determine their level of disclosure. Don't insist that everyone participates by sharing information. People will make important discoveries about their own and others level of comfort/discomfort in relation to personal disclosure even if they don't actively contribute.
- Give everyone a minute to think about it.
- Start with yourself, then continue round the group. No discussion is allowed. Simply thank the contributor for their input.
- At the end of the round, thank everyone for sharing their information.

3. Boundaries

25 minutes

This exercise gets everyone thinking about why boundaries are important in their volunteer role.

What to do

- Ask the group to quick think why boundaries are important in the mentor/mentee relationship. Note ideas on a flipsheet.

- Remember the rules - write down all ideas, no feedback while you're doing this. [Building on or developing other people's ideas is OK though].
- Allow 10 minutes to get everyone's suggestions and to write them down.
- At the end of the 10 minutes [or earlier if ideas have dried up], go through each idea and discuss it with the group. Allow 15 minutes for this.

Trainers' notes:

Emphasise the importance of volunteers knowing clearly what the limits of their role are.

4. Personal boundaries [continuum exercise]

40 minutes

This exercise is a very dynamic and fun way of exploring group members' personal boundaries in mentoring situations. It also shows that different people have different personal boundaries.

What to do

- Ask group members to stand up.
- Tell people that you will read out a list of situations that they might be faced with when mentoring. Read out each situation and ask everyone to place themselves along an imaginary line on the floor, depending on whether they find the situation acceptable [at one end of the line] or unacceptable [at other end of line].
- Read out these situations, one at a time.
- Allow people a minute to position themselves on the line.
- Ask people at random why they have chosen to stand where they are.
- Discuss each boundary issue in depth, and explain where the project stands on each issue. There may be some leeway in certain situations.
- Summarise by emphasising the variations in personal boundaries found within the group. Highlight the importance of knowing your own personal boundaries and how these equate to/differ from the boundaries expected of you as a mentor.

Trainers' notes:

If discussions get involved, you may have to limit the number of situations you read out for time reasons. Below are suggested situations:

mentoring dilemmas:

1. Your mentee tells you that it is her birthday and asks if you would like to join her in the pub for a drink.
2. While speaking to your mentee you casually mention that you are looking for a gardener as your garden is a bit out of control. Your mentee says

that he is keen to earn a bit extra on top of his giro and offers to do gardening work for you for £5 an hour.

3. Your mentee says that his giro [benefit cheque] did not turn up today. He tells you that he has no food in the house, no money for bus fares and asks if you would lend him £5.
4. Your mentee asks if you are in a committed relationship.
5. Your mentee asks if you have ever smoked cannabis.
6. Your mentee arrives for an appointment with her wee sister, explaining that there was no-one else to look after her.
7. Your mentee would like to increase the mentoring meetings to two a week.
8. You have met with your mentee for two sessions. She asks if you could provide a written reference for her.
9. Your mentee has recently moved in to a new flat and asks if you will give him a hand painting and decorating.
10. Your mentee asks if she could visit you at your workplace.

Coffee break **15 minutes**

5. Guidelines on boundary issues **10 minutes**

Here you give some Do's and Don'ts to help volunteers know where they stand with the limits to the mentoring relationship and you introduce people to the relevant project policy (briefly at this point).

What to do

- Show slide ②.
- Go through each point, one at a time and discuss.
- Hand out project policy on boundaries and make sure everyone understands everything, answering any questions that may arise.

6. Personal safety and risk assessment exercise **30 minutes**

This exercise invites people to discuss and identify factors important for ensuring their own personal safety and that of their mentee.

What to do

- Divide the group up into small groups of 3 or 4 people.
- Give each group a flipsheet and a pen.
- Ask each group to choose a note-taker.

- Ask each group to discuss the following question and to list their suggestions "What steps can I take to ensure my own safety and that of my mentee while mentoring?"
- After 15 minutes, tell the small groups to return to the large group.
- Get each group to stick their flipsheets up on the wall.
- Then ask one person from each group to feed back on their discussion.
- Allow up to 15 minutes for feedback from the small groups.
- Ensure that all aspects of safety in connection with mentoring are covered eg travel to and from the mentoring meetings, location of the meetings and safety during the meeting

7. Project policy on personal safety and list of emergency contacts

20 minutes

Here you flag up points concerning personal safety, explain the project's policy on personal safety and hand out a list of emergency contacts for mentors use. It is important to note here that the mentoring service has legal responsibilities for the health and safety of both mentors and young people – but that mentors also have responsibilities towards their own safety and that of the young person.

What to do

- Show slide ③.
- Go through each point answering any questions that might arise
- Hand out the project's policy on personal safety and go over the main points making sure that everyone understands everything.
- Emphasise that personal safety is an important consideration at all times and reiterate that if anyone is in any doubt over an issue to seek advice and guidance from project staff
- Explain that mentors are not expected to be able to deal with all situations that may arise on their own and can use their judgement about where to refer their mentee to specialist services.
- Hand out the emergency contact list and inform people that this is a resource that they can use to refer to if their mentee requires specialist help or urgent assistance with a problem
- Ask if anyone has any questions about anything regarding personal safety

8. Recap of session

5 minutes

This helps people reflect on what they have learned and recaps on the session objectives.

What to do

- Show slide ① again.
- Check that everyone is happy that each objective has been met.

9. Hometask

5 minutes

Explain that this session's hometask will involve each person in reflecting on the boundaries they have within a range of relationships both personal and professional.

Ask people to take 15 minutes at home to complete the task on the worksheet provided.

Explain that the purpose of this exercise is to highlight how we consciously or unconsciously deploy boundaries in all our relationships.

10. Looking ahead

What to do

- Link this session to the next one. Tell the group what the next training session will be about.

11. Evaluation of session

10 minutes

What to do

- Give out evaluation sheets and allow 10 minutes for everyone to fill them in. Make sure you get them all back before everyone leaves!

12. Handouts

Give out session handouts.

Objectives

Slide 1

By the end of this session you will:

- Have identified your own personal boundaries as a volunteer mentor
- Be able to list and explain the boundary issues from the Guidelines on Boundary Issues
- Have identified your own response to situations involving boundary issues
- Have carried out a risk assessment regarding safety within the mentoring relationship

DO

- Be aware of your own personal boundaries
- Avoid getting into situations that could be misinterpreted
- Think before you say, "Yes"
- Remember that the main focus of the mentoring relationship is the needs and progress of the mentee in relation to personal development goals

DON'T

- Give out your home telephone number or address to your mentee
- Take your mentee to your own home or meet in their home
- Get involved in a sexual relationship with your mentee
- Get emotionally over-involved with your mentee
- Give or lend your mentee money

If you are ever in doubt about a boundary issue, speak to the project co-ordinator about it.

Pointers on Personal Safety

Slide 3

- Meet your mentee in a meeting place approved by the project
- Do not go ahead with the mentoring meeting if your mentee is under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Always leave word of where you are going, who you are meeting and when you expect to be back
- Do not transport your mentee in your car unless you have been authorised to do so.

Boundaries

Boundaries are limits we set ourselves in everyday relationships: what we share of ourselves, and how we manage our relationships with different people at home, at work and socially.

Boundaries are often unconscious - that is, we instinctively decide how we act in a situation, or they may have come in to our consciousness at some stage.

Clear and stated boundaries are essential in mentoring work: firstly for the protection and safety of both the mentor and mentee; and secondly in order to create a safe and dependable setting in which the mentoring relationship can develop.

By the nature of the work, and the vulnerability of the mentee, mentors are in a position of trust. Mentors therefore need to be very careful with their contact with the mentee in order to create and maintain safe and dependable boundaries in the mentoring relationship.

For example, time boundaries: mentors need to be reliable and consistent about timing, frequency and regularity of meetings to show their mentee respect and to set a good example. Appropriate personal boundaries also need to be observed.

Mentors need to be aware at all times of the boundaries they are establishing and maintaining in the mentoring relationship.

We have put together guidelines and policies on boundaries, personal safety and confidentiality, which help define the framework of mentoring relationships.

Volunteers must agree to work within these guidelines and policies, so that they can be part of the project. Where there is a lack of clarity, the mentoring relationship can suffer or even break down.

Boundaries are a fundamental, integral part of mentoring. They help the mentor know exactly where they stand on issues of confidentiality, conduct and working limits, thus avoiding confusion, which could cloud the development of the relationship.

Adapted from : Edinburgh Homeless Project

Hometask for Session 5

Please take a few minutes to reflect on the different boundaries or limits that you have in place in the following relationships (miss out any that are not applicable to your own situation) Jot down any key features of what personal information you will share/not share, what your personal space is around each person and any limits that apply around where you meet.

How fixed or flexible are the boundaries in each relationship?

Your partner:

Your doctor:

Your next door neighbour:

Your work colleagues:

Your ex-partner:

Your children:

Your parents:

Your bank manager:

And finally note down anything you feel you have learned about yourself from doing this exercise!

Evaluation Sheet

1. Rate today's training session by circling one number

Not interesting

Very interesting

1

2

3

4

5

2. How will today's training session help you carry out your role as a mentor?

3. What did you enjoy most about today's training session?

4. Anything you didn't enjoy or didn't feel was useful?

5. Any suggestions to improve this training session when it is next run?

6. Any other comments?

Thank you for completing this form
