



YSO Policy: Appropriate Boundaries

This is a policy from a University that hosts youth ages 6-17 for summer over-night camping programs. For this policy, BE SAFE recommends the following:

- Refer to a staff training policy within this policy. This policy emphasizes the importance of training to help distinguish between when it is appropriate to speak to youth about relationships, and when it can be inappropriate.

Policy:

Below is a list of frequently encountered areas of concern related to appropriate boundaries. None of these areas is always a definite indication of a problem. In fact, when done publicly and with proper supervisor approval, many would be considered well-intentioned and positive. However, when done without proper consideration and approval, they can be indicative of an adult or youth forming the beginnings of an inappropriate relationship. One goal of training should be to clearly define safe and respectful relationships and discuss potential areas for concern as listed below. Training should also ensure that supervisors are equipped to be on the lookout for these indicators and know when to look more closely at a situation as having potential for inappropriate boundary crossing.

- a. Social media communication with youth (Twitter, Facebook, Myspace, etc).
- b. Cell phone communication, including texting.
- c. Outside-of-work interaction including babysitting, providing transportation, taking a youth for a soda/treat as a reward, etc.
- d. Discussing personal issues and information with youth or within earshot of youth. This includes any subject that one would normally discuss with a same-age friend: i.e. relationships, finances, family, gossip-type information, etc.
- e. Using coarse or foul language around youth. Repeated use around youth can be a signal to youth that the adult is not concerned with social norms. In the extreme case, this is a method which a perpetrator will "cast a wide net" to elicit a response from a vulnerable youth.
- f. "Holding contracts" with youth. Holding a contract with a youth means agreeing to keep a secret with a youth, however innocuous it may seem. Example: Staff A observes Youth X taking an extra snack despite instructions that it is one snack/camper. Staff A responds by saying "It's a good thing only I saw you, Staff B would be really mad." Two things happen as a result. First, Staff A now has leverage with which to manipulate Youth X and Youth X now knows that Staff A is willing to operate outside the authority of the other staff. This is one of the most common precursors to deviant behavior by adults and youth.
- g. Physical contact. This issue has a great deal of complexity and requires some training. Training points include public/private contact, gender awareness, age awareness, frequency and the "needy" youth, awareness of one's own needs, the role of horseplay, etc.
- h. Consistent application of authority among youth. It is human nature to relate more closely to some youth than others. However, it becomes a boundary issue when adults apply their authority inconsistently and some youth receive consideration not available to others.

