



## YSO Policy: Safe Spaces and Boundaries

Boundaries take many forms and exist in all areas of a person's life. Boundaries can be physical, social, emotional, psychological, and technological. YSOs should strive to create safe spaces for youth and staff across each of these areas.

This is a policy from a youth-serving organization. For this policy, BE SAFE recommends the following:

- When beginning a program with a new group of young people, ask the youth what they think makes a space safe. Include the opinions about what youth and staff believe makes a space safe in the safe space policy.
- Include a procedure of what to do when someone in your program feels unsafe in the space.

### Safe Space:

Above all, Agency S strives to create a safe space for all youth, staff, parents/guardians and community at large. By “safe space” we mean an environment that ensures one's emotional and physical health and safety by promoting openness, trust, compassion and respect among all persons. “Safe space” is also one in which judgments are not made by anyone regarding differences in background or opinion, or what someone says or does. Respectful disagreement is always allowed, but in order to have a productive conversation about these differences, everyone needs to feel safe enough with the people around them to be honest and open. Active listening, willingness to hear other opinions, tolerance and confidence are all mechanisms through which a “safe space” is created. In order to maintain this healthy environment, all actions and conversations must be mindful of and in compliance with promoting this positive atmosphere.

### Staff Boundaries With Youth:

Physical Boundaries: Agency S recognizes that physical contact is a great way to build relationships between people. However, Agency S's first and foremost is a professional environment and physical contact is required to maintain that high level of professionalism. Staff are mentors, teachers and coaches for the youth and all physical contact should respect that dynamic.

Emotional/Social Boundaries: In order to maintain a “safe space” for both staff and youth, staff are responsible for ensuring that appropriate social boundaries are upheld. Staff must remember that they serve as mentors and role models to these youth and should therefore be careful of what information they decide to disclose about themselves. Although self-disclosure is a part of building a relationship with youth, many times when youth ask staff personal questions about them, they are in fact asking for guidance on how they should behave. With this in mind, staff should be responsible for re-directing the conversation and keeping the focus on the youth. What staff decides to disclose about themselves is a judgment call, but their position as a mentor should be kept in mind.

Romantic relationships between staff and youth are inappropriate and absolutely not permitted. Sexual contact between staff and youth is prohibited and may result in the termination of either staff or both staff and youth. Whether or not sexual contact is involved, inappropriate relationships between staff and youth will not be tolerated.

Internet and Technological Communication: Staff should not maintain relationships with current students via social Internet networks, such as Facebook and MySpace. Agency S does currently have an alumni page on Facebook, but is used solely for the purpose of maintaining contact with past members of the program. As youth workers, staff serve as mentors and role models at all times whether they are aware or not aware. Therefore, if staff do have accounts on these social networking websites, they should keep in mind that their personal information, photos, and comments are public





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information and viewable by other youth. Private settings on these accounts also are not sufficient reasoning to have inappropriate displays on personal pages because staff cannot control what mutual contacts they may share with youth.

Overall, an appropriate level of staff self-disclosure to youth should be maintained within and outside of the program. If cell phone numbers are exchanged between youth and staff, calling and texting should be kept to a minimum and should only be used for communication in relation to Agency S programming or issues (e.g. running late, absences, etc.) All content should be relative to the position of the youth and staff and casual conversation should not be initiated by a staff member with current students via technological communication. There is plenty of time to have conversations during program time and anything sustained outside of the program can cause unexpected and unwelcome outcomes (e.g. inappropriate attachment by either youth or staff, concern of parents/guardians, and even legal issues).

