

Boundaries for Mentors with Children in Therapy

Boundaries may include the amount of money one spends on an outing, cultural considerations, one's family involvement, the involvement of the child's siblings, the amount of time spent with the mentee, settings that may be more or less stressful, and acceptable behavior.

The value of creating boundaries is that it can assist the structure of the outing, support consistency in what is acceptable, provides positive role modeling, helps one honor commitments, and provides a respectful way to work out differences.

When one begins to experience guilt, confusion, judgment, changing needs, having feelings of being a baby sitter, wondering whether one's time is meaningful, feeling like one is spending too much money, feeling that the child is spoiled, then one may be experiencing the results of poor boundary setting.

The mentor is part of the therapeutic team, and is responsible for sharing in full their experience with the mentee to the Volunteer Coordinator and the Therapist. The mentor is not there to please the child, but rather to support the therapeutic goals. The mentor is non-judgmental and unconditional in their acceptance of the child. The mentor is not a friend, but is friendly. The mentor often has experiences with the mentee and the child's family that need to be processed through the assistance of the Therapist and or the Volunteer Coordinator. This processing assists the mentor to maintain objectivity and balance.

Setting boundaries are supported by:

1. Planning
2. Explaining procedures and following them closely.
3. Reviewing the goals of the outings and the evaluating at the end how well the plan was followed.
4. Setting the parameters so that the word "no" connects.
5. Receiving insight, strategies, and goals from the Volunteer Coordinator and the Therapist.

The following are issues that need to be closely defined:

1. **Taking the child to the mentor's home.** Only with prior approval of the therapist.
2. **Involving the mentee with one's family.** Only with prior approval of the therapist.
3. **Spending time at the child's home.** Normally, only as long as is polite.
4. **Getting involved with the family's dynamics and issues.** Refer all questions to the therapist. Do not transport any one in the family besides the mentee. Do not run errands during the outing for the family.
5. **Touching which is acceptable.** Depending upon the age. Never touch a mentee if the child is upset. All touching should be age appropriate.
6. **Giving out personal telephone number.** Limit the time and the days that the mentee is allowed to call. Parents should have a way of contacting you if they need to change a pick up or drop off time, or to reschedule.
7. **Advice giving.** Best to refer to the therapist.

8. **Budgeting.** Be reasonable, given your income. The Volunteer Coordinator can provide some assistance. If the family is financially capable they can be asked to contribute to pay for the child's share of the cost. Review this with the therapist.

9. **Pick up and drop off times.** Program is from 2 - 4 hours once a week. Any more or less time should be reported to and approved by the Volunteer Coordinator and the Therapist. By exceeding the time restraints the mentee and their family can become confused as to the role of the mentor.

The following are some situations that stimulate the mentor to define boundaries:

1. You have given your home phone number to the child and their parents. There is a dispute in the family and you receive a phone call from the parent or child trying to involve you in the dispute.
2. Your mentee is asking if you to spend more than once a week together, or if your outings can be longer than the allowed time.
3. Your mentee wants to know if their best friend, who has spent the night, can come on the outing. The child tells you their friend is home alone a lot, never gets to go anywhere and the family has no money.
4. Your outing with the child is window-shopping at the mall. During the outing, the child wants you to buy something not planned for, or wants to borrow some money to buy something.