

POINT SOURCE YOUTH ON BEHALF OF OCFS PRESENTS:

BOUNDARY SETTING BETWEEN SERVICE PROVIDERS AND YOUTH

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Executive Summary

Setting healthy and realistic boundaries between service providers and youth participants is critical and consequential within direct service. This can be a difficult task when attempting to build a trusting relationship with young people. Many boundary gray areas are sometimes created by the variety of young people's needs, practice settings, and professional relationship contexts within the field of child and youth care. Upholding professional boundaries while still providing warm, personal care is paramount. This toolkit was developed from a training webinar and aims to support OCFS's direct service providers to identify healthy boundary-setting techniques and how to engage young people with critical thought and awareness when building trust and balancing a professional relationship.

Speakers

Jonathan Castro, Director of Walton House Supportive Housing Program, *Jericho Project*

Téo Ortega, Consultant, *Sagrado Strategies LLC*

Skye Adrian, Program Manager, *CHY / Artist Executive, Skye Adrian Studio*

Jyasia, Youth Advocate

Shane Thompson, Case Manager, *Hetrick Martin Institute Host Homes Program*



Office of Children
and Family Services

The purpose of this resource is to provide information & guidance from experts in their field that is as updated and accurate as possible. It is not intended to give medical advice for individuals or organizations.

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Key Takeaways

1

Boundary setting is an important part of the **therapeutic process**. It sets the tone for the relationship the provider will have with the youth participant.

2

Boundary setting occurs regularly, and isn't "one boundary fits all". Some participants will test your boundaries constantly. You must be consistent in what you say and do.

3

You must respect a participant's boundaries. This is a two-way street and providers are not entitled to every aspect of their clients lives. Be mindful of what boundaries mean to each individual young adult.





Best Practices

1. Ask yourself, “What I am about to share or ask/share, is it in the service of the youth?” — if the answer is no, then don’t share. Often, curiosity or over identification with a youth, can lead a service provider to share personal information or ask questions that are not appropriate or pertinent to services being provided. Remember your positionality and that the purpose of setting boundaries is to set a healthy collaborative relationship rather than shut the youth down.

2. Be direct and transparent. Do not beat around the bush. Often when a service provider is uncomfortable redirecting a participant they ignore it or they provide a “band-aid” response. Therefore, a question like “Can I take you out sometime?” can lead to a response like “I have a boyfriend”, instead of “That is inappropriate and not what I am here to do for you as a case manager.” The former can provide a participant with hope that they have a chance or gives them unnecessary

information. The latter addresses the boundary overstep and hopefully curves any future questions of that nature.

3. Boundaries should not be so rigid that you’re unable to be authentic. We are human and our responses should not be robotic. Setting boundaries does not mean that we are not allowed to be warm in our responses. “How was your weekend?” Can be responded to with “It was nice/ relaxing, thanks for asking.” It does not have to be “Please refrain from asking me about my personal life”. Find your boundary voice.

4. Be mindful of how much “feelings” and non-clinical language is used when discussing participant concerns. Are you burnt out with the participant? — this can oftentimes lead to poor advocacy. Are you going over and beyond for the participant? — this can be a sign that you have crossed a boundary — would you do this for everybody else?.

“At the end of the day, this is their life, and we should be working with [young people] directly and engaging them as partners on how they want to see things play out. That helps you create healthy boundaries in and of itself.”

—Shane Thompson





Four Actions You Can Take Now

1. **Don't wait for a boundary to be crossed to set it.** Make an outline of your personal vs your professional boundaries and create spaces to go over them with the youth. Having or setting boundaries can be difficult depending on the relationship you have with the youth, be sure to practice your language and stance when setting boundaries.
2. **Implement reflective supervision.** Whether you are a supervisor or a supervisee, use supervision to discuss concerns or areas of growth. Do not use this as a punitive process but rather as a space where dialogue and skills building can occur.
3. **Listen out for boundary setting concerns** during engagements, staff meetings, and other interactions. If the concerns are widespread, consider program/agency trainings. If it's localized, think about providing skills refreshers in supervision/staff meetings.
4. **Promote Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** programs and other benefits your agency may have. Providers that are stressed out and aren't feeling supported can "dump" their feelings on to peers and participants, which is not productive.

Additional Resources

- [Resilience Exercise package by Positive Psychology](#)



“I feel like a lot of folks tend to police service providing spaces and police what folks say and do, and that’s just an unrealistic boundary. Me accessing a service doesn’t mean I’m going to change the individual I am [in order] to access that.”

— Skye Adrian