

Professionalism is the Best Protection

While educators need to establish good relationships with students in order to teach them, educators must not rely upon students to meet their own social needs. When educators rely on students to meet the educator's social needs, the relationship is no longer a professional relationship. Nor is it a true friendship since by the nature of the educator-student relationship, it is not an equal or even relationship.

The relationship between educator and student is an uneven one. It is a relationship of trust where the educator has power over the student, making it inappropriate and unprofessional for the educator to try and meet his/her social needs through that relationship. While good relationships with students are very important for the education process, that does not mean that the educator may become personal friends with his/her students. As you may glean from reading on, failure to follow this basic principle of professionalism can result in an educator fitting the profile of someone attempting to engage in sexual misconduct with students, even if that is not the person's intent.

At the same time, it is recognized that a sound and trusting relationship with students is often necessary to advance educational goals. The key in striking the balance is for the educator to consider whether s/he is attempting to have personal needs met through the relationship, or to have a peer-to-peer or "special relationship" with a student. If the relationship is becoming too close, the educator is the adult and is responsible for establishing professional boundaries.

Even in small villages where everyone knows everyone and school employees may be related to some of their students, these principles of professional relationships with students apply whenever educators are on the job.

Dealing with Groomers

How sexual grooming works: Sexual grooming is the process by which much of the serious sexual misconduct against children occurs in schools. An adult befriends a child, creating a connection with the child, a special relationship, lowering the child's natural inhibitions in order to eventually take advantage of the child sexually. In education, sexual abusers often target students who are passive or needy and then engage in personal *boundary invasion behaviors* which become increasingly invasive of the child's boundaries. The child gets used to the boundary invasions and their increasing intrusiveness, and starts to accept them as normal. Eventually, when the student's inhibitions are down, sexual misconduct may occur. Commonly the child may even blame him/herself for what happened.

Student victim profile: Students who become victims are often in special need of adult attention, and at first find the special relationship with the educator something grounding and centering. They end up trusting the educator, feel that they are personal friends with the educator, allow the boundary invasions because they are friends, and when something inappropriate happens, may end up blaming themselves. The victim can also be a relative of the abuser or a friend of the abuser's children.

Principles Which Are the Key to How Educators Can Stop Sexual Grooming and Thereby Most Sexual Molestations

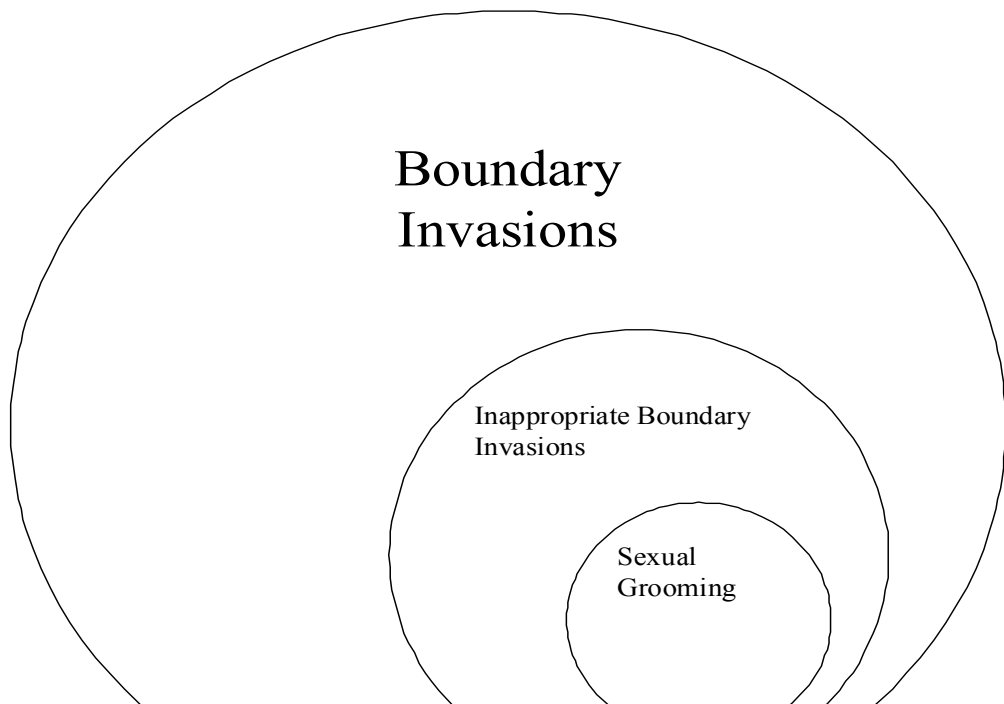
1. Social science experts inform us that sexual molesters victimize children either by “grabbing” or “grooming” children. (Carla van Dam, Ph.D., *Identifying Child Molesters* (2001).)
2. These experts also inform us that the vast majority of educators who sexually molest students accomplish their molestations through the sexual grooming process.
3. Sexual grooming of students begins with and is accomplished by a process of increasingly invasive *inappropriate boundary invasions*.

Therefore:

4. If we *stop inappropriate boundary invasions*, we can prevent most molestations by educators.

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Venn Diagram Showing Relationship of Grooming to Boundary Invasions



Definitions

Inappropriate: “Inappropriate” in conjunction with “inappropriate boundary invasions” means conduct which under the totality of the circumstances does not have valid and bona fide educational, health, or safety reasons.

Boundary invasions: Boundary invasions are situations where the educator does not respect the student’s personal physical and psychological boundaries. In predatory situations, the boundary invasions become increasingly invasive, with the student becoming used to the invasions and allowing increasing invasions to occur. Not all boundary invasions are inappropriate, and not all inappropriate boundary invasions result in sexual misconduct with students.¹ However, inappropriate boundary invasions are something which other adults may become aware of. Since inappropriate boundary invasions are usually the only clue whereby other adults can detect that an educator-student relationship may be headed in the wrong direction, it is important for educators to avoid inappropriate boundary invasions and for administration to address them promptly with the educator when they occur.

Whether boundary invasion behaviors have “questionable educational benefit” can be determined by examining the relationship established by the educator with the student to see whether that relationship moved from being professional to becoming personal.

Possible “inappropriate boundary invasion” (*i.e.*, “risk behaviors,” are behaviors which show that a risky relationship is being established and may include:

Inappropriate Boundary Invasions

The following are “risk behaviors” which might be sexual grooming.

Taking an Undue Interest in a Particular Student:

1. Having a "special" friend or a “special relationship” with a particular student.
2. Favoring certain students by giving them special privileges.
3. Favoring certain students, inviting them to come to the classroom at non-class times.
4. Getting a particular student out of class to visit the teacher during the teacher’s prep period.
5. Engaging in peer-like behavior with students including rough-housing.

Using Poor Judgment in Relation to a Particular Student:

6. Allowing a particular student to get away with inappropriate behavior.
7. Being alone with the student behind closed doors at school.
8. Giving gifts or money to the student.
9. Being overly “touchy” with certain students.
10. Touching students for no educational or health reason.

¹ Examples of appropriate boundary invasions in schools: assisting a student after a toileting accident (with two adults involved); jerking a child by the shirt collar to prevent the child from being hit by a car; demonstrating a wrestling move in PE or in wrestling.

11. Giving students rides in the educator's personal vehicle, especially alone.
12. Frequent electronic communication or phone contacts with a particular student.

Becoming Involved in the Student's Private Life:

13. Talking to the student about the educator's personal problems.
14. Talking to the student about the student's personal problems to the extent that the adult becomes a confidant of the student when it is not the adult's job role to do so.
15. Initiating or extending contact with students beyond the school day in a private or non-group setting.
16. Taking a particular student on personal outings, away from protective adults.
17. Using e-mail, text-messaging, instant messaging, or social networking to discuss personal topics or interests with students.

Not Respecting Normal Boundaries:

18. Invading the student's physical privacy (e.g., walking in on the student in the bathroom).
19. Inviting students to the educator's home.
20. Visiting the student's home.
21. Asking the student to keep certain things secret from his/her parents.

Sexually Related Conduct:

22. Engaging in sex talk with students (sexual innuendo, sexual banter, or sexual jokes).
23. Talking with a student about sexual topics that are not related to a specific curriculum.
24. Showing pornography to the student.
25. Hugging, kissing, touching, or other affectionate physical contact with a student.

Small Communities / Villages

In small communities it is more likely that people working in the schools will already know students before they become students. Children in the community may be friends of the family or part of the educator's extended family. The child may be the educator's babysitter, someone who is hired to do chores, and someone often seen at community events. The educator may belong to the same community organizations as the child, be an elder, the child's uncle, aunt, cousin, or best friend's parent.

These Guidelines recognize the realities of small communities where everyone knows everyone and people who grew up in the community have close ties and blood relationships with a large segment of the community.

The additional guidance for small communities is:

- 1) Even if the child is a relative, professional boundaries are to be observed at school or when the educator is on the job (in his/her role as an educator).

- 2) If students come to the educator's home, it should be to visit the educator's children, not the educator, unless the visit is arranged by the parent (*i.e.*, the child might be staying with the educator and his/her family while the parent is in the hospital).
- 3) The parent of the child visiting the educator's home should be aware that the child is there. If there is any ambiguity about whether the parent of the visiting child knows where that child is, it is up to the educator to so inform the parent.
- 4) If children visit the educator's home on more than an occasional basis, the educator should inform the school principal and explain the circumstances.
- 5) Regardless of contacts outside of school, it is still inappropriate for the educator to engage in a peer-to-peer behaviors with a student unless the educator is the child's parent.

Additional Guidelines

In addition to avoiding inappropriate boundary invasions with students at school:

1. Classroom doors should have windows.
2. Windows should not be covered except in school lockdown situations.
3. Educators should not be meeting in private with students to "mentor" or "counsel" the student unless that is the educator's official role in the school.
4. If a student needs counseling, non-counselor educators should send the student to the counselor or person whose role it would be to help the child. If there is no such person, then administration should consult with the District Office.
5. When an educator meets alone with a student, the door should be open unless it is a counselor or administrator meeting with a student. The counselor's or administrator's door should have a window on it which is not covered.
6. When dealing with a child's toileting accident, two adults should assist the child.
7. Do not initiate hugs with students.
8. ***The following forms of behavior are not appropriate and should be reported immediately to administration:***
 - a. Private text-messaging, social media contacts, other private electronic communication, or phone calls, unless the child is an immediate family member;
 - b. full frontal hugs, lengthy hugs;
 - c. kisses;
 - d. holding children over three years old on the lap;

- e. touching any child anywhere below the waist [except for toileting or diapering with younger children, helping younger children with their footwear, or in organized games like softball where one might tag the other person out].
- f. showing inappropriate affection;
- g. occupying a bed with a child or youth;
- h. being in the same hotel room with a student other than an immediate family member;
- i. touching knees or legs of children or youth;
- j. wrestling with children or youth, unless coaching wrestling;
- k. tickling children or youth;
- l. piggyback rides;
- m. massages, shoulder rubs, neck rubs, etc.;
- n. comments or compliments relating to a youth's body;
- o. snapping bras, giving wedgies, or similar touch on underwear;
- p. giving gifts or money to individual children or youth;
- q. Visits to the child's home to visit the child or visits by the child to the educator's home to visit the educator.

9. Coaching:

When coaching sports, it is occasionally necessary for a coach to touch a player to demonstrate various positions or moves. Coaches should discuss this necessity with players and their parents at the beginning of the year/season, and explain that anyone uncomfortable with that should let him/her know privately, or inform another adult who can inform the coach. Students' privacy should be protected.

- a. Opposite gender wrestling coaches should not be demonstrating holds on opposite gender wrestlers unless to demonstrate wrestling moves, and only when there has been a meeting at the beginning of the year with parents where the wrestler and parents agree whom the child would feel comfortable doing the demonstrating. Parents should be allowed to attend wrestling practices if they wish.
- b. In track, if there is a need to have a runner lift his or her hips in the starting blocks, this can be accomplished without touching by using a cell phone (preferably the student's) to show the deficiency in the position. A side view would be used.

- c. In basketball, an opposite gender coach should discuss with opposite gender players that s/he may need to touch them in demonstrating various moves in the game and that anyone uncomfortable with that should let him/her know privately, or inform another adult who can inform the coach. The student's privacy should be protected.
- d. If there is touching involved in coaching other sports, similar principles should be applied.
- e. If possible, having two coaches at practices is desirable.

Staff Member Duties

The staff member's role in preventing sexual abuse of students is two-fold: first, to avoid engaging in risk behaviors which could be mistaken for boundary invasion or grooming behaviors; and second, to report situations where such behaviors by other employees take place.

1. *Do not engage in inappropriate boundary invasion behaviors* described above or behaviors like them. Keep your interactions with students at school and at school related events on a professional level.
2. Refer students who need emotional or other support to appropriately trained staff such as counselors or school psychologists. In small or remote communities, where appropriately trained staff may not be available, consult with District Office leadership for workable alternatives. Staff can be caring while maintaining an appropriate level of professional decorum.
2. *Report the Boundary Invasion:* If a staff member observes any adult engaging in the behaviors described above with students, or other behaviors which raise concerns, the staff member must:
 - a. ***WHEN IN DOUBT, REPORT IT OUT!*** Inform your principal or the appropriate person at the District Office at your earliest opportunity.² Do not wait or mull things over or attempt to determine for yourself whether the behavior you have observed has a plausible, innocent explanation. You may not be aware of or understand the entire situation, and allowing the conduct to continue could be harmful for both the staff member and students.
 - b. **DO NOT** confront or discuss the matter with the adult.

² Make your report to the appropriate administrator, but do not make the report to an administrator who may be the one involved in the boundary invasion behaviors. Do not warn the person who is being reported of anything. Let the process take its course.

- c. Do not inform the person of your concern, unless it is a situation where immediate intervention is necessary to protect a child.
- d. ***Maintain confidentiality.*** Failure to do so may impede official investigations, foster untrue rumors, or violate privacy. You owe a legal duty of confidentiality to students on matters which a reasonable person would want to remain confidential.
- e.
- f. Follow rules for mandatory reporting of child abuse and/or sexual abuse to law enforcement and/or Office of Children's Services.
- g. Document who you notified, where and when and what you reported for your own records.

What if the Person Is a Friend?

If the person engaging in the boundary invasion or misconduct is your friend, it is still necessary to report the conduct to administration in order to protect students, yourself, and your friend. Sometimes an employee ends up getting too close to a student without originally intending anything sexual. Eventually an opportunity may present itself for something unprofessional to occur, and the employee may make a career-ending mistake which harms the student, the student's family, the employee's family, and the employee. Reporting boundary invasions to administration early on helps to prevent such problems from developing.