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**Reflection Guide**

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**What to do:** Reflect on your areas of frustration — the ones where there are conflicts or you feel powerless to act. Look at the five types of boundaries described in the first table below and the list of things you can and can’t control in the second table. Decide which boundary types and spheres of influence apply to your frustrations and, consider how to manage them. Mark statements that stand out. Then, write yourself a script to have a discussion with the appropriate person or people involved — or with yourself!

**Why it matters:** Boundaries are emotional and physical guidelines, norms, or limits that define what’s appropriate, safe, and permissible behavior for yourself and others. When others don’t know about and respect individual and shared boundaries, stress can affect everyone’s health and well-being. Likewise, when you understand what you can and can’t control, you can let go of issues that cause frustration and focus on areas where you can have an impact.

## Five Types of Boundaries

|  | **What They Are** | **Scenario** | **What to Say** | **How to Do It** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Physical Boundaries** | Physical boundaries protect your personal space and physical needs. | A student you’ve been working with for several month gives you a hug without asking. When you say, “That’s enough,” the student squeezes you tighter.  Limited staffing has kept you engaged in several activities without a break. When you finally get a couple of minutes to yourself, the site coordinator asks you to delay your break to help with yet another activity. | “I’d appreciate it if you ask me first.”  “I’d be happy to continue to help, but I desperately need a break. I need to get some fresh air.” | ***Do*** use confident body language: face the person, make eye contact, and use a steady tone of voice at an appropriate volume.  ***Do*** clearly explain what you want in easy-to-understand language.  ***Do*** suggest holding a group meeting to share perspectives and discuss ways to better manage time. |
| ***Don’t*** assume other people can understand your needs or desires through nonverbal communication.  ***Don’t*** assume that all people have the same boundaries. |
| **Emotional Boundaries** | Emotional boundaries separate your personal feelings from another’s feelings. This boundary requires a strong sense of self. | You’ve been working with your co-instructor for years. Lately, the two of you have often disagreed about what to prioritize during a program activity. Your co-instructor makes the final decision without you. You’re upset that you weren’t consulted, although the activity went well. | “I appreciate your taking the lead on the decision. But moving forward, can we discuss these things ahead of time so I can better understand your reasoning?” | ***Do***be honest and respectful. It’s OK to be firm, but your message will be better received if you deliver it professionally. |
| ***Don’t*** ignore your emotional needs: They may eventually come out in inappropriate ways, such as yelling, put-downs, or the silent treatment. |
| **Work Boundaries** | These boundaries include the physical, emotional, and mental limits you create between your personal life and professional commitments. | During your second week in your afterschool role, the program lead asks you to take over another activity located at the elementary school site. You’re hesitant to say “yes” because you have no background in the topic, nor do you have experience working with younger students.  You’re at home and your site coordinator calls you about an email they just sent you. In the email, the site coordinator asks that you respond at your earliest convenience. | “I’m not comfortable doing that task. I don’t know enough to do this well.”    “I’ll do that as soon as I get to the program tomorrow.” | ***Do*** share your expertise and knowledge to improve program quality.  ***Do*** suggest ways to share the load with others.  ***Do*** look for resources and technologies that can make work go more smoothly. |
| ***Don’t*** take on responsibilities that are outside your area of knowledge or scope of practice.  ***Don’t*** commit to unnecessary tasks that increase your stress or anxiety.  ***Don’t*** habitually devote nonwork hours to job responsibilities. Work is just one part of life. |
| **Mental Boundaries** | Mental boundaries are limits involving thoughts, values, and opinions. These boundaries also help you distinguish your emotions from someone else’s. | Your activity isn’t going as planned. The students have lost focus and are no longer engaged in the task. As you feel your patience wearing thin, the activity instructor across the hall asks to combine her class with yours so she can take a break. | “Let’s meet halfway. How about we each take a 10-minute break and then work together?”  Think to yourself:  *This is just one activity. I can try again tomorrow.* | ***Do*** plan ahead. Think about what you want to say, and how to say it, before starting a difficult discussion.  ***Do***consider other peoples’ needs. |
| ***Don’t*** skip chances to compromise. Give-and-take is part of any healthy relationship. |
| **Time Boundaries** | Time boundaries establish how you manage your time for things such as relationships, family, work, and so on. | To increase family engagement and a strong sense of community, the program director strongly encourages all staff to attend the boys basketball game on Saturday. This isn’t part of your employment agreement, and you already have plans for Saturday.  You’ve worked long days for five months straight. You hide your irritability at work. Many nights, you dream about your students’ hardships. On a planned day off, your site coordinator asks you to come in because the afterschool program is short staffed. | “That sounds exciting, but I’m not available.”  “Unfortunately, I’m not available. Is there another way I can help?” | ***Do*** reserve your evenings or time off for personal and family time. Shut down your laptop or computer.  ***Do*** communicate with your superior(s) about your availability. |
| ***Don’t*** ignore your personal needs when you work with or serve others.  ***Don’t*** work for extended periods without breaks. |

# What You Can and Can’t Control

Here are examples of things you can and can’t control. At work, what you can and can’t control depends partly on your role in the out-of-school time. For example, a frontline staff member may not have control over program policies, but a program director does.

| **Sphere of Influence** | **What I CAN’T Control** | **What I CAN Control** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Students | Thoughts  Past educational experiences  Behaviors  History of trauma  Growth patterns  Developmental or learning impairments  Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) | My relationships and rapport with students  Responses to student behaviors  De-escalation techniques  My expectations for student learning  Student group agreements  Positive environment  My behavior |
| Family and Peers | Students’ home lives  Economic status  Family dynamics  Friend groups  Religious or societal beliefs  Parent responses/reactions | Family engagement activities  Communication with families  Family empowerment and partnerships  Building rapport between families and the program  Boundaries  Ground rules and social norms |
| Program and School | All decisions about program policies/procedures  School-day curriculum  Discipline policies  School-day culture  School district policies  Out-of-school time staffing shortages | Communication with program leaders  How I implement program activities  Time allocated to work and program responsibilities  Program culture and climate  Promoting social skills and self-regulation Communication with school-day staff |
| Community | Presence and activities of community and social service organizations  Social safety net | Forming community partnerships  My presence in the community  Engagement with support networks |
| Laws | Federal and State requirements, rules, laws, and guidelines | Compliance with regulations  Voting or advocating for certain policies |

**Use this space to list actions you’ll take to reduce stress and improve your work-life balance:**

**Use this space to write a script for a discussion you need to have with someone to follow through on your planned actions.**

*For example, if you’re frequently asked to work extra hours because your program is understaffed, you might want to speak with your supervisor about possible solutions, like partnering with a nearby college or university to create opportunities for their education majors to get work experience in your program.*



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