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Developing Boundaries and Advocating for the Self

TCHATT

**(Texas Child Health Through
Telemedicine)**



Potential Issues When Children Do Not Express Boundaries

- Issues with Codependency (relying on others to solve their perceived issues).
- Issues with communication.
- Issues developing and maintaining relationships.
- Issues with respecting others' boundaries.
- Not understanding boundaries may lead to difficulty with compliance outside of schools such as safety and following the law. Which may lead to potential incarceration.



Definitions

- Boundaries: Guidelines, rules, or limits that a person creates for themselves that are reasonable, safe, and permissible.
- Self-Advocacy: The ability to represent oneself and communicate your needs or concerns.
- Empathy: The ability to understand and share feelings with others.



Why is My Student Confiding Very Personal Matters with Me?

- If a student is providing you with detailed personal matters, it may be because they consider you a mentor or parental figure in their lives.





Teachers May Also Develop Boundaries to Their Students

- Should you feel uncomfortable with your student's personal matters, you may refer them to the school counselor. Keep in mind this may effect trust with older students.
- You may also empathize with the student and express your concern or boundary. Reinforcing appropriate conversation with praise may also help students develop appropriate conversation.
 - Ex: “John, it sounds like you are going through a lot right now and I am grateful you are able to share what happened to you with me. However, we cannot be discussing it during class so we can speak about it in office hours after class.”
 - Ex: “Sara, I do not feel comfortable talking about _____ I am letting you know we will not be talking about that during class.” “Sara, I like how you changed the subject to something more appropriate/helpful! Awesome job!”



How Do We Teach Students to Advocate for Themselves?





Learning Empathy

- When a student is upset about a situation, rather than trying to fix the problem, console them. Provide them comfort and repeat what they are feeling. Ex: “You are so hurt, I am here for you, I know it hurts”.
- Allow time for the student to fully express themselves including some silence. Embracing the silence can really benefit the student.
- When time has passed, ask the student what we can do together to fix the problem, rather than you, the instructor to fix the problem.



Learning Empathy

- “A child who consistently receives empathy gains the ability to regulate negative emotions in a healthy way and integrate the ability to have empathy for others” (Psychology Today).
- Read aloud: A study was conducted on school age children where school counselors used interactive read-aloud as a strategy to improve empathy levels. The authors found the strategies to be effective and empathy development was deemed an important skill for students to learn (Thompson & Melchior, 2020)
- Please see resources section under Positive Psychology Link for resources on teaching empathy and kindness with games and classroom lesson ideas.
- When a student is able to understand others emotions or their own, they will be able to set boundaries and respect the boundaries of others.



Practice Setting Boundaries

- Name your limits.
- Tune into your feelings.
- Be direct.
- Do not feel fear or guilty for setting a boundary for things that make you uncomfortable.
- Practice Self-Awareness.
- Incorporate Self-Care.
- If your student is having a hard time setting boundaries, provide support by discussing it with them and consider role playing activities that can be incorporated in a lesson plan that all students may benefit from.
- Be assertive with your boundaries and follow through.
- Start small on your first boundary to gain confidence and experience.
- (Tartakvosky, Psych central, 2018)



Increasing Confidence & Self Esteem

- Students and school staff must understand that beginning boundary setting can be challenging if the task is “too big”.
- Starting small boundary practices will be able to help the student grow in confidence and experience before setting a challenging boundary.



How Will Developing Boundaries Help My Student?

- Helps students become comfortable with articulating their own feelings and setting limits.
- Helps students respect others' limits.
- Helps students have a voice that increases self-advocacy and independence skills.
- Helps students develop and maintain relationships.



Resources

- [Psychology Today: The Secret to Teaching a Child Empathy](#)
- Eleanor Thompson & Shekila Melchior (2020) Improving Empathy in Children: Interactive Read-Aloud as a Counseling Intervention, *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 15:2, 199-211, DOI: [10.1080/15401383.2019.1676857](#)
- [Positive Psychology Empathy Worksheets for Students and Adults](#)
- [10 Ways to Build and Preserve Better Boundaries \(Psych Central\)](#)



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Questions