

# 25 BOUNDARY-VIOLATING BEHAVIORS

## Schools, Students and Parents Should Be Aware of and Avoid

The vast majority of teachers, administrators, coaches, volunteers, and employees in public schools are dedicated, caring people who do a great job preparing students academically and helping them develop other talents and skills critical to being a successful adult.

However, schools must be aware that some individuals who are sexually attracted to children or teens choose to work in schools and other youth-serving organizations. It gives them "cover" as they carefully identify children and teens they believe will be easy targets for sexual abuse. Other individuals may not have specific intentions to sexually abuse, but find themselves violating certain boundaries in their interactions with students that can lead to sexual misconduct and abuse.

The good news is ***we don't have to wait for sexual abuse to occur before we stop it.*** When school personnel, students and parents are aware of behaviors that violate the appropriate boundaries between adults and students, they can take action to report violations *before* they can ever escalate to sexual abuse. That places individuals on notice that their behavior is inappropriate, unacceptable and must be corrected. It provides an opportunity for administrators to guide personnel in their professional development without having to make judgements about whether the individual's behavior is sexually motivated or simply the result of a lack of self-awareness about poor boundaries.

Being made aware of boundary-violating behaviors lets students know they never have to accept any behaviors from others that make them feel uncomfortable, even from adults in positions of power or who are well-liked or popular. It lets parents know how to support their schools as safe havens where their children can learn and grow without the threat of sexual abuse.

Some schools have Codes of Conduct that make general mention of the need for school personnel to conduct themselves in a "*professional manner*" with students. Some even include statements such as, "*School personnel shall not be sexually inappropriate with a student.*" However, neither of these statements provide a description of the various specific behaviors that are unacceptable and that must be avoided.

The development of a detailed Code of Conduct and the involvement of administrators, staff, students and their parents in its review and adoption are key to creating a culture of safety where everyone knows and supports the Code and are encouraged to report violations to ensure the Code's integrity.

Codes of conduct are essential because they protect children from sexual misconduct and abuse, protect employees and volunteers who may need guidance about how to become aware of their boundary-violating behaviors; and protect the school from the turmoil, negative publicity, and legal and financial liabilities that often result from incidences of sexual abuse.

Here is a list of 25 Boundary-Violating Behaviors which educators and employees of public schools, their students and parents should be aware of and avoid. School leaders are encouraged to review these as they develop or revise their current Code of Conduct.

**Do you see or know about an adult in your school that:**

1. Makes comments about a student's body or physical attributes to them or to other students or staff, e.g. "I like your new curves." "She's really pretty."
2. Makes sexual comments or jokes, suggestive gestures, or engages in flirtatious behavior with a student.
3. Does things of a personal nature that students can do for themselves, e.g. combing their hair, providing bathroom assistance.
4. Touches students in a way that goes beyond a pat on the back or high five, such as lingering hugs, engaging in roughhousing or provocative physical games with students, or inappropriate touching, e.g. stroking hair, back massages, etc.
5. Engages in physical affection that could be perceived as inappropriate or confusing by the student or others witnessing the behavior.
6. Showers with students after athletic practices or events, undresses around students, or violates their privacy in the bathroom or changing room.
7. Asks young students to sit on his or her lap or hand holds with older students.
8. Uses pet names or words like, "baby," "darling," etc. to refer to a student or allows students to call them by their first name or a nickname if that is not the school practice.
9. Gives gifts to selected students that violates school policies on giving or receiving gifts. Selects a student for special privileges, e.g. sending on personal errands.
10. Offers a student a ride in his or her car, unless in an emergency situation, or allows a student to borrow their car.
11. Shares a room overnight with students when traveling for any school event or sports function.
12. Invites students to off-school events or trips or invites a student to hang out after school without other adults or students—at the school or elsewhere.

13. Closes or locks doors when meeting with a student before or after class or covers classroom windows so interactions will not be seen or cannot be interrupted.
14. Uses their cell phone in locker rooms or restrooms to photograph students or takes pictures of students elsewhere and shares them without parental permission.
15. Sends inappropriate pictures of themselves to students or asks students to send photos of themselves.
16. Asks a youth about their romantic life or relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend.
17. Tries to provide psychological counseling to a student about a sensitive personal issue when a referral to the school counselor would be the appropriate action.
18. Confides in and offers "support" to a student in a way that isolates a student from their friends or family.
19. Shares their personal phone number or personal email address with a student instead of using school-based phone and email systems.
20. Sends private, non-school related text messages to students or responds to text messages from students after school hours or during nighttime hours.
21. Follows or "friends" students on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, etc. or asks students to follow him or her on social media.
22. Sends or exposes students to pornographic materials.
23. Offers students alcohol, drugs, vape pens or cigarettes.
24. Shares with students highly personal things or secrets about themselves, or shares stories about their adult relationships, marriage, or sex life.
25. Engages in any sexual or romantic relationship with a student or other youth, *no matter the age of that child or youth, and even if the youth believes it's okay.*

**If you see these behaviors, alert the person designated in your school to receive reports of boundary-violating behaviors, sexual misconduct or sexual abuse.**



For more info on how to strengthen your school's capacity to prevent child sexual abuse, visit:

**Enough Abuse Campaign**

[www.enoughabuse.org](http://www.enoughabuse.org) or call 617-742-8555