

Helpful Workplace Behaviors to Inform Compassionate Boundary Setting

1. Begin by asking the group to envision a compassionate work environment, where they can be their best self in their job. What staff behaviors would lead to such an environment?
2. Create a space to document a group brainstorm, for example some large flip-chart paper if in person or a Jamboard if together virtually.
3. Ask the group to share what they envisioned, encouraging them to share their ideas as behaviors. If the group shares attitudes instead of behaviors, ask *“What behavior would demonstrate this attitude?”* Write these ideas down on your shared brainstorming space and title it Helpful Workplace Behaviors.
4. If participants are having difficulty coming up with ideas, ask them what behaviors are important to the mission and well-being of the organization. After the group is done brainstorming, add to the title of the exercise, *“Our Yeses.”*



The second step of this exercise is to brainstorm what things staff need to say “no” to in order to support their “yeses.” These “nos” may become individual boundaries that staff members choose to set. Have the group brainstorm what things they need to say “no” to in order to support the items on the “yes” list. (Example: **Helpful Behavior** – Communicating concerns directly to the person the concern involves. **The “No” to support the Yes** – engaging in gossip with other staff members.)

1. Review the tips for how to set such boundaries in your professional and/or personal life. Practice role playing communication between staff about some of the identified boundaries.

Tips for Setting Compassionate Boundaries

- Know what you want to say “Yes” to in your life (values and priorities).
- Be proactive. Have “meetings” to discuss boundaries. Structure offers safety for both sides.
- Just say it! Don’t make them guess. Use simple and direct language.
- Reinforce by pointing out the violations or near violations **IN THE MOMENT**.
- Give explanations that are specific, relevant to the other person, and offer shared solutions.
- Back up your boundary with action. If you give in, you invite people to ignore your needs.
- Remember your locus of control. Boundaries aren’t about perfection. When you must say “yes,” look for where you have control.

Compassionate Boundary Setting to Build Compassion Resilience

Section 6

Questions that may get staff thinking for this activity from the perspective of behaviors with students.
(Be sure to also include behaviors with colleagues and families.)

Elementary Level: Do you think it is OK to...

1. Transport student(s) home.
2. Call students to remind them to bring permission slips or other important items to school.
3. Make home visits for parent-teacher conferences or to follow up on concerns.
4. Go to students' important events outside of school (e.g., piano recitals, sports events).
5. Provide students with school supplies they do not have, including pencils, paper, scissors, etc.
6. Provide students with personal items they need, including food, shoes, coats, toothpaste, etc.
7. Find ways to provide students with healthy snacks without being reimbursed.
8. Babysit for students when their parents are in need.
9. Touch a student when they are in need of a hug.
10. Keep a student's secrets.

Middle School Level Questions: Do you think it is OK to...

1. Friend students and their families on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and other social media.
2. Transport students home with parental permission using personal vehicles.
3. Make reminder calls for students regarding permission slips, registration information, and other important documentation.
4. Make wake up calls for students who have difficulty with attendance.
5. Accept calls from students outside of school hours.
6. Share personal phone numbers with students who need extra support on assignments.
7. Make home visits for parent-teacher conferences, beginning of the school year, or re: concerns.
8. Attend students' games, concerts, or other school events or other events such as recitals.
9. Touch a student and give them a hug, when it is needed.

High School Level Questions: Do you think it is OK to...

1. Friend students on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, or other social media.
2. Transport students home when they do not have any other form of transportation.
3. Share personal phone numbers with students who need extra support on assignments.
4. Share personal contact information with students who need extra emotional support.
5. Make reminder calls to students for permission slips or other important documents.
6. Make wake-up calls to students in the morning.
7. Accept calls from students in need during off-school hours.
8. Make home visits for academic reasons or other concerns.
9. Attend students' games, concerts, or other school events or other events such as recitals.
10. Touch a student and give them a hug, when it is needed.
11. Allow a student to stay in my home if he/she has no place else to go.
12. Maintain relationships with students, after they are no longer in a teacher's courses.

Questions from Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction – School Mental Health Project created in collaboration with Sara Daniel, Saint A, and Pam Black, Trauma Sensitive Education, LLC

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Examples of simple and direct language for boundaries

To set a boundary with a colleague that complains too much about what you cannot control:

"I am working on showing up with good energy for my students, I find that talking too much about what I can't control makes that hard for me. Let's switch topics."

To set a boundary with someone who takes more ideas/ assistance than they give:

"I wouldn't be here if it weren't for the collaboration I have had with other teachers. I am happy to offer you advice and want to be sure that I also learn a few tricks from you. I'd love to know how you approached _____."

To set a boundary with someone who seems to always share bad news:

"I am making it a priority to find things to laugh about this year. Humor and positivity are how I make it through the year in good shape! I need you to bring some funny stuff along with the bad news. Want to hear what made me laugh yesterday?"

To set a boundary with an angry person:

"I want to work with you to figure this out. It will be hard if our brains are not calm enough to think. How about we take a 5 minute break?"

To say no to extra commitments:

"Although our district goals are really important to me, I need to discuss what can come off my plate or what I can do in a different manner in order to take on anything new. I am working on how to balance my family's needs and my workload."

To set a boundary with someone who is critical without your permission:

"I find that the feedback that works best for me to grow is given when I ask for it. It would be helpful to me if you would ask for my permission before giving me feedback. Can you do that?"

To buy yourself time when making decisions:

"I find I make my best decisions when I have time to think them through; I'll need a day to think on it."

