





Good Boundaries for Healthy Ministry

Boundaries provide a container for ministry to take place. A good boundary is consistent, reliable, and establishes expectations that create a sense of security and safety for everyone. Healthy boundaries are critical to maintaining an environment where faith can be nurtured and grow. To keep our boundaries reliable, we need to take time and effort to maintain them.

Healthy boundaries require high maintenance for those who have them; people with unhealthy boundaries become high maintenance for those who interact with them.

Warning signs that a church leader's healthy boundaries are at risk:

- Make special or secret arrangements to be with someone
- Change normal practices or routines to be with someone
- Confide personal and professional issues with a counselee or a minor
- Create emotional intimacy by whispering, flirting, touching, hovering, etc.
- Manipulate another's emotions, i.e. "I'll hurt myself if you leave me"
- Use rationalization, justification, minimizing, spiritualizing to continue relationship, i.e. "God brought us together"; "If no one else knows, we aren't hurting anyone"
- Allow a marriage to diminish so that someone else fills the void too easily

Safe practices to help maintain a church leader's healthy boundaries:

- Practice ministry duties consistently with all people (congregants, volunteers, staff, children)
- Meet privately with an adult only once per week for 45-75 minutes; refer to a professional after three visits
- Participate in an annual evaluation process which discusses healthy boundaries
- Observe technological boundaries – texting, emails, social network sites should be shared with a supervisor or accountability partner; limit technology exchanges
- Annually discuss boundaries between staff/volunteers and congregants/youth/children (set clear expectations and provide opportunity to discuss boundary issues that arise)
- Avoid one-to-one meetings in homes/cars/offices when no one else is present
- Limit physical contact to a brief side-by-side hug or pat on the shoulder, hand, or forearm

Safe Church Ministry equips congregations in abuse awareness, prevention, and response. For more information, contact:



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