



United Educators

Boundary Training in Schools

United Educators Telephone Roundtable
Reference Materials

Wednesday, December 13, 2006
1:00 p.m. Eastern Time

Presented by

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Speaker and Moderator Biographies

Jane Bluestein is an award-winning author and speaker who specializes in programs and resources for educators, counselors, parents and others in areas related to relationship building, effective instruction and guidance, and personal development. She has authored several books; the latest is entitled *High School's Not Forever*. Jane has appeared internationally as a speaker and talk-show guest, including appearances as a guest expert on CNN, National Public Radio and The Oprah Winfrey Show. Jane received a Bachelor of Science degree, Masters of Arts in Teaching, and Doctorate of Philosophy from the University of Pittsburgh.

Karen-Ann Broe advises schools and colleges on risk management, with a primary emphasis on student rights, injuries, athletics, discrimination, behavioral and disciplinary matters. She has over 20 years of experience in the areas of education law and management, employment practices, local government, contracts and litigation. She has written extensively and often speaks at schools and conferences. Karen-Ann earned a Bachelor of Journalism degree from the University of Texas at Austin and a Juris Doctor degree with honors from the Washington College of Law at American University in Washington, D.C.

David Wolowitz is a litigator with over 30 years of experience who also advises schools, institutions, and businesses on risk avoidance and crisis management. He regularly consults with independent schools on such topics as professional boundaries, reporting law compliance, employment practices and various related topics. David is a popular speaker at schools and colleges and for such organizations as the Independent Schools Association of Northern New England and the Association of Boarding Schools. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Washington University, Master of Arts from Harvard University, and Juris Doctor degree from the University of Michigan Law School.

Roundtable Agenda

- I. General Concepts
- II. Healthy Boundaries in Relationships
- III. Boundary Training for Adults
- IV. Boundary Training for Students
- V. Case Studies
- VI. Questions and Answers

Boundary Training Case Studies

Case Study #1

A popular teacher of 10th grade computer science assigns her class with the task of setting up their personal MySpace accounts. The teacher invites her students to link their MySpace pages to the teacher's MySpace page. The teacher's and students' pages contain photographs and details about their hobbies, interests and friends.

A female student begins sending email messages to the teacher at her personal email address as listed on her MySpace account. The student and teacher exchange emails about pop music, celebrities and TV shows. After a few weeks, the student begins expressing her frustration about being shunned by the "popular girls" at school. The teacher sympathizes with the student and offers her suggestions for making friends at school.

- **Have boundaries been crossed or violated?**
- **How should the school respond to this situation?**

Case Study #2

A former semi-professional soccer player volunteered his time to serve as assistant coach for the high school's junior varsity team. He spent several afternoons a week with the team, instructing the 9th and 10th grade boys in their ball control and passing skills, as well as game strategy. The school's coach appreciated this assistance, as the volunteer coach had far more experience in soccer than the coach had, and the boys responded well to him.

Some of the boys' parents asked the volunteer coach if they could pay him to give their boys extra coaching help during the weekends. The parents were interested in helping their boys in being selected for area club teams as well as varsity soccer in high school.

The volunteer coach began giving private coaching lessons to several of the boys during the weekends. The volunteer coach also sold soccer gear—shoes, balls, clothing, gloves, socks and ankle pads—to the families. The volunteer coach was a sales representative for an athletic supply company and he obtained 10% discounts to the families who hired him for private coaching.

- **Have boundaries been crossed or violated?**
- **How should the school respond to this situation?**

Case Study #3

A head cheerleader gets an extra ticket to the big football game. The tickets are in very high demand. She tells three girlfriends that she hasn't yet made up her mind which special friend to give it to, but she will by a certain date. Each girl then proceeds to shower her with attention. The one with a car offers her rides anywhere, anytime. The one with a rich family gives her expensive makeup. The smart one offers her free tutoring. No rules are violated. A teacher finds out from a student who is offended.

- **What should the teacher do?**

Case Study #4

The husband of the school's dean of students went in for emergency surgery to remove a brain tumor. He was hospitalized for a month as he remained in serious condition, and underwent rehabilitation. Students, staff and teachers at the school reached out with concern and offers of help. A sign-up sheet was posted at the school for volunteers to help provide the dean with evening meals, dog walking, and house cleaning services. Several students signed up and, with the assistance of their parents, provided the meals and services.

Later in the semester, some of the students who provided the free meals and services were accused of cheating on their course exams. The academic dishonesty cases were presented to the dean of students for fact-finding and a decision as to what discipline, if any, to impose.

- **Was it proper for the dean of students to accept the free meals, dog walking, and house cleaning services provided by the students and their families?**
- **Does the acceptance of the meals and services compromise the dean's ability to make an impartial decision in the academic dishonesty cases?**
- **How should the school respond in this situation?**

Public School News

Boundary Training: Promoting Healthy Adult-Student Relationships in Schools

United Educators' member K-12 schools often ask, "What are the proper boundaries for our staff's interactions with students?"

Many examples of behavior raise questions. For example, a popular teacher invites students to set up their personal MySpace accounts and link them to the teacher's account. The web pages contain pictures and details about hobbies, interests, and friends. Or a volunteer coach encourages students to buy their athletic gear from a company that the coach owns and operates. Or a school guidance counselor accompanies a student to spiritual awakening groups after school without informing the student's parents.

These types of activities may or may not violate school rules. The activity may be intended for the student's benefit. The behavior may not violate any laws. Yet, a personal "boundary" may have been crossed in each instance, depending on the roles and responsibilities of the adult employee or volunteer.

Drawn from the field of psychology, "boundaries" may be described as the personal limits people set to determine the appropriateness of their own and others' behavior in any given situation. Although an encroachment may not violate any laws, it may be a risk factor for an unhealthy relationship. Boundary training is increasingly popular for adult school employees and volunteers ("staff") at public and independent K-12 schools.

What Is Boundary Training?

Schools are an ideal place to learn about boundaries. A good boundary system starts with taking responsibility for our own lives. We define and express how we wish others to act toward us and establish consequences for their behavior. We ultimately cannot dictate the actions of other people, even children.

Boundary training helps school staff with their responsibilities to provide underage students with education, supervision, and guidance. It is designed to promote healthy relationships and prevent sexual and other types of misconduct, such as bullying, hazing, harassment, conflicts of interest, and financial impropriety. Teachers can also use the boundaries concept as positive reinforcement to encourage student responsibility and achievement.

The premise of boundary training is that sexual and other types of misconduct in schools are often committed by persons with no history of past wrongdoing. The staff member often does not intend

to harm someone and does not fully appreciate the consequences of his or her behavior. Misconduct usually starts small but, when unchecked, grows over time.

Boundary training is intended to fill the gaps in current staff training programs that address specific codes of conduct. It is not possible to anticipate all types of problems that arise; boundary training has a broader focus. The goal is to instill values and keep staff behavior healthy and appropriate to their functional roles at the school. Minor transgressions are referred to as boundary “crossings,” while major transgressions are “violations.”

As staff develops an understanding of boundaries and practices good behavior, students develop self-esteem and relationship skills. Students also benefit from instruction on boundaries, which would deal with age-appropriate topics such as anger management, dating, and gender roles.

Risk Factors for Unhealthy Relationships

An important part of boundary training is sensitizing staff to what constitutes unhealthy relationships with students and how they arise.

Adults who engage in misconduct with students are often poorly trained, physically or emotionally impaired (for example, through substance abuse, mental disorder, or unresolved emotional issues or abuse), or involved in a life crisis such as marital problems or professional issues.

Students who are victimized often lack a close relationship with parents or friends. They may have a history of being abused or neglected. They often exhibit low self-esteem and seek inordinate amounts of approval from adults or peers. These vulnerable students typically are unaware of the legal and ethical standards for transgressions and don't know where to turn for advice and support.

David Wolowitz, a New Hampshire attorney who specializes in representing independent schools, and Douglas J. Dickson, vice rector for students at the St. Paul's School, have both written and facilitated training on this subject. They have identified four risk factors for unhealthy staff-student relationships:

1. **Power imbalance.** When there is a differential in the power or influence of two persons, the person with greater power or influence is more likely to be in a position to violate the boundaries of the person in the subordinate position. Factors that have an impact on the relative power of staff and students include their relative ages, maturity and experience, cultural background, and emotional maturity. Typically, staff members hold superior positions over students in their role as a teacher, coach, counselor, or advisor. Occasionally, students are in the superior position, for example, a student leader, popular athlete, or son or daughter of parents who financially support the school.
2. **Poor boundary setting.** Staff members who have poor boundary skills may have learned their behavior during childhood or developed it in response to a current life problem or crisis. The behavior may be physical, verbal, or financial in nature. It may arise at school or in an extracurricular, social, or other context.
3. **Role confusion.** School staff members engage in various roles with students, such as teacher, advisor, counselor, or coach. These roles may shift or blend over time. The staff member or person in the superior power position has the primary responsibility to maintain an awareness of his or her role. The boundaries appropriate to that role should be maintained regardless of the wishes of the student or other person in the inferior power position.

4. **Isolation.** Staff often engages in private or one-on-one interactions with students in such places as residence hall rooms, classrooms, automobiles, and health or counseling centers. The isolation may encourage students to treat the adult as a surrogate parent or close friend and disclose personal and sensitive information relating to, for example, their families or dating relationships. Staff members need to be aware of the potential problems of isolation, seek assistance from others as needed, and avoid behavior that could be misinterpreted.

Establishing Healthy Boundaries

Once staff members recognize how unhealthy relationships arise, they need guidance on how to set and maintain safe boundaries with students. Guidelines developed by Wolowitz, Jane Bluestein, an author and speaker who specializes in boundary training, and other experts include the following:

1. **Establish boundary limits and parameters early in relationships.** Staff members are encouraged to stay within their assigned role, whether it be teacher, coach, counselor, advisor, house parent, or something else. Clarify what is permissible contact at the first sign that a student may be seeking a different type of relationship. Inform the student of safe alternatives for obtaining guidance or emotional support. Consult with a supervisor or colleagues on how to handle situations involving students.
2. **Maintain personal awareness.** Staff members should be alert to their own behavior and how personal stresses (for example, health, family, employment, and financial) may affect their interactions with students. Consider the impact of one's behavior on students, parents, colleagues, and others. If a boundary is crossed, examine the motive. Discontinue or correct the behavior. When a student acts inappropriately, discuss the situation so that the student understands how to conduct himself or herself properly.
3. **Avoid risky behavior.** Staff members should be careful not to put themselves in ambiguous or compromising situations with students. Physical contact should be limited and appropriate to the adult's role at the school. Minimize the sharing of personal information. Avoid secrets, unless the student's disclosure is made confidentially with a counselor or religious or clergy member. Staff should not consume alcohol while on duty or in the presence of underage students.
4. **Appropriate settings.** Schedule meetings with students at regular times and when other staff members are present. Where appropriate, one-on-one meetings with a student should be conducted in rooms with a door open or with unobstructed window views. School rules must be followed when transporting students in a staff member's personal vehicle. Avoid entering the bedrooms or bathrooms of students while on school trips and at other times, unless necessary for health or other reasons. Minimize contact with students away from the school except on school-sponsored functions.
5. **Motivate students and build self-esteem.** Modeling boundaries concepts can build students' self-esteem and reduce their vulnerability to misconduct with adults or peers. Teachers, coaches, and other school staff can use their daily interactions to encourage student responsibility in a reward-oriented environment. Rather than relying on a list of do's and don'ts, offer the student choices within reasonable limits to encourage cooperation. Communicate positively by making promises for achievement rather than threats for failure. Respond to a student's problems or emotions with acceptance and support.

6. **Documentation and communication.** Staff members and schools should maintain documentation of any interaction with students that might be interpreted as a boundary violation. Discuss the situation with the parents and other staff, as appropriate. Ensure that students understand whether communications will be kept confidential. Discuss the circumstances in which confidentiality will not be protected, such as imminent risk of harm to the student or another person.

Training Staff at Your School

The goals of boundary training are for staff to understand what constitutes both healthy and unhealthy relationships and how to set boundaries with students in a positive learning environment.

An outside consultant or school employees, such as counselors or administrators, may facilitate the training. An effective way to introduce the material is to encourage the staff to talk about their various roles with students. The concept of boundaries can then be described, followed by large or small group discussions of how staff may falter when they attempt to advise, discipline, or get closer to students. Real-life situations can be modified for confidentiality purposes and used to create case studies to illustrate varying degrees of proper or improper conduct.

Effective topic areas for adult staff training may include the following:

1. **Physical contact.** Discuss what is educationally appropriate versus inappropriate touching. What is the school's policy on giving and receiving hugs and other physical affection? When does a staff member stand so close that he or she invades a student's "personal space"? Are there differences for physical contact for staff members who are athletic coaches, music teachers, or history teachers?
2. **Verbal and electronic communications.** Boundary issues often arise when staff engage in informal talk and electronic messages (for example, email or instant messages) with students. Should staff ever use slang or vulgar language with students? Gossip about other students or staff? Give students a home or cell phone number or a personal email address? Should staff disclose or respond to questions involving their dating history, relationships, or sexual orientation?
3. **Giving praise.** Staff should be careful of their language when offering praise to students individually or in front of their peers. How should teachers compliment students without becoming too personal? Can a teacher commend a student for his or her physical attributes?
4. **Off-site school activities.** Trips and outings away from school also raise issues. When should a staff member transport students in his or her personal car? Who enforces curfew? How should staff intervene if students tell stories and jokes of a sexual nature or that are otherwise denigrating to other students?
5. **Attire.** Discuss how staff set an example in their own choice of clothing and accessories as well as their obligation to enforce the dress code issues with students. When is clothing too revealing or sexual? When does the clothing promote negative influences, such as drugs, sex, violence, and death? To what extent may clothing reflect membership in an unhealthy culture, such as gangs?
6. **Loans and gifts.** When is it appropriate for staff to give or receive gifts to students or their family members? Should a staff member pay for a student's meals? Is it ever proper to make or receive a loan from a student or her family?

7. **Conflicts of interest.** Issues arise when staff involves students in business and other ventures separate from the school. Should a teacher ever give a course assignment when the students' classroom work may benefit the teacher personally? When is it appropriate to hire students in a staff member's personal business? May a teacher accept babysitting, house sitting, and other jobs from students' families?
8. **Application of school rules.** Teachers, coaches, counselors, and other staff are in a position to apply school rules to benefit particular students. How can staff do so fairly and without favoritism? When is it appropriate to write passes to excuse late arrivals or absences from class or other activities?
9. **Social, political, and religious activities.** Social and other involvements away from school carry risks. How should staff interact with students at activities and events not connected with the school? Should staff invite students to their homes? What types of relationships may staff maintain with students' families?

Schools Should Be Emotionally Safe

Healthy relationships between school staff and students help students learn and grow in an emotionally safe environment. Boundary training encourages staff to understand their roles and appropriate behavior with students. Schools should consider implementing the training for all adult employees and volunteers who have frequent contact with students.

Acknowledgments

For reviewing this article prior to publication, United Educators would like to thank David Wolowitz, partner in the law firm of McLane, Graf, Raulerson & Middleton P.A., Jane Bluestein, president of Instructional Support Services, Inc., and Douglas J. Dickson, vice rector for students at the St. Paul's School.

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Preventing Harmful Relationships in School

BY DOUGLAS J. DICKSON

This article originally appeared in the Fall 2005 issue of *Independent School*. Permission to reprint the article has been granted by the National Association of Independent Schools.

Many families choose independent schools for the strong sense of community the schools foster. They want their children to learn in a safe environment characterized by mutual respect and trust. Indeed, they put their faith in the adults in schools, expecting that these adults will act on behalf of the children's welfare and safety.

For their part, schools know that promoting and maintaining healthy relationships between the many constituents in independent schools are vitally important to supporting the mission not only of individual schools, but of independent schools in general.

But sometimes things go wrong.

The recent scandal in the Roman Catholic Church and the intense media coverage that followed has sharpened the focus in our country on the need to consciously promote healthy relationships within all institutions and establish policies in support of such healthy relationships. A single incident involving the abuse or misuse of power in the relationship between a teacher and a student in school can have a devastating impact not only on those involved, but on the reputation and the financial resources of any independent school. It is imperative, therefore, for all schools to have a comprehensive plan in place to keep the institution focused on promoting healthy relationships and preventing harmful ones.

Over the last several years, in my capacity of dean of students at St. Paul's School (New Hampshire), I have had been working with attorney David Wolowitz of the New Hampshire law firm of McLane, Graf, Raulerson & Middleton. Wolowitz began working with our school several years ago to offer legal assistance on daily matters that arose at our school, and, in the course of offering this legal advice, he began to team up with us to craft a proactive program for

our faculty, students, and staff. The goal of the program is to prevent harmful relationships in our community by:

- Offering regular training for faculty, staff, and students
- Establishing a common vocabulary on issues relating to harmful relationships
- Develop a comprehensive plan for prevention to include updated school policies and reporting mechanisms

I would like to suggest that all independent schools develop such a plan in their communities.

Training

The first step is to raise awareness about this issue by opening up conversation in the school community, and the first group of people to target for this discussion is the faculty. Independent school faculties assume a powerful role in the lives of the students. They are the ones with the most contact with students and usually the most influence. Teachers inevitably establish the closest bonds with the students, and many become *bona fide* role models for students.

This training is equally important, however, for all other adults who have contact with students, especially with staff who work in security, health services, and any other area where student–adult contact is high. I also believe that this training should filter down to the student body, first with the leaders — proctors or prefects, student council offices, etc. — and eventually through to even the youngest and newest students who are the most vulnerable and the least equipped to seek help.

In our training sessions, we have attempted to create an atmosphere for open discussion about relationships. First and foremost, we want to affirm that close, healthy relationships are vital in our community and that we do not want to impede such relationships with our training. We certainly do not

want people to become paranoid or afraid to enter into close relationships — since these relationships are at the heart of a good education. But we do want to promote dialogue and thoughtful discussion about establishing healthy boundaries for relationships.

This training is normally undertaken with a knowledgeable outside facilitator, though a group within your school community can also lead it. Either way, the facilitators outline the issue by establishing or reestablishing the vocabulary that defines it. Moving beyond the vocabulary, the facilitators attempt to engage the participants by presenting real-life situations that have occurred in the community or in similar communities. Until trust is established and until the vocabulary is well understood, these scenarios will be restricted to more mundane situations. As the training progresses and trust develops, more substantive questions will likely arise. This training takes time and usually requires multiple sessions spread out over several years. It should be viewed as an ongoing process.

Establishing the vocabulary

One common assumption is that those who violate boundaries are all deeply troubled people who prey on children premeditatively. We stress that one should not assume this. Focusing too narrowly on this stereotype is inadequate and risky. There are occasions when “good” people go astray by violating boundaries. Strategies designed to identify predatory, repeat offenders are not likely to identify these other people who one might describe as “wanderers” — those who cross boundaries without premeditative intent.

We attempt to explain the dynamics of this non-predatory behavior. It is usually evolutionary, often beginning with good intentions and, yet, small missteps. This behavior is often private and neither reviewed nor discussed. The behavior escalates into a serious problem when the offender has gone too far to exercise restraint or

judgment.

An unhealthy relationship may begin to develop, for example, when a teacher who is attracted to a student offers exclusive extra help opportunities to that student. In isolating the student, the teacher might only offer educational assistance at first — with the best intentions — but given the opportunity to be alone with the student repeatedly, this teacher eventually crosses the established boundary by attempting to become closer to the student, either emotionally or physically or both. These attempts to gain access to the student might start with a simple touch or another common gesture and when the gesture is received it may lead to others that are less innocent.

We want everyone in our school community to be familiar with some likely attributes of those involved in this kind of transgression. Transgressors normally hold superior positions with some power in the relationship. Those who transgress are often poorly trained, physically or emotionally impaired (*e.g.* substance use, depression), or involved in a situational crisis (*e.g.* marital problems, professional issues).

For their part, the victims may be vulnerable and open to the possibility of a transgression because they are in the subordinate position, usually unaware of the legal and ethical standards for transgressions, and/or lack guidance on where to turn for advice and support.

In our training, we attempt to identify some of some key elements that breed misconduct in relationships. The first of these is the power imbalance. It is important for students and adults to understand this dynamic in their relationships with others. Teachers need to understand that they hold the upper hand in relationships with students. The adult holds the authority and is generally more mature, while the student is vulnerable and inexperienced. The degree and nature of this imbalance depends on a variety of in-

dividual circumstances including age and maturity and the roles played in these relationships. We also want students to understand where they stand in this power imbalance. There may be situations when the student is in the weaker power position, and there may be times when the student holds the superior power position.

This power imbalance is real. Teachers are responsible for awarding grades, writing recommendations, making coaching decisions, and assigning discipline. It is important to remember, too, that students perceive this power imbalance and can translate it into infatuation or hero worship. Teachers must always keep in mind that the student's best interest is primary and, therefore, the adult is responsible for setting healthy limits and boundaries and avoiding conflicts of interest.

A student may hold a position of power within the school as captain of a team, student council officers, or some other position of leadership in the school. These student leaders must understand their position and act accordingly.

The second factor that helps breed misconduct is the exercise of poor boundary setting. During this phase of training, we try to define what a boundary is in our daily lives. Dr. Thomas Gutheil, writing in *Psychiatric Times* (August, 1999), defines *boundaries* as "the edge of appropriate behavior in a given situation." It is important to identify some of the boundaries — through case studies and hypothetical situations — that may present potential risk. Physical boundaries such as touch and hugging, verbal boundaries such as self-disclosure about personal issues (gossip, personal relationships), and financial boundaries such as gifts or loans are but a few of the many potential issues to discuss. Talking about these situations allows the participants understand more fully where the edge of inappropriate behavior lies.

It is also important to recognize

that, in the life of a school, teachers take on many roles that are constantly shifting and blending and creating opportunities for boundary issues. Being teacher, coach, adviser, and friend all at different times can create role confusion for faculty members and for students. But maintaining role awareness and establishing healthy boundaries are always the obligation of the adult or the person in the superior power position, regardless of the wishes or the behavior of the student or the person in the inferior power position.

Over the years, I have encountered hazing incidents and, in many cases, the recipient of this behavior is eager to let it be known that he or she enjoyed the experience or had fun as a result. I caution all to consider that the victim does not have a great deal of choice in what he or she expresses after being hazed. If the victim says anything except that he or she enjoyed the experience, the victim will fear being viewed as being weak, and, as a consequence, either become ostracized by peers or fall victim to further hazing. The desire to belong and be safe often overshadows the victim's view of the incident.

The third factor that can lead to misconduct is isolation. Teachers and students often interact in relative isolation, thereby creating opportunities for unobserved boundary violations. Teachers in independent schools have access to intimate and private moments and places — dorm rooms, school vehicles, locker rooms, offices, etc. — where the faculty member may be alone and unobserved by other students or adults. We ask our faculty to be mindful of this isolation and to help each other by promoting open communication about these issues.

Developing a comprehensive plan for prevention

Certainly, training and establishing vocabulary are two important steps in the prevention of harmful relationships. However, this work must be supported by school policies that address the issue directly and clearly. All school

policies in this area of school life must be clear and current. They must be regularly reviewed, made available in all school handbooks, and be internally consistent with other policies of the school.

Screening and background checks must be thorough for all potential employees. Do not limit inquiries to criminal records checks; ask prior employers if there have been any complaints or concerns about misconduct. Know as much as you can about the people you hire. Similarly, other adult residents in school housing (such as spouses and adult children who regularly live with the employee) should also be required to undergo a criminal background check. You will never fully safeguard your school by doing these background checks, but you want to be as thorough as possible to protect your community and students.

Schools should also establish mechanisms to identify and assist those who engage in questionable behavior before it escalates. Encourage adults to observe each other in action and to offer critical and helpful observations to each other. In establishing the vocabulary for this issue, try to keep the conversation going throughout the school year and among community members as a part of the daily life at school. It is especially important to create opportunities to talk openly and establish a safe atmosphere for those in subordinate positions to raise concerns about superiors.

In addition, schools should make sure that all adults in a school community have access to counselors when needed. The problems that might lead a teacher to cross boundaries with a student are not uncommon problems in the independent school culture. If adults have access to good mental health care or other support mechanisms, they are more likely to maintain healthy, nurturing relationships with students and to seek assistance when needed.

It is critical for schools to train faculty on compliance with mandatory reporting laws and policies for your

school, including issues of child abuse, hazing, and sexual harassment. Establish a reporting team in your school to handle this important task. This team should stay current on the evolving issues in this field, and should create standard forms and maintain a central file to ensure that records are kept.

Finally, policies should ensure that clear and consistent enforcement for transgressors follow missteps. Personnel action in cases that involve boundary violations must send a clear message that this type of behavior will not be welcome.

Developing a prevention program with the goal of promoting healthy relationships in independent school communities is vitally important. Having your school demonstrate the proper due diligence in preventing harmful relationships makes excellence sense from a risk-management perspective. Most importantly, such a program should and must be put in place in order to protect the children in our care and to build sound and healthy communities. Simply stated, preventing harmful relationships in residential communities is the right thing to do.

Douglas J. Dickson is dean of students St. Paul's School (New Hampshire).

Handouts to accompany

**United Educators' Telephone
Roundtable**

Boundary Training in Schools

Presented
December 13, 2006

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Healthy Boundaries in Education: Teaching Safely, Not Defensively

1. **A school's reputation for safety is paramount to its mission to educate.**
 2. **Importance of developing strategies for meaningful risk management.**
 3. **In a litigious society, risk avoidance is crucial, but should not stifle creative teaching.**
 4. **Avoiding mistaken assumptions about likely transgressors.**
 5. **Understanding the dynamics of non-predatory misconduct.**
 6. **Common attributes on non-predatory transgressors.**
 7. **Institutional obstacles to addressing questionable behavior.**
 8. **Why strict rules are not enough.**
 9. **Creating a neutral vocabulary for addressing difficult behavioral issues.**
 10. **Risk factors leading to unhealthy relationships.**
 11. **Power imbalance.**
 12. **Poor personal boundaries.**
 13. **Role confusion.**
 14. **Isolated or unreviewed conduct.**
 15. **Understanding boundaries.**
 16. **Developing a comprehensive strategy for prevention.**
 17. **Healthy boundaries guidelines.**
 18. **Setting and maintaining healthy boundaries as an educational opportunity.**
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Boundaries Training for Student Leaders

19. **Misconduct in school relationships, such as hazing, harassment, and bullying, can have serious consequences for the victim, the perpetrator and the school**
20. **Why do otherwise good people do bad things?**
21. **Four key elements and examples:**
 - a. *Poor boundaries*
 - b. *Lack of supervision*
 - c. *Role confusion*
 - d. *Power imbalance*
22. **What are personal boundaries?**
 - a. *Boundary "crossings" vs. boundary "violations" explained*
 - b. *Common boundary sites where "crossings" can escalate into "violations" with examples*
23. **The role of student leaders in prevention**
 - a. *On the pedestal, like it or not*
 - b. *Being a role model*
 - c. *Teaching others*
24. **Healthy boundary guidelines**
 - a. *Establish boundaries and limits early and often in relationships*
 - b. *Maintain personal boundary awareness in your relationships*
 - c. *Perceptions matter*
 - d. *Avoid risky behavior*
25. **Develop practical strategies that work for you**
 - a. *How do you maintain boundaries in ways that work for you?*
 - b. *How do you say no to peer pressure?*
 - c. *How do you help others say no?*
 - d. *How do you bail out after you have gone part of the way down the "slippery slope"?*

This information is provided as a courtesy by:

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Handouts to accompany

*United Educators'
Roundtable:
Setting Boundaries
for Children and Adults*

by Dr. Jane Bluestein

Presented
December 13, 2006

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Motivating Cooperative Behavior

Win-Lose approaches that can compromise the emotional safety of the classroom:

POWERING: Win-Lose



Strategies:

- Humiliation, loss of dignity, violation of self-esteem; criticism, shaming, verbal/emotional violence
- Threat to physical safety, physical violence
- Conditional approval or love; threat of emotional abandonment
- Deprivation of meaningful privilege or activity (ex: recess, eligibility, graduation)

Dynamic/Outcomes:

- Depends on your reaction, power, anger and student's fear of your reaction
- May generate superficial compliance. Reinforces people-pleasing, dependence on approval or at least minimal cooperation to avoid being hurt in some way. Passive learning.
- Can inspire rebelliousness, particularly in students who aren't motivated by the need for your approval or the need to "save face."

Boundary Issues:

Does not respect students' boundaries or need for power; violates students' boundaries.

Effectiveness:

Can be effective in getting short-term cooperation from compliant students. Cost to emotional environment and quality of relationship between adult and student is HIGH.

PERMISSIVE: Lose-Win



Strategies:

- Allowing students to behave in ways that can create problems for you or others
- Letting kids have their way to avoid other conflicts
- Letting kids do something they want in order to obligate them to cooperate; attempt to motivate cooperation through guilt, by being "nice"
- Giving up; perception of having less influence or control than is true

Dynamic/Outcomes:

- Chaos, manipulation, lack of student self-management
- Tremendous insecurity when students' needs for limits are not met

- Adult frustration, often ending up in reactive “blow-up” when you reach the end of your rope; encourages kids to really push the limits.

Boundary Issues:

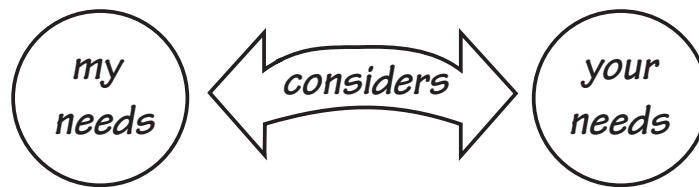
General lack of boundaries, unclear boundaries based on differences between teacher’s understanding and students’ understanding (“Be good.” “Clean this area.”), ambiguous boundaries, or boundaries with built in loop-holes (using warnings, asking for excuses, etc.)

Effectiveness:

Minimal; usually kids know that they don’t have to listen until you start screaming, for example. Lack of limits and predictability makes cost to emotional environment and quality of adult-student relationship HIGH.

Win-Win approach that does not compromise the emotional safety of the classroom:

COOPERATIVE: Win-Win



Strategies:

- May include meaningful activities such as going to a center, self-selection, use of certain equipment, games, extra free time, time with adult, working with a friend, drawing, running an errand, a chance to help in another classroom; good grades (motivating for students who find grades meaningful) or a “good” note home; a “night off” from homework; etc. What’s worked for you?
- May offer students a chance to choose between two or more activities, the sequence in which they do assignments, or choices about where, when, how, or with whom to do particular activities

Dynamic/Outcome:

- NOT based on adult’s reaction, fear of adult’s power, or need for approval
- Proactive approach that considers and attempts to accommodate the students’ needs for both limits and power within those limits
- Clearly-communicated contingencies, boundaries, guidelines, limits before the students have a chance to mess up.
- Student needs for limits and control are accommodated as much as possible in an environment in which the teacher is still the authority
- Reward-oriented; focuses on positive outcomes to student (not externally based)
- Predictable (so long as boundaries are maintained); mutually respectful

Boundary Issues:

None. Boundaries are respected; communicated and upheld.

Effectiveness:

Best possibility for success of all configurations of authority

From 21st Century Discipline, by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Frank Schaffer Publications, Inc., 1999). Original in Parents in a Pressure Cooker, by Jane Bluestein and Lynn Collins (Modern Learning Press, Rosemont, NJ, 1989).

Student Behavior Profiles

	Options available with All-or-Nothing Thinking		An Alternative
Behavior	Rebellious, Defiant, Dis-obedient	Compliant, Obedient	Cooperative
Descriptor	Self-Centered	Self-Abandoning	Self-Caring
Focus	My needs	Your needs (or my need to look like I'm more concerned with your needs)	My needs <i>and</i> your needs
Goal	Having my own way no matter what; Power; Being Left Alone	Avoiding conflict and abandonment; Approval seeking	Getting what I want with a minimum of conflict and inconvenience for others
Responsibility	Someone else's fault; sees little connection between behavior and outcomes	"Just following orders;" disempowered; sees self as victim, having few choices	Responsible for own behavior; sees self as having choices and power
Power Play	Uses power to disempower; win-lose	Gives power away; lose-win	Shares power; win-win
Power Tools	Anger, violence; passive-aggressiveness; secrecy; isolation	Being "nice;" being perfect; doing what everyone expects; achievement, recognition; tears, guilt; passive-aggressiveness	Negotiating, compromise; ability to identify personal needs; self-expression; ability to make you a deal you can't refuse.
Feelings	Difficulty expressing feelings in constructive, non-violating ways	Feelings are often "stuffed" and/or denied; vulnerable to tolerance breaks, can be explosive.	Not necessary to use feelings to manipulate, hurt or control; can express feelings in non-hurtful ways
Costs	Relationships	Sense of self; self-worth	May create conflict with authoritarian or manipulative people. Can threaten, upset or alienate people with weak or no boundaries.
Stays Safe by	Not needing you, not caring	Keeping you happy (so you won't criticize, express disapproval, be disappointment or leave)	Identifying and expressing needs; Taking care of self. (Probably feels pretty safe to begin with.)
Boundaries	Few, as far as others are concerned	Few, as far as self is concerned	Has personal boundaries; respects others' boundaries

Adapted from Parents, Teens & Boundaries: How to Draw the Line, *by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Health Communications, Inc., Deerfield Beach, FL, 1993).*

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The Obedient Student

- Motivated by factors such as the need to please authority and gain approval or conditional acceptance (fear of conflict, disapproval or abandonment)
- Follows orders
- May lack confidence in ability to function in absence of authority; lacks initiative; waits for orders or instructions
- Creates safety by keeping others happy (regardless of cost to self)
- Self-esteem is defined externally (worthwhile when getting approval)
- Self-abandoning; focus on needs of others
- *I am my behavior (and somebody else probably made me this way). S/he made me do it.*
- “Power tools” include compliance, being “nice,” perfectionism, doing what everyone expects, achievement (for approval and worth), recognition, tears, guilt, passive-aggressiveness
- Difficulty seeing connection between behavior and outcomes of choices
- Difficulty seeing options or choices available; difficulty making decision
- Helpless and teacher-dependence common; disempowered; sees self as having few choices
- Operates from external value system (often that of someone important to him or her) which may not be personally relevant and could even be harmful or destructive
- Obeys, may think; complies with requests fairly automatically, often without questioning the appropriateness of the request or considering the long- or short-term effects of compliance
- Vulnerable to peer pressure
- Lacks confidence in personal instincts and ability to act in own self-interest
- Difficulty predicting outcomes of choices
- Difficulty understanding or expressing needs
- Limited ability to get needs met without hurting self or others
- Limited negotiation skills; orientation is “You win, I lose” (or “I win by giving you what you want”); gives power away
- Compliant
- Commitment to avoid conflict or punishment, “keeping teacher (or Mom/Dad, etc.) off my back”
- May experience conflict between internal and external needs (what I want vs. what others want); stress may manifest as guilt or rebelliousness
- May make choices to avoid disapproval, ridicule or abandonment (“. . . so my friends will like me more”)

Adapted from 21st Century Discipline: Teaching Students Responsibility and Self-Control, by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Frank Schaffer Publications, Inc., 1999). Third edition in production. Originally adapted from Parents in a Pressure Cooker, by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. and Lynn Collins, M.S. (Modern Learning Press, Rosemont, NJ, 1989).

The Responsible Student

- Motivated by factors such as the need to weigh choices, experience positive consequences unrelated to others’ reactions (getting needs met with a minimum of conflict and inconvenience for others)
- Makes choices
- More confident in ability to function in absence of authority; takes initiative; asks for guidance
- Creates safety by identifying and expressing needs; taking care of self
- Self-esteem is defined internally (worthwhile with or without approval, or even with disapproval)
- Self-caring; focus on personal needs while respecting needs of others
- *I am not my behavior, although I am responsible for how I behave.*
- “Power tools” include negotiating, compromise; ability to identify and communicate personal needs; self-expression; ability to make you a deal you can’t refuse
- Better able to see the connection between behavior and consequence
- Better able to see options or choices available, able to make decisions
- Personal empowerment and independence common; sees self as having choices and power of choice
- Operates from internal value system (what is best or safest for him or her), considering needs and values of others
- Thinks, may obey; will evaluate requests made by others and consider the effects of compliance before choosing to cooperate
- More resistant to peer pressure
- Confidence in personal instincts and ability to act in own self-interest
- Better able to predict outcomes or consequences
- Better able to understand and express personal needs
- Better able to get own needs met without hurting self or others
- Better-developed negotiation skills; orientation is “You win, I win;” shares power
- Cooperative
- Commitment to task, experiencing personal outcome of cooperation
- Better able to resolve conflict between internal and external needs (what I want vs. what others want); less inclined toward guilt or rebelliousness
- May make irresponsible choices to satisfy curiosity or from poor judgment



10 dangers of encouraging obedience and people-pleasing

- People-pleasers are motivated by external factors, such as the need for outside (and usually conditional) approval. They often do what others want in order to feel safe, worthwhile or valued (for example, “. . . so my friends will like me more.”)
- People-pleasers do what others want to avoid disapproval, punishment, ridicule or abandonment, or for fear of hurting, disappointing or angering someone else. They base their decisions on another person’s anticipated reaction.
- People-pleasers may obey anyone who appears to be important, powerful or popular. They tend to be highly influenced by peer pressure. They are far more vulnerable than other children to adults who may not have their best interests in mind.
- People-pleasers have a hard time saying “no,” even when saying “yes” would be unwise, inconvenient or even unsafe for them. Their negotiation skills are limited.
- Obedient kids have a hard time seeing the connection between their behavior and the consequences of their behaviors. Their sense of responsibility may be limited: “He made me do it,” “Everyone else was doing it,” “She started it.”
- Obedient kids are likely to blame their choices on someone else. They don’t have to take responsibility for their choices (or how their lives turn out) because they were just doing what someone else told them to do.
- Obedient kids may have a hard time functioning in the absence of authority. They lack initiative and would just as soon wait for someone to tell them what to do. They often depend on others to make decisions for them or make their choices simply to impress someone else.
- They believe that their ability to influence or control their lives depends on their ability to keep others happy, even if doing so inconveniences them, compromises their boundaries or principles or, in some instances, even jeopardizes their safety.
- When people-pleasers experience conflict between what they want and what someone else wants, they may express this conflict as compliance, guilt, passive-aggressiveness, resentment, helplessness or victimization.
- People-pleasers lack confidence in their own instincts and the ability to act in their own self-interests. They have difficulty understanding or expressing personal needs, or asking directly for what they want.

NOTE: I use the word *obedience* to describe the notion of simply doing what one is told, usually without evaluating the request, in order to avoid disapproval, rejection, abandonment or some other negative, hurtful or punitive outcome. Contrast obedience with *cooperation*, which will look about the same in terms of how the child is acting, but which is motivated by something besides the reaction or approval of another person. *Although many people assume that obedient children will automatically know how to act in the absence of authority, too often the opposite is true.* Either they look outside for guidance (and not always to the best source) or experience a kind of paralysis, or inability to act. Our real goal in building responsibility, is encouraging cooperation, not obedience. In doing so, we can achieve the same behavior results without compromising the child’s emotional safety or ability to act in his or her own behalf.

Adapted from The Parent’s Little Book of Lists: Do’s and Don’ts of Effective Parenting, *by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Health Communications, Inc., Deerfield Beach, FL, 1997).*

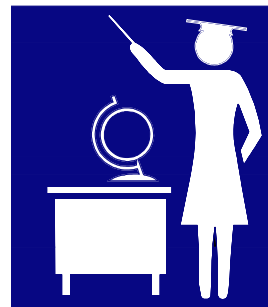
Adult Behaviors, Beliefs and Attitudes that Encourage *Obedience*

- Authoritarian, judgmental, critical, punitive
- Often inconsistent; likely to have a double standard for adult and student behaviors
- Outcome oriented
- Demands, with criteria based on teacher power: *“Because I TOLD you!”* OR to motivate with conditional teacher approval.
- May offer choices between “good” and “bad” options, creating pressure on student to make the “right” choice (choose a particular option) to please adult (gain conditional approval)
- Likely to mistrust student’s ability to decide in own best interests; may mistrust student’s motivation
- Makes decisions for students: *“I know what’s best for you.”*
- Offers few opportunities for students to practice decision making, requires dependence
- States contingencies negatively (as threats): *“If you don’t . . .”*
- Punishment oriented
- Believes that adult’s needs are more important than student’s needs; may disregard student’s needs or preferences
- Likely to be threatened by student’s independence and initiative; may discourage or prevent both types of behavior; protective; has difficulty allowing students to experience negative outcomes of decisions or mistakes
- More likely to cover for student’s poor choosing; inclined toward rescuing, giving warnings or making excuses, not holding student accountable
- Takes responsibility for student’s behavior and consequences: If student forgets library book, *“I have to remind you every week.”*

Adult Behaviors, Beliefs and Attitudes that Encourage *Responsible Cooperation*

- More positive orientation to student; accepting
- Tries to be consistent; commitment to modeling behaviors requested of students
- Process oriented
- Requests, with criteria based on consequences or outcomes, benefits to students: *“Put the lid on the paste so it won’t dry out.”*
- All options offered are equal (no “good” and “bad” choices); no pressure for students to choose particular option to stay in adult’s good graces
- Trusts student’s ability to make decisions; likely to understand that student is motivated by own needs
- Avoids making decisions for student; will give student information and encourage decision making based on that information; guides, helps
- Can still feel needed by independent student; encourages independence and initiative (does not need to disempower to feel powerful)
- States contingencies positively (as promises): *“If you do . . .”*
- Reward oriented
- Believes adult’s needs are equally important to student’s needs; respects student’s needs and often attempts to accommodate preferences
- May have difficulty allowing student to experience negative outcomes but is willing to hold student accountable and allow him or her to make and learn from mistakes (except in life-threatening situations)
- Resists inclination to rescue, warn or make excuses; can feel powerful and important without solving student’s problems or protecting student from unpleasant outcomes of choices
- Leaves responsibility for student’s behavior and consequences with student: Student forgets library book because of poor decision made by student.

From 21st Century Discipline: Teaching Students Responsibility and Self-Control, by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Frank Schaffer Publications, Inc., 1999). Third edition in production. Originally adapted from Parents in a Pressure Cooker, by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. and Lynn Collins, M.S. (Modern Learning Press, Rosemont, NJ, 1989).



5 Characteristics of a Good Boundary*

- **Clarity**

Boundaries are clear, specific and clearly communicated. They work best when you have the students' attention, when they understand what you're requesting, when the positive outcome of their cooperation is clear and when specific requirements, conditions or time factors are spelled out. For example, *"I'll read for the last 10 minutes of class as long as you're quiet."* (or, *"... if your desks are cleared."*)

- **Win-win**

Boundaries respect and consider the needs of everyone involved. They attempt to create ways for both you and your students to get what you want. For example, *"You can take another library book home as soon as you return the ones you borrowed last week,"* or *"I want to hear about this problem. I'll be free to give you my full attention as soon as I give the reading group their assignments."*

- **Proactivity**

Boundaries work to prevent problems and are typically expressed before a problem occurs or before it is allowed to continue (or get worse). For example, *"You can use this equipment as soon as you can demonstrate how to use it correctly."* *"Let's stay quiet in the hall so we don't disturb any of the other classes."*

- **Positivity**

The most effective boundaries typically focus on the positive outcomes of cooperation. They are also expressed positively, as promises rather than threats or simply as information (with the implication that the positive outcome is available, for example, until a certain time or under certain conditions). For example, *"If you do your homework 10 days in a row, you can have the 11th day off (or do for extra credit),"* or *"The art center closes at 2:00."*

- **Follow through**

Follow through—allowing a positive consequence to occur only when the child does what you've asked—is what communicates that you mean what you say and you say what you mean. It increases the likelihood that your students will take you seriously when you ask for what you want, and it improves the chances that they will cooperate as well (if it's really the only way they can get what they want).**

*Boundaries are tools for building cooperation in relationships, for letting others know what you want and for letting them know which options are available to them (for getting what they want). Set boundaries when you want behaviors to change and wish to avoid negative, stressful behaviors such as nagging, yelling, threatening or punishing to get what you want. Whether you use boundaries in relationships with children or other adults, the characteristics of boundaries and dynamics of boundary setting are the same.

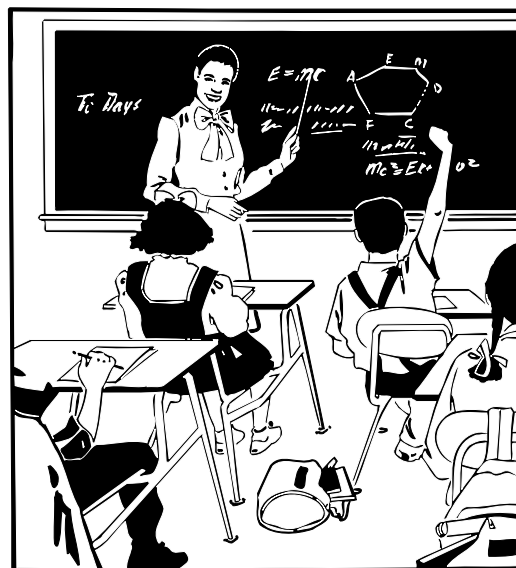
**Boundaries allow you to follow through without even getting angry! Follow-through works wonders, but it requires patience, faith, consistency and courage!

Based on information from The Parent's Little Book of Lists: Do's and Don'ts of Effective Parenting, by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc. 1997) and 21st Century Discipline: Teaching Students Responsibility and Self-Control, also by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Frank Schaffer Publications, Inc., 1999).

11 Reasons to Use Boundaries

- Boundaries allow you to express your limits and to communicate the conditions or availability of certain privileges that your students desire.
- Boundaries prevent conflict and build win-win power structures. They help you take care of yourself while attempting to accommodate your students' needs or desires.
- Boundaries build a reward-oriented school environment. They emphasize positive consequences—desirable outcomes available with cooperation.
- Boundaries create less stress and fewer power struggles than rules and demands (which are typically win-lose and often focus on punishments or negative outcomes for noncompliance).
- Boundaries build mutual consideration and respect.
- Boundaries do not rely on the child's fear of the teacher's emotional reaction (such as anger, disapproval or disappointment) to help the teacher get what he or she wants.
- Boundaries allow positive and negative consequences to occur in a nonpunitive environment (*negative consequences simply being the absence of positive consequences*). As long as educators only allow positive consequences to occur when students have done their part, boundaries hold children accountable for their own behavior.
- Boundaries with good adult follow through can minimize children's behaviors such as whining, begging, temper tantrums, defiance, lying or making excuses to get they want.
- Boundaries leave the door open for students to change their behavior in order to get their needs met. While rules or threats emphasize the penalties for misbehavior, boundaries focus on the ability to make more constructive choices.
- Boundaries do not threaten emotional safety in relationships, or in the classroom (or school) environment.
- Boundary-setting is especially effective in an atmosphere of love, acceptance, respect and trust, although the process can help create these qualities in relationship or environments in which they do not initially exist.

These four pages on boundary setting and follow through are based on information from The Parent's Little Book of Lists: Do's and Don'ts of Effective Parenting, by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc. 1997) and 21st Century Discipline: Teaching Students Responsibility and Self-Control, also by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Frank Schaffer Publications, Inc., 1999). Third edition in production.



9 Things to Remember when Setting a Boundary

- Use boundaries to let your students know your limits and tolerances, your availability, the conditions under which you will participate in some activity, which privileges are available or the conditions under which a privilege is available to your students. Use boundaries to give your students information they can use in making decisions.
- Using past experience (and common sense), anticipate what you will want and what your students will probably want as well. Consider both your needs and the students' needs when formulating your boundary.
- Be clear and specific about what you're asking for, what you would like, which options are available, the times or conditions under which a positive outcome is available, or any other factors that your students will need to know in making their choices or anticipating a particular event.
- Communicate your boundary before there is a conflict, or before the conflict continues or reoccurs: *"You can get credit for your homework as long as it's on my desk before the 3:30 bell rings tomorrow."* *"I will read as long as it is completely quiet."* *"The hall pass will not be available during the test this afternoon."*
- State boundaries positively, as promises rather than threats: *"You can watch the movie if your seatwork is done by 2:00,"* rather than, *"You're not watching the movie if your seatwork isn't done by 2:00."*
- Be prepared to follow through. If you're not willing to withhold positive outcomes until your students so their part—whether it's finish their seatwork, complete a chore, put their plan in writing or tone down their voices—don't bother setting the boundary in the first place.
- Examine your attachment to particular outcomes. For example, if you are heavily invested in your students' performing at a certain level in order for you to feel OK about your teaching ability, you may find yourself asking for excuses or making excuses in order to avoid following through. Either refrain from setting this boundary (and don't complain when your students act irresponsibly) or use your resistance to following through as a chance to look at your need to protect your students (or yourself) from the negative outcomes of their behavior choices.
- Watch the tendency to make excuses, give warnings or let things slide "just this once." This is a great way to teach kids that you don't really mean what you say and that it's OK to disrespect your boundaries. If you want to build in some flexibility, do so before your students blow it. See "Homework Options" on the following page.
- If the student is unable to perform or complete his or her end of the bargain because the request or time limit was truly unreasonable, because the instructions were not clear or understood, or because the child was developmentally incapable or lacked the necessary skill or experience to do what you want, *it's a bad boundary*. This is not the same as making excuses for a developmentally capable kid who simply doesn't come through. In this instance, back up and try again (delaying the request until the child is more capable, setting a different boundary or offering more clarity, instruction or a more reasonable time limits, for example). Do not withhold positive outcomes at this time.

Ingredients of Effective Adult-Student Relationships: MOTIVATION & FOLLOW THROUGH

The ability to connect what you want
with what the student wants in positive ways.

The ability to motivate and reinforce cooperative behavior
with outcomes *other than* adult approval or the threat of negative
adult reactions (shaming, criticism, abandonment, etc.).

The willingness to make learning personally meaningful,
exiting and/or relevant
to encourage commitment and engagement from students.

The willingness to identify a variety of meaningful
positive outcomes (including enrichment or additional work)
that are conditionally available while students are on task,
or when certain tasks are completed.

The willingness to *withhold* positive consequences
until the student has held up her end of the bargain.

The ability to *immediately* intervene breaches
in conditions or limits of a boundary,
avoiding warnings, delayed consequences, punishment or praise
(used to manipulate behaviors that are not being exhibited);
the willingness to build in flexibility *before* a boundary is violated
(in order to accommodate occasional problems without
compromising one's boundaries);
the willingness to resist asking for excuses.

Ingredients of Effective Adult-Student Relationships: **SUPPORTIVENESS**

Needs: Connectedness, being valued, being heard

The ability to respond to a student's problems or feelings with acceptance, support and validation.

The ability to listen.

The willingness to provide outlets for a student's feelings that allow the student to externalize the feelings (get them out) without hurting himself or others.

The ability to help the student seek solutions to problems without enabling, fixing, dismissing or judging the child's problems or feelings.

The ability to resist adopting a student's feelings or take responsibility for the solutions to his problems, either directly solving the problems or giving advice or solutions ("shoulds").



Dealing with A Child's Feelings (or Problem)

Nonsupportive responses to children's feelings and problems:

Responses that attempt to make the feelings go away

Dynamic: Protects children from their feelings; or protects adults who are uncomfortable with children's feelings.

Outcomes: Child's self-doubt, confusion; need to "stuff" feelings; feelings not OK.

- **Dismissing/Minimizing**
"That's nothing to be upset over." "That doesn't mean anything." "So she called you a camel. Big deal!"
- **Excusing**
"She didn't mean it." "He didn't know what he was saying." "She must be having a bad day." "Well, you know, her parents are going through a divorce."
- **Denying**
"Oh, you don't really feel that way." "There's no such thing as monsters." "People shouldn't hate their brothers."
- **Distracting**
"But you're so good in your other subjects." "Things could be worse." "You're lucky you have a brother." "You think you've got problems." "But his parents are so nice." "Cheer up! This is the best time in your life!"
- **Medicating**
Uses some type of substance (usually food) or activity (schoolwork, TV, chores, shopping) to distract children from their feelings: *"Just get busy."*

Responses that make the child wrong for having feelings

Dynamic: Serves as outlet for adult's anger, impatience, frustration, or feelings of inadequacy or shame triggered by child's feelings.

Outcome: Shame/wrongness; defensiveness; feelings not OK.

- **Attacking/Shaming**
"I told you this would happen!" "Don't be a sissy." "You're so ungrateful!" "Nice boys don't hate their sisters." "You're just too sensitive." "How could you be so stupid!"
- **Blaming**
"What did you do to her?" "Well, if you had just studied!" "Of course it died! You never changed the water!" "That's what happens when you overeat."
- **Challenging**
"Why does that bother you?" (requires child to defend feelings, convincing adult that the feelings are legitimate/getting adult's approval for feelings)

- **Enmeshing**
“Well I never had a problem with math.” “So now you know how I feel.” “Your problems really give me a headache.” “That wouldn’t bother me.”

Responses that attempt to fix it or make it better

Dynamic: Makes adult responsible for child’s problems, allows adult to feel important.

Outcome: Reduced sense of responsibility for problems (for child); lack of confidence in problem-solving abilities; helplessness; using feelings to get “rescued”

- **Commiserating**
“Ain’t it awful.” “Well, he’s a jerk anyway.” “You don’t need her anyway.” “You’re so unlucky!” (Unlike validating, commiserating can imply a certain amount of powerlessness or victimhood. It is not supportive or particularly comforting and rarely what the person wants to hear.)
- **Rescuing**
“Here. Let me see those math problems.” “OK. You can have the car again next weekend if you have a good enough excuse for breaking curfew.” “Look, I’ll talk to your teacher about it.” “That’s OK. I’ll pay those insurance premiums.”
- **Advising**
“Go study and you won’t feel so scared about that test.” “Tell her how you feel.” “You know if you cut your hair and lost five pounds you wouldn’t feel that way.” “Just ignore her.”

Creating a Safe Emotional Environment

- Remember that it’s OK for children to have feelings without explaining or defending them.
- Feelings are not behaviors. Feelings are never right or wrong, but behaviors that hurt other people are not OK. Adults do not need to protect other people from a child’s feelings, but they may need to intervene in hurtful behaviors.
- It’s OK to express feelings as long as doing so does not hurt anyone or create problems for others.
- Most children (and many adults) do not have healthy, non-hurtful outlets for expressing their feelings, especially anger or frustration. In a non-conflict time, discuss and present options available to help kids “externalize” their feelings without hurting themselves or others. (Ex: Having a stuffed animal or picture they can talk to when you’re not available. Being able to draw a picture or write a letter about how they’re feeling—and then tearing it up! Going for a run, hitting a pillow, tearing up paper, or going down the hall for a drink of water and a chance to catch their breath!)
- Adults and children are distinct, separate individuals. It is not necessary to own someone’s feelings or problems to show that person love.
- Adults are not responsible for changing or controlling the child’s feelings. It’s more loving and supportive to communicate that a child’s feelings are heard, respected, and taken seriously—even when you don’t understand them.

- Children learn to deal with feelings more effectively when they don't have to "stuff" or hide them to protect a critical, guilt-ridden, or over-reacting adult.
- Responses that interfere with children's ability to own, feel, or process their feelings can block communications, teach children to mistrust their own feelings and perceptions, and interfere with the development of their problem-solving capabilities.

Supportive Alternatives for Dealing with Other People's Problems and Feelings

- **Get clear on your role**
Are we there to protect children or to teach children to protect and defend themselves; to give solutions or to help them find their own?
- **Listen**
Maintain eye contact, with minimal or no talking
- **Distinguish between feelings and behaviors**
There's a difference between wanting to hurt someone and actually hurting someone. Feelings are never right or wrong.
- **Accept**
Avoid judgmental, shocked, disappointed words, looks, body language. Avoid making others wrong for their feelings.
- **Validate**
Support the other person's right to his or her feelings. Offer words or non-verbal assurances that gives children permission to have feelings.
- **Maintain your boundaries**
Let kids know when you'll be available. Watch the tendency to take responsibility for the child's feelings or problems by trying to fix the situation, cheer them up (fix them), or by rescuing or advising.
- **Provide and encourage healthy, non-hurtful outlets for feelings (and meeting needs)**
- **Ask—don't tell**
This is for problem-solving rather than dealing with affective states—two different situations, each of which requires different behaviors. Once the emotional crisis has passed and the child is ready to access the part of the brain that deals with cognitive functions, help him find solutions to his own problems, think about options available, anticipate probable outcomes. This process puts you in the role of facilitator or guide. A great alternative to advice-giving!
- **Model and teach conflict-management**
If necessary, model and teach conflict-management. Demonstrate non-destructive ways to have, express, and process feelings; express needs; set and maintain boundaries.
- **Leave the door open for future discussion**

Adapted from Parents, Teens & Boundaries: How to Draw the Line, by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Health Communications, Inc., 1993.) Also appears in the revised edition of 21st Century Discipline: Teaching Students Responsibility and Self-Control, by Bluestein (Frank Schaffer Publications, Inc., 1999).

What's Wrong With "I- Messages"?

by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D.

Description:

Formula for expressing feelings in conjunction with another person's behavior: "*When you _____, I feel _____ (and I want you to _____).*" in order to get the other person to act differently.

Problems:

- They are still "You" messages, literally (verbally) and energetically, carrying a message of blame: Your emotional state is the fault of someone else's behavior. ("Victim" talk.)
- They put the responsibility for your feelings and emotional well-being on someone else.
- They assume that the other person is invested in your emotional well being and would be willing to change his or her behavior to care-take you. This is especially not true of typical playground or hallway social dynamics.
- They give a great deal of power to someone who may not have your best interests at heart, someone who may, in fact, be hoping to cause you discomfort, embarrassment, inconvenience or pain.
- If someone's intention is, indeed, to hurt you, "I messages" tell that person that his or her strategies for doing so are effective and, in fact, working!
- Few child relationships have (or should have) the intimacy required for dealing with the emotional impact of behaviors—and such intimacy is neither necessary nor relevant for generating cooperative, respectful behavior.
- Kids who are willing to change their behavior so other people won't feel sad or angry often have a hard time making good decisions on their own behalf. Their behavior tends to be other-motivated and people-pleasing, patterns which carry their own dangers and risks.
- There are other, better ways to generate cooperation from others, regardless of their personal feelings for you

Alternatives:

- Dealing with confrontation by "agreeing" and changing the subject
- Requesting different behavior (or that a certain behavior stop): "*Please stop kicking my chair.*" "*I don't like that word. Please don't use it around me.*" "*Please don't touch the stuff on my desk.*" (No need to justify or explain why.)
- Stating a preference: "*I don't care to discuss that.*" (And then cheerfully change the subject, redirect discussion.)
- Set a boundary, using a promise with a positive consequence: "I don't play with people who call me names." "I don't date people who hit." "I'll be happy to continue this discussion when you stop yelling at me."
- Simply refusing to engage or respond is also appropriate in some instances.

Free article on my Web site: <http://www.janebluestein.com/articles/whatswrong.html>

The Myth of the Self-Esteem Myth

HIGH or Healthy Self-Esteem

Belief in my basic worth as a person regardless of others' opinions, or my achievements, for example.

Belief in my own competence, capabilities, with an understanding and acceptance of the fact that I am better at certain things (and better at certain things at certain time) than I am at others.

Resistance to comparisons (and to defining myself in comparison to others); ability to maintain an internal and self-contained sense of my own value and capability

Ability to enjoy and appreciate external appearance, status, possessions, acquisitions, without dependence on them in order to feel valuable, complete, worthwhile or attractive.

The ability to see myself realistically; the ability to acknowledge my current flaws, limitations and imperfections and without being paralyzed or defeated by them; the ability to see myself realistically and still perceive myself as worthwhile.

The ability to enjoy and appreciate my relationships with others (a partner, my family, my friends and professional associates), without depending on them in order to feel valuable, complete, worthwhile or attractive.

The willingness to take risks, make mistakes, and be wrong without compromising my sense

LOW or Weak Self-Esteem

Conditional belief in my basic worth, depending on others' opinions or reactions, or my ability to achieve and succeed (or avoid failure), for ex. Belief in my basic unworthiness regardless of external factors, achievements, etc.

Inflated sense of my abilities or my inabilities; all-or-nothing perception of my capabilities; shutting down or giving up in the presence of my inabilities, flaws or difficulties (being a victim)

Tendency to define self (and worth of self) in comparison to others, either better or more than, or less or worse than; difficulty appreciating or evaluating myself against internal standards

Reliance on external appearance, status, possessions and acquisitions to feel valuable, attractive, worthwhile or complete; a sense that I would be OK if I had these external variables in my life.

The tendency to deny or ignore my current flaws, limitations and imperfections or to over-compensate for them by bragging, showing off, throwing my weight around or hurting others in some way;

Reliance on the existence and presence of these relationships in order to feel valuable, complete, worthwhile or attractive.

Perfectionism, defensiveness, self-protection; resistance to promotions or additional responsibility; need for approval; need to be right.

From Creating Emotionally Safe Schools by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 2001). This chart includes some material graciously contributed by Robert Reasoner, president, International Association for Self-Esteem.

HIGH or Healthy Self-Esteem

The ability to say no and stick up for myself, the willingness to disagree and to maintain my integrity, even at the risk of abandonment or disapproval; the willingness to be alone.

The ability to recognize and value personal needs in relation to need of others (win-win); a willingness to give (service, compromise) without placing self at risk (for harm, abuse, exhaustion, mental depletion, etc.)

The ability to accept myself as I am, while continually attempting to grow and get better; belief that growth is possible.

The belief in my own power to change things I'm not comfortable with in my life or self; the ability to take positive action and make positive choices to improve things that I'm not happy with; high degree of persistence, even in the face of frustration, failure or discouragement

The belief in my own deservingness; comfort with my achievements, accomplishments, and acquisitions, as well as with compliments and gifts; the ability to receive

Willingness to associate and work with individuals of all races, creeds and lifestyles.

Ability to set goals and make long range plans, believing they can be achieved with effort and persistence.

Self-esteem clearly goes beyond simply "feeling good about oneself," and should not be confused with delusion, bravado, self-aggrandizement or narcissism. The term has gotten a bad rap in recent years, perhaps because the concept has been linked to excessive or unearned praise (or flattery), giving unconditional approval to unacceptable behavior, accepting below-standard work as acceptable (or even wonderful!) or attempting to protect children from challenges, mistakes or failure. Adults who practice these behaviors in the name of self-esteem, do a great disservice to the children involved. Doing the opposite—criticizing, knocking kids down or setting them up for failure—is certainly no better, but there is a middle ground. If we're truly committed to building self-esteem (or whatever term we can comfortably ascribe to the characteristics on the left-hand side of these pages), we need to hold children accountable for their behavior, challenge them to continue to grow, and accept and value them as people while refusing to accept unacceptable behavior or sub-standard performance.

LOW or Weak Self-Esteem

Difficulty saying no; willingness to compromise my standards, limits and goals to receive approval and acceptance from others; the fear of being alone, OR isolating.

Difficulty recognizing and valuing personal needs; self-sacrificing (lose-win); OR indifference to needs of others (win-lose)

Inability to accept self as I am; pessimistic (why bother?); perceiving myself as unable to change.

Self-perception as victim, helpless, disempowered; pessimistic (why bother?); easily discouraged; high sensitivity to frustration, failure; tendency to give up or quickly adopt idea that success is improbable (why bother?)

Difficulty receiving, especially compliments or gifts; apologetic, guilty; lack of deservingness; OR a sense of entitlement

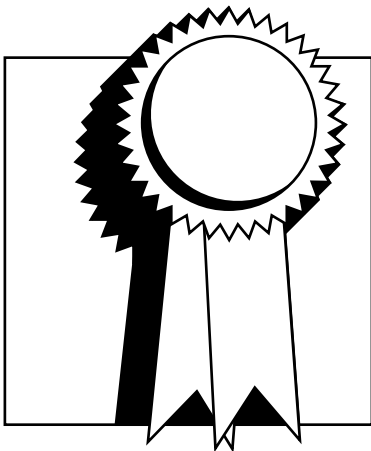
Inability to fully accept those perceived as different; threatened by those with different opinions; seeks to be associated with those who will give them status.

Reluctant to set goals or take on challenges of difficult tasks.

Guidelines for Reinforcing Positive Behavior

- Use positive reinforcement—verbal or non-verbal (interactive, token or activity)—to acknowledge and strengthen *already-existing* behaviors. Avoid attempting to use reinforcement *before* the desired behavior has occurred. (Use different strategies to motivate the student to *initiate* a desired behavior [promise a meaningful positive consequence for cooperation] or to *intervene* a disruptive behavior [withdraw or withhold a privilege or positive consequence].)
- Watch for a tendency to use praise to help a student solve a problem or feel good about himself. Flattery can appear manipulative even to a young or needy student. Such messages are superficial at best and will not contribute to the student’s genuine sense of self-worth.
- Avoid praising one child (or group) to motivate others. “I like the way Bobby is sitting” only serves to reinforce Bobby (and may, in fact, back-fire if Bobby isn’t happy about the attention), promising conditional approval to others when they, too, sit.
- Avoid using teacher approval as a means of reinforcing desired behavior. Learn to distinguish between reinforcers intended to maintain a particular student behavior and genuine expressions of appreciation, affection or enjoyment of your students. In a win-win classroom, behaviors such as a smile, touch, nod or wink—which obviously communicate the fact that the teacher is pleased—are not used as expressions of conditional approval or caring. Although they may sometimes be used as reinforcers, such behaviors may also appear randomly, regardless of the student’s performance or behavior, as expressions of appreciation or affection.
- Phrase reinforcements as an affirmation or acknowledgement of a behavior the student has demonstrated and the positive consequences now available (not as “if . . . then” statements, which are more useful for motivating behavior that has not yet been demonstrated). Reinforcements may be effectively communicated in either oral or written form.
- To reinforce a desirable behavior, first *describe* the behavior that took place. Be specific and concrete and avoid making judgments about the behavior or the worth of the student.
- Secondly, whenever possible, attach a comment that *connects* the immediate benefits of the student’s

behavior to the student. (Occasionally, it may be appropriate to state the positive outcomes in terms of their benefits to the group.) Focus on the payoff for the student, making sure the outcome is positive and meaningful. Avoid projecting your own feelings and values, which may or may not be relevant to those of the student, or suggesting how the student should feel.



- Look for the positive. You can almost always find something to recognize in any performance. Reinforce what was done right and work to correct or improve the rest.
- Perhaps because of the rigidity of roles during the factory-era, there was a tendency for teachers to recognize certain behaviors in boys (such as strength, mechanical skill, and ability in math and the sciences) more frequently than girls (who are more often reinforced for neatness, creativity, attractiveness, and writing and artistic abilities). In recognizing students, be aware of any tendencies to promote stereotypes.

Guidelines for Handling Negative Behavior

- **Think prevention.** Although no one can predict every possible opportunity for disaster, many problems can be avoided by taking the time to anticipate what you and your students will need, considering any possibility for misunderstandings or difficulties and setting very specific limits ahead of time.
- When something comes up, try to isolate what's bothering you. Are you reacting to a personality trait or value conflict, or is the student's behavior actually interfering with the teaching or learning process?
- **Attack the problem, not the person.** Mentally separate the student from the behavior. It's the interruption that's annoying—not the student.
- Minimize your reaction. Count to ten, or at least to five. Use this time to remind yourself that you don't have to get angry, lecture, criticize, interrogate or punish. (Often, you don't even have to get involved!) Staying calm can help you avoid compounding the problem at hand. A brief pause can also allow the student to resolve or correct the problem behavior on his own.
- Deal specifically with the behavior—not the morality of the behavior, previous incidents or the personality behind the misconduct.
- If your reaction starts to create a win-lose (or no-win) situation, stop and back off: *"Wait. This isn't the way I want to handle this."* If necessary—and possible—withdraw for a few seconds to regain your perspective.
- At all times, stay responsible for your actions and words. We are most vulnerable to negative adult behavior patterns in the presence of negative or disruptive student behaviors. Regardless of our commitment to maintaining a positive, win-win environment, there will be times we will most likely slip up and say or do something hurtful or destructive. At those times, be careful to model responsible language and not blame the student. For example, avoid statements like, *"You make me so angry,"* or *"If you hadn't done that I wouldn't have said that to you."* If you act or speak in a hurtful way, apologize and switch to more a constructive approach—just like you would want the student to do!
- Look for ways to offer many choices and positive outcomes for cooperation, building in incentives and motivators. This is a proactive and positive approach that will eliminate many of the incidents that arise when students are competing for power.
- Withdraw the privilege or positive consequence as soon as a misconduct occurs. Keep your tone and body language as neutral as possible. (A statement like *"This isn't working"* can help you intervene decisively without attacking or criticizing.)



From 21st Century Discipline: Teaching Students Responsibility and Self-Control, by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Frank Schaffer Publications, Co., Torrance, CA, 1999)

- Whenever possible, invite the student to reclaim his privilege or possession as soon as the misbehavior ceases: *“You may return to the group as soon as you can control your talking,”* *“You can continue playing with this game as soon as you finish cleaning up the area you just left.”*
- If correcting his behavior will not give the student immediate access to the privilege or possession, let him know when it will be available again: *“Please return to your seats. Let’s try (working together) again tomorrow,”* or *“Please put the puzzle back on the shelf until you finish your seatwork.”*
- Provide support, feedback, guidelines and limits to help, but leave the responsibility for the student’s behavior with the student.
- If instruction and activities would help in areas such as problem solving, social interaction, or handling anger and frustration, for example, save them for a non-crisis setting. Likewise, if you feel that you and your students could benefit from the administration or support staff (counselor, school psychologist, social worker), invite them to conduct or participate in these activities. These individuals may also be available to discuss particular problems and help you brainstorm possible win-win solutions, and will be especially helpful when you can provide documentation and don’t attempt to dump the responsibility for the problem on them.
- In problem-solving activities and discussions, keep coming back to win-win: *“How can we both get what we want?”*

Intervention Strategies			
Behavior	<i>Productive (Positive, Desirable)</i>	<i>Non-Productive (Neutral, Non-disruptive)</i>	<i>Counter-Productive (Negative, Disruptive)</i>
Intervention Strategy	Positive Reinforcement/ Recognition	Contingency Contracting, Offering Choices	Follow-through; loss of privilege (positive consequence); new boundary
Goal	Maintaining existing behavior, improving the likelihood of behavior recurring on its own	Encouraging more cooperative, more productive behavioral choices; building commitment	Stopping negative behavior; replacing with cooperative, non-disruptive behavior
Process	1. Describe the behavior 2. Connect to positive outcome	Connecting what you want to what the student wants; making productive behavior more desirable	Might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • remove or delay access to positive consequence • ask student to stop, change behavior • present acceptable alternative • use promises (set new contingency)
Caution	Avoid praise that connects behavior to worth. <i>“I really like you when...”</i> <i>“You’re good because...”</i> Avoid praise that reinforces dependence on approval: <i>“I like the way...”</i>	Motivators must be need fulfilling to be effective. This will vary from student to student. Motivators must also appear accessible (immediate enough). Avoid using conditional approval as a motivator. Avoid depending on your students’ fear of your anger or power to motivate their cooperation.	Once limits have been violated, follow through immediately. Avoid warnings, reminders after the fact. Do not ask for excuses. Instead, ask what the student plans to do to correct the situation. Avoid punishing, moralizing, giving advice or solutions, making excuses or taking responsibility for the student’s problem. Avoid making the child wrong; accept the student, not the behavior.

Ingredients of Effective Adult-Student Relationships: **SELF-CARE**

The ability to identify personal needs and feelings,
set—and enforce—boundaries,
take time for self,
self-validate and get help when necessary.

The ability to distinguish between self-care and selfishness.

The ability to feel deserving of self-caring
behaviors and decisions;
the ability to feel deserving of kindness and respectful treatment
by others.

The ability to use mistakes and failures as opportunities
for new goals, strategies or growth.

The willingness to reach out for help when necessary,
and to utilize support resources
although maintaining responsibility
for solving one's own problems.

The ability to self-forgive.



Are You at Risk?*

*Risk factors include a tendency for adults to:***

- feel personally responsible for a student's successes and failures
- measure personal success by student behavior and achievement, or by approval from others
- have an overwhelming need to avoid conflict and generate approval from others (which can manifest as attention-seeking, maintaining status quo, passive-aggressiveness or rebelliousness)
- compromise student needs to avoid "rocking the boat," either with administrators, parents or other students
- believe that the job would be easier to perform if only the students, their parents, the administration and/or "the system" would change
- have difficulty setting and maintaining boundaries between self and other people
- have difficulty setting and maintaining boundaries between self and job
- deal with discipline problems by shaming, blaming, complaining, manipulating, ignoring or dumping them on someone else (parents, principal, vice principal or other support staff)
- feel threatened by another teacher's progress or success
- feel as though "things would completely fall apart if it weren't for me."
- swing from chaos, helplessness and victimization to moral superiority and self-righteousness
- often rescue students by ignoring misbehavior, offering inappropriate second chances or failing to impose previously-stated consequences
- protect a student from failure or negative consequences in an effort to feel successful, valuable or powerful
- over-identify with, and even adopt, another person's feelings
- appear to be "fine" and "in control"
- deny that any of the above are personally relevant

** At risk for lots more stress, frustration and conflict than you would like.*

*** We're probably all guilty, to some degree, of all of the above from time to time. This list is simply a sample of the ways at-risk factors can show up in the classroom. These patterns become problematic when they become typical of a teacher's feelings and behaviors.*

<http://www.janebluestein.com>

These patterns can ultimately interfere with the adult's ability to:

- interact with students without violating their dignity or self-worth
- interact with school staff effectively
- meet students' academic and learning-style needs
- behave consistently within the framework of their own values
- feel worthy and successful
- detach from the job
- take care of themselves

Other contributing factors:

- a tradition of dysfunctionality (which now feels "normal")
- a scarcity of healthy, functional role models
- the absence of a healthy, functional system to support people trying to operate in healthy, functional ways.
- the very human tendency to resist change

Some assumptions on reducing risk factors:

- One can adopt healthy patterns of behavior, even in unhealthy, unsupportive environments.
- The system is not likely to rescue, protect, take care of or support a teacher's needs, despite that teacher's enthusiasm, instructional skills, dedication or good intentions.
- Change happens best in supportive environments; teachers tend to function effectively, grow professionally and personally, and avoid stress and burnout when they can create a support network for themselves, either in or out of school—and preferably in both environments.
- Change is most effective when individuals take responsibility for their own growth, rather than attempting to change or blame others.
- Change is most effective when encouraged rather than coerced.
- The system is not likely to change all by itself.
- As individuals change, the system will change.

This information appears in Creating Emotionally Safe Schools, by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 2001).

Stress-Producing Obstacles in Relationships

- Needing to be in charge or in control (especially when it depends on disempowering or controlling others or when it disregards other people's desire for control and autonomy).
- Needing to be right (when it depends on others being wrong, when it requires that you make others wrong, or when it insists that others agree with you or support your views and actions).
- Needing to be needed or feel important (when it requires the dependence of others).
- Needing for someone else to exhibit certain behaviors, appearance, values, preferences or abilities in order to feel good about yourself (or successful as a parent or spouse, for example).
- Expectations, especially when your preferences or desires are not communicated or agreed to beforehand. Having an agenda for how another person should be or behave: "I expected you to be home by now," "If you really loved me, you would have called," "I can't believe you didn't get me a card." (Typically, the only person committed to an expectation is the person who has the expectation.)
- Arrogance or self-righteousness. Assuming the other person understands or knows what you want: "Come home at a reasonable hour," "I was ready to leave two hours ago!" "I shouldn't have to do that (or deal with that)."
- Assuming that others operate with your priorities and values: "How can you spend so much time at the mall (or watching football)?" "You shouldn't date someone from that part of town."
- Assuming that someone will think, feel, act or react in a certain way: "I didn't tell you because you'd get mad," "I didn't want to bother you," "I was afraid you'd be hurt." Thinking for another person.
- Tunnel-vision. An inability to see the "big picture."
- All-or-nothing thinking. (Sometimes called dualism or black-and-white thinking.) A tendency to think in terms of opposite extremes. An inability to see multiple options or other points of view.
- Fear of conflict, rejection or abandonment. Compromising personal values or standards, making decisions based on someone else's reaction or possible reaction.
- Denying that a problem exists or making excuses for someone else's unacceptable behavior, rather than confronting that person or asking for more reasonable behavior.
- Reactivity. Overreacting.
- Victim thinking. The perception of having no power to change situations (or thinking) for the better or to do things differently.
- Dependence on others for your own needs. Abdicating personal responsibility. Being afraid or unwilling to let people know what you want.
- Blaming: "If you would shape up there wouldn't be a problem."
- Double standards. Expecting or demanding behaviors from others that you do not model or demonstrate yourself.
- Criticizing, shaming, ridicule, judgments or any form of attack. Focusing on the negative (especially in someone else's behavior, choices, preferences or values).

Adapted from The Parent's Little Book of Lists: Do's and Don'ts of Effective Parenting, *by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D.*
(Health Communications, Inc., 1997.)

- Asking someone to defend or explain his behavior rather than asking for what you want: “Why did borrow my sweater without asking me first?” instead of “I want you to ask before you borrow my things.”
- Assuming that another person is committed to an agreement simply because you have expressed what you want. Not asking for agreement.
- Lack of consideration for another. Focusing on your own needs to exclusion of others’ needs. Failing to respect another person’s boundaries, privacy or time.
- Focusing on another person’s needs to exclusion of your own. Discounting or dismissing your needs in favor of someone else’s (when doing so will have a negative or harmful effect on you). Self-sacrifice.
- Resistance to being conscious and present in the relationship.
- Resistance to personal change: “I’ve always felt that way,” “This is just the way I am (or do things).”
-
-
-

Which of these characteristics create the most conflict or alienation in your life? How?

Which of these characteristics used to be more of a challenge for you than they are today?

Which of these characteristics still present a challenge for you personally?

Which of these characteristics would you most like to change in someone close to you?

Assuming that this person does not change, how can you better take care of yourself in the future?

Which of these characteristics would you most like to change in yourself? What can you do differently?

Other comments, things to watch out for . . .

Appendix B: Student Survey

My favorite teachers are the ones who:

The teachers I dislike (or am most uncomfortable around) are the ones who:

I wish more teachers would:

I wish some teachers would stop:

The best thing a teacher ever said or did to me was:

The worst thing a teacher ever said or did to me was:

If I were a teacher, I would:

If I were to change this school, I would:

Other comments or suggestions:

What are your kids telling you? Share these with me and I will add them—anonously—to my web sites. (Please indicate the kids' grade levels.) Send completed surveys to me c/o I.S.S. Publications, 1709 Father Sky Ct NE, Albuquerque, NM 87112. Thanks!

Appendix D:

Is Your School an Emotionally Safe Place?

This survey lists a number of practices which characterize a school with an emotionally safe climate. It has been included to help you evaluate your school's goals, policies and intentions, as well as the degree to which each exists in actual practice. The list is deliberately idealistic and comprehensive. Studies suggest that each item is an important component of an emotionally safe school environment, and that emotional safety is built on a combination of all of the characteristics listed in this survey. As schools strive to achieve the specific behaviors each item suggests, they will no doubt see improvements in the culture of the school, as well as in the performance, commitment, behavior and interactions that occur within its walls. Likewise, as schools increase the agreement with each of the items in this survey, they can expect a reduction of stress commonly associated with failure, rebelliousness, disruptiveness and passive student behavior.

You may wish to use this survey to evaluate the degree to which your school is committed to each item in terms of its philosophy or vision, as well as the degree to which the behaviors described in each item regularly occur in actual practice. You can rate each item for an individual classroom, or according to your perception of the school environment as a whole.

Use the following scale to rate each item:

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| 1- Strongly Agree | 3- Somewhat disagree |
| 2- Somewhat Agree | 4- Strongly disagree |

Need for Meaningful Outcomes (Positive Consequences), Structure, Boundaries (Limits) and Follow-Through

- We make a deliberate effort to anticipate what students and teachers (and parents) will need in various situations in order to prevent problems from occurring.
- We have and communicate boundaries and policies that clearly describe desirable and acceptable student behaviors.
- We have and communicate boundaries and policies that clearly describe desirable and acceptable staff behaviors.
- The school environment is reward oriented (as opposed to being punishment oriented): Rules and boundaries emphasize the positive consequences of cooperation and compliance.
- Our goal is to motivate through access to positive outcomes, rather than through avoidance or fear of negative outcomes.
- We attempt to motivate students with the promise of a positive outcome, rather than using statements that offer conditional approval or safety (avoidance of disapproval, punishment) for cooperation (threats).
- We attempt to follow through consistently, with-

holding (or withdrawing) positive outcomes until students follow through on what is required on their end.

- We are committed to avoiding warnings, threats, meaningless or delayed (negative) consequences.
- We make students and their parents aware, as soon as possible, of changes in behavior or performance that could affect grades, promotion or graduation.
- We communicate with parents on a regular basis about what their kids are doing well.

Need for Respect, Belonging and Dignity

- We attempt to avoid equating students' worth with their behavior or achievement.
- We attempt to avoid humiliation, shaming, sarcasm, ridicule or other forms of attack with regard to students' personality, achievement or behavior.
- We attempt to avoid depending on negative adult reactions (anger, punishment, disappointment) in order to motivate students (or control their behavior).
- We recognize that students have a need to experience meaningful positive outcomes, just as adults do.
- We treat our students with the same respect we want them to show us and one another.

From Creating Emotionally Safe Schools, by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 2001). This is the survey in its entirety as it appears in the Appendix of the book.

- We recognize that our students have a need for dignity, purpose, success, impact (seeing outcomes of choices and behaviors), acceptance, belonging, attention, structure, power and fun, among other things.
- We encourage students to have and voice their own thoughts and opinions.
- We encourage students to speak up for their own instructional needs (for example, more help, additional information or resources, clarification, other learning needs).
- We encourage inquiry and debate, and attempt to avoid negatively reacting to students who challenge or disagree with adults (although we do ask students to present their positions respectfully).
- We attempt to adhere to the same standards of behavior (including language and tone of voice) that we expect or require from our students.
- We regard—and use—a students’ mistakes simply as opportunities for new learning.
- We avoid responding with impatience, anger or disappointment to a student who is having difficulty understanding or mastering a new concept or performing a new skill.
- We respect students’ affective needs and are committed to listening and supporting their feelings in positive ways.
- We work to eliminate prejudices toward students based on their racial or cultural background, physical appearance; academic, artistic or athletic competence; sexual orientation; family history; prior achievement or performance.
- We avoid gossiping about students or their families.
- We strive to stay aware of put-downs expressed by students or staff, especially those that involve the use of slurs or derogatory names or remarks.
- We respond immediately to put-downs, slurs and derogatory names or remarks (rather than ignoring or excusing them).

Need for Autonomy (Power and Control)

- We accept the importance of students learning decision-making and self-management skills.
- We encourage kids to set goals and evaluate options in order to take responsibility for solving their own problems, rather than “rescuing” them or telling them what they should do.
- We allow students to self-manage with regard to materials and resources.
- We encourage students to self-manage their personal needs within clearly stated boundaries (ex: drinking water or using the rest rooms as needed)
- We allow and encourage students to have input in and make decisions about their learning (topics, presentation, media, sequence, assignments, need for additional practice, readiness for the next skill or topic, etc.)
- We allow and encourage students to have input

in and make decisions about how, where and with whom they work.

- We hold students accountable for their behavioral choices without blaming, shaming, attacking or punishing (ex: withholding positive outcome, privileges, credit for work due)
- Students are encouraged to initiate and take risks regarding their own learning.
- We allow and encourage students to create, design, request or renegotiate projects and assignments to make them personally meaningful and relevant.

Need for Recognition, Attention and Emotional Safety

- We attempt to recognize positive behavior with statements that emphasize a positive outcome or meaningful benefit to the students, rather than using statements that emphasize the students’ worth (“goodness”), our happiness or pleasure, or the students’ ability to please us.
- We attempt to reinforce positive behavior by allowing positive outcomes to occur, continue or become available, contingent, for example, on work completion or non-disruptive behavior.
- We attempt to meet students’ needs for attention in positive, constructive and proactive ways in order to diminish the tendency for them to act out to get these needs met.
- We strive to stay aware of changes in patterns in students’ behavior and to maintain a sense of how students are doing (that is, not just focusing on their academic performance).
- We attempt to create emotional safety by noticing and supporting students in crisis.
- We provide appropriate outlets for students in crisis.
- Our students know that if they need to talk, we are willing to listen (or set a time when we can listen, or refer them to someone who can listen).
- We respect students’ needs for confidentiality to the degree that doing so will not put that student or anyone else in danger.
- We strive to maintain awareness of how students treat one another.
- We immediately respond to incidents we witness that involve any form of bullying, harassment or threat to a student’s safety.

Need for Options as a Learner (Individuality)

- We attempt to determine what interests and motivates our students and use this information in our planning and instruction.
- We attempt to identify various aspects of our students’ individual learning needs (such as learning styles, modality preferences, dominance profiles, temperament or personality profiles), and use this information in our planning and instruction.
- We attempt to identify various types of intelligences (linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial,

- bodily-kinesthetic, naturalistic, interpersonal and intrapersonal) and use this information to capitalize and build on students' strengths.
- ___ We provide resources and activities to accommodate a variety of intelligences in each class.
 - ___ We attempt to accommodate a variety of modality strengths (visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic preferences) in our directions and activities.
 - ___ We attempt to accommodate a variety of learning style and preferences in our instruction and assignments.
 - ___ We recognize and attempt to accommodate the needs of tactile and kinesthetic learners (as well as high visual, verbal and auditory learners).
 - ___ We acknowledge and appreciate the fact that some students may pay attention without sitting up straight and making continual eye contact.
 - ___ We make sure kids have ample opportunities to move during the day.
 - ___ We teach children ways to self-regulate (maintain appropriate alertness for the particular class or activity) without disrupting others.
 - ___ We attempt to accommodate a variety of learning preferences by offering choices, particularly during independent work time (ex: seating or location in room, affiliation, music or sound, intake, etc.)
 - ___ We offer a variety of assessment tools to allow students to demonstrate mastery in ways besides paper-and-pencil tests.

Need for Success (Academic, Social, Intrapersonal)

- ___ We assess student ability before beginning instruction or assigning tasks.
- ___ We attempt to accept students exactly the way they come to us, build on what they know, and encourage growth from wherever they start.
- ___ We attempt to provide opportunities for success for each child in the school, even if he or she is far behind curricular expectations.
- ___ We attempt to match instruction and assignments to individual student needs according to their current skill or mastery levels or prior experience.
- ___ We have adopted the belief that the primary purpose of evaluating a student's work is to determine what type of instruction or resources that particular student needs next.
- ___ We invite and consider student input and self-assessment when assigning placement, follow-up work or grades.
- ___ If a student fails to master a concept or skill, we see our role as that of improving understanding, rather than simply evaluating their performance before moving on to the next concept.
- ___ We encourage students to use our feedback to improve their work and resubmit (for a higher grade, for example, or until they get it right).
- ___ We attempt to build interpersonal skills such as communication skills, respect, tolerance, compas-

sion, resistance to teasing and peer pressure, and other positive social behaviors.

- ___ We attempt to build intrapersonal (character) skills such as persistence, responsibility, honesty, integrity, as well as confidence, the ability to stick up for oneself, problem-solving skills and resistance to failure, defeatism or victim thinking.

Areas of greatest strengths:

Areas most in need of improvements:

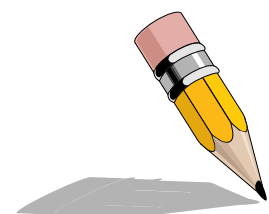
Prioritize goals:

1-

2-

3-

Use the planning sheet on the following page to evaluate relevant considerations in reaching these goals.



Finding a safe adult

© 2005, *High School's Not Forever* by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. and Eric Katz, M.S.A.C. (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc.)

Note: This excerpt is from the final manuscript. Exact wording may be slightly different, but you are free to use anything you wish from this material. If you want to see the Safe Adult cards, I can scan the page and send it to you.

Of all the factors necessary for a student to succeed in high school, none has been proven to be more important than having at least one adult who is there for you and supports you unconditionally. Sometimes these people are easy to find and may be as close as right there in your home. Other times that special adult may work in your school. If you have not already found a supportive adult, here's how to seek one out.

Some of us are fortunate enough to have parents, extended family members, teachers, clergy or other adults in our lives that we can turn to for support and guidance. However, many students do not have safe and supportive adults in their lives. Hundreds of books have been authored on how to best help teens succeed in school and in life, and yet the most important factor seems to be having at least one adult in your life you can count on for support no matter what.

OK, so what does a safe adult look like and how do I go about finding one? The good news is that there are many adults who are willing and able to support you as you move through your high school years. It does take some effort on your part to identify these adults and to connect with them.

Here are some of the characteristics of safe adults:

1. Safe adults tend to lead balanced lives. They are not always in a state of crisis.

2. Safe adults are consistent. Although they, like all of us, have good and bad days, they do not listen to you patiently one moment and then yell at you the next.
3. Safe adults do not make you feel uncomfortable. They are not sexually or emotionally inappropriate with you.
4. Safe adults are not looking to be seen as cool by teens. They understand that they are adults and are not looking to be a part of your peer group.
5. Safe adults can clearly tell you that they do not like something that you may have done while still letting you know that they like you as a person.
6. Safe adults do not always tell you what you should do. They give you choices and help you think through the possible consequences of each choice.
7. Safe adults do not gossip or bad mouth others. Here is a good rule of thumb. If a person tells you secrets about others or really says a lot of bad things about them to you. There is a very good chance that they will also talk about you in this way to others.
8. Safe adults are also human. They do not always know the answer to a particular question and they honestly admit when they do not know. They make mistakes like the rest of us and it is important not to put anyone on too high of a pedestal.

How to find safe adults:

1. Talk to adults. Safe adults are not likely to just come looking for you. You will need to interact with a number of adults in order to determine which ones you feel comfortable with.
2. Ask the adults if they are willing to listen to you when you have questions or problems. Ask when it would be ok to call, or stop into their office or email them. Ask them to clarify their boundaries: Can you call them at home or at work or after 10 P.M.? What is an emergency and what can wait until tomorrow?
3. Start by sharing little things about yourself and see how the adult reacts. Do not just sit down and tell all of your deepest secrets and fears the first time you chat.
4. Don't fall into the trap of looking for the "cool" teacher, neighbor etc. Many safe adults are more laid back and are not looking to be the center of attention.
5. Listen to your instincts. Just as you can tell which teachers really care about kids and which are counting the days until they retire, if you focus you can get a good feel for which adults are sincere and which really are not to be counted upon.

Build a network of safe adults

According to research by the Search Institute in Minneapolis, teens need at least three adults in their lives (besides their parents) who they can go to for advice and support.

—Rebecca Greeneⁱ

Who can you go to for career guidance? Relationship advice? Academic help? Health, body or addiction issues? What other areas of your life might benefit from the counsel of a trusted adult? Where else could you find an adult you can trust who would be available for you? _____

It is important to have more than one safe adult to count on. Even the most dependable person may not be available all of the time. People go on vacation, have crises of their own or even leave the area. It is a good idea to have a back-up person or even a couple of people who you can turn to in a time of crisis.

In the back of this book you will find blank Safe Adult Contact cards. Once you have identified safe adults, fill out the information on these cards listing the adult's names, phone numbers, email and other contact information. If possible take the card to a local copy center and have it laminated so that it will last. Carry it with you at all times.

ⁱ Greene, 64.