





good boundaries make good relationships

“Boundaries are norms, rules, or codes of conduct that characterize an individual’s personal space or environment and his or her sense of security and safety. Healthy boundaries provide a nurturing and safe physical, emotional, sexual, and spiritual environment for individuals.”
Len Sperry, MD, PhD, *Sex, Priestly Ministry, and the Church*, 2003, page 10

A safe boundary is consistent, reliable, and establishes that certain behavior cannot come in or will not go out. But to keep our boundaries reliable, we need to take time and effort to maintain them.

Healthy boundaries are high maintenance for people who have them; people with unhealthy boundaries are high maintenance for others who interact with them.

Warning signs when a church leader’s boundaries are at risk of failing:

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

Safe practices to maintain a church leader’s healthy boundaries:

- Practice job-related duties consistently with all parishioners, volunteers, staff, children;
- Meet privately with an adult only once per week, 45–60 minutes in length, after three visits refer to a professional;
- Participate in an annual evaluation process which discusses healthy boundaries;
- Observe technological boundaries – texting, emails, social network sites should be shared with a supervisor or accountability partner; limit technology exchanges with others;
- Discuss boundaries between staff/volunteers and youth annually;
- Avoid one-to-one meetings with youth in homes/cars/offices when no one else present;
- Limit physical contact to a brief side-by-side hug or pat on the shoulder, hand, or forearm.

Abuse Awareness 2010 sponsored by the Safe Church Ministry of the CRCNA. For more information, contact:



Safe Church Ministry, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560
616-224-0735 | www.crcna.org/safechurch