

## Professional Boundaries Check List

### Taking an Undue Interest in a Particular Student:

1. Having a "special" friend or a "special relationship" with a particular student.
2. Favoring certain students by giving them special privileges.
3. Favoring certain students, inviting them to come to the classroom at non-class times.
4. Getting a particular student out of class to visit the teacher during the teacher's prep period.
5. Engaging in peer-like behavior with students.

### Using Poor Judgment in Relation to a Particular Student:

6. Allowing him/her to get away with inappropriate behavior.
7. Being alone with the student behind closed doors at school.
8. Giving gifts or money to the student.
9. Being overly "touchy" with certain students.
10. Touching students for no educational or health reason.
11. Giving students rides in the educator's personal vehicle, especially alone.
12. Frequent electronic communication or phone contacts with a particular student.

### Becoming Involved in the Student's Private Life:

13. Talking to the student about the educational practitioner's personal problems.
14. Talking to the student about the student's personal problems to the extent that the adult becomes a confidant of the student when it is not the adult's job role to do so.
15. Initiating or extending contact with students beyond the school day.
16. Taking a particular student on outings, especially personal outings, away from protective adults.
17. Using e-mail, text-messaging, instant messaging, or social networking to discuss personal topics or interests with students.

### Not Respecting Normal Boundaries:

18. Invading the student's physical privacy (e.g., walking in on the student in the bathroom).
19. Inviting students to the teacher's home.
20. Visiting the student's home.
21. Asking the student to keep certain things secret from his/her parents.

### Sexually Related Conduct:

22. Engaging in sex talk with students (sexual innuendo, sexual banter, or sexual jokes).
23. Talking with a student about sexual topics that are not related to a specific curriculum.
24. Showing pornography to the student.
25. Hugging, kissing, or other affectionate physical contact with a student.

## Staff Information

### Professional Boundaries and Inappropriate Boundary Invasions; Preventing Sexual Abuse of Students

A miniscule percentage of educators is made up of individuals who engage in sexual misconduct of one form or another with students. This small number of people do disproportionate harm to students and the profession. What social scientists tell us about sexual grooming reveals that other educators are the key to stopping sexual misconduct against students by other educators. Hence, the following information will help you to help protect students, your school, and the profession.

Studies reveal that up to 9.6% of students experience some kind of sexually inappropriate talk or conduct from educators at some point between kindergarten and graduation from high school. (Charole Shakeshaft, Ph.D., *Educator Sexual Misconduct: A Synthesis of Existing Literature*, prepared for the U.S. Dept. of Education (2004).) This misconduct is often committed by the same individuals over and over. If the rest of the profession is aware of the following social science and psychological insights, such misconduct can be greatly curtailed if not stopped.

In addressing the issue of sexual misconduct against students in the profession, please do not mistake anything here to be an attack on educators or the profession. The profession is already under heavy and serious attack. (See: [www.badbadteachers.com](http://www.badbadteachers.com).) This is aimed at helping you to do your part to protect both children and the profession.

### **Professionalism is the Best Protection**

The bedrock principle of professional relationships with students in education is that educators should establish good relationships with students in order to educate students; but educators should not rely upon students to meet their own social needs. When educators rely on students to meet the educator's social needs, the relationship is no longer a strictly professional relationship. Nor is it a true friendship since by the nature of the educator-student relationship, it is not an equal or even relationship.

The relationship between educator and student is an uneven one. It is a relationship of trust where the educator has power over the student, making it inappropriate and unprofessional for the educator to try and meet his/her social needs through that relationship. While good relationships with students are very important for the education process, that does not mean that the educator needs to become personal friends with his/her students. As you may glean from reading on,

failure to follow this basic principle of professionalism can result in an educator fitting the profile of someone attempting to engage in sexual misconduct with students, even if that is not the person's intent.

At the same time, it is recognized that a sound and trusting relationship with students is often necessary to advance educational goals. The key in striking the balance is for the educator to consider whether s/he is attempting to have personal needs met through the relationship, or to have a peer-to-peer or "special relationship" with a student. If the relationship is becoming too close, the educator is the adult and should establish professional boundaries.

### **Kinds of Sexual Misconduct by Educators**

Basically, sexual misconduct by educators is of two kinds—predatory and opportunistic. The child predator deliberately grooms a student to engage in sexual behavior. The opportunist may not consciously begin with predatory motivation in mind, but allows himself/herself to develop a special relationship with a student which results in situations where the educator's professionalism is compromised. At some point the relationship then becomes predatory, sometimes when there is a situation made possible by the close relationship where there is an opportunity to take advantage of the student. Both situations arise out of ignoring the basic principle of professional relationships with students and nurturing a "special relationship" with a particular student where the adult is getting his/her social needs met through the student. There is nothing wrong with a student feeling special; but there is something wrong with the adult using the student to meet the adult's social needs.

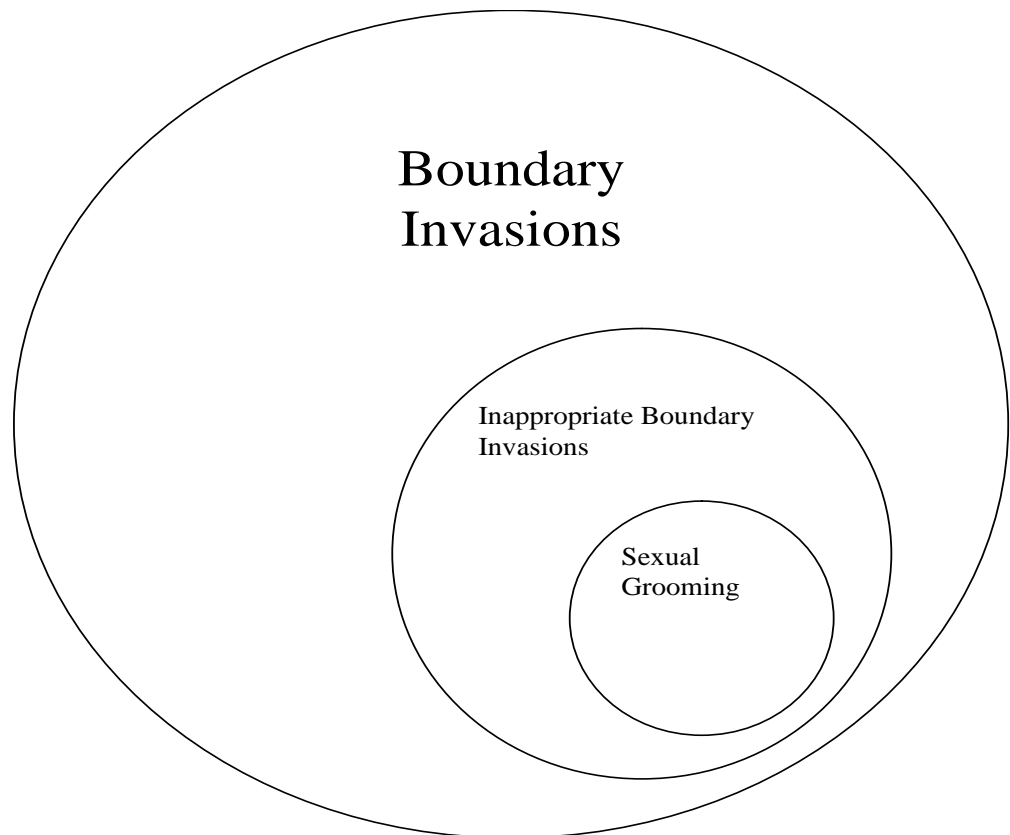
### **How Sexual Grooming Works**

Sexual grooming is the process by which 99.9% of serious sexual misconduct against children occurs in education. The adult befriends the child, creating a connection with the child, a special relationship, lowering the child's natural inhibitions in order to eventually take advantage of the child sexually. In education, sexual abusers often target students who are passive or needy and then engage in personal ***boundary invasion behaviors*** which become increasingly invasive of the child's boundaries. The child gets used to the boundary invasions, and their increasing intrusiveness, accepting them as normal. Eventually, when the student's inhibitions are down, sexual misconduct may occur. Commonly the child may even blame him/herself for what happened.

## Principles Which Are the Key to How Educators Can Stop Sexual Grooming and Thereby Sexual Molestation

1. Social science experts inform us that sexual molesters victimize children either by “grabbing” or “grooming” children. (Carla van Dam, Ph.D., *Identifying Child Molesters* (2001).)
2. These experts also inform us that 99.9% of educators who sexually molest students accomplish their molestations through the sexual grooming process.
3. Sexual grooming of students begins with and is accomplished by a process of increasingly invasive ***inappropriate boundary invasions***. ***Therefore:***
4. If we ***stop inappropriate boundary invasions***, we will prevent most molestations by educators.

### Venn Diagram Showing Relationship of Grooming to Boundary Invasions



## Definitions

***Inappropriate:*** “Inappropriate” in conjunction with “inappropriate boundary invasions” means conduct which under the totality of the circumstances does not have valid and bona fide educational or health reasons.

***Boundary invasions:*** Boundary invasions are situations where the educator does not respect the student’s personal physical and psychological boundaries. In predatory situations, the boundary invasions become increasingly invasive, with the student becoming used to the invasions and allowing increasing invasions to occur. Not all boundary invasions are inappropriate, and not all inappropriate boundary invasions result in sexual misconduct with students. However, inappropriate boundary invasions are something which other adults may become aware of. Since inappropriate boundary invasions are usually the only clue whereby other adults can detect that an educator-student relationship may be headed in the wrong direction, it is important for educators to avoid inappropriate boundary invasions and for administration to address them with the educator when they occur.

Whether boundary invasion behaviors have “questionable educational benefit” can be reasonably determined by examining the relationship established by the educator with the student to see whether that relationship moved from being professional to becoming personal.

Possible “inappropriate boundary invasion” behaviors which show that a risky relationship is being established include:

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## **The Student Victim Profile**

Students who become victims are often in special need of adult attention, and at first find the special relationship with the educator something grounding and centering. They end up trusting the educator, feel that they are personal friends with the educator, allow the boundary invasions because they are friends, and when something inappropriate happens, may end up blaming themselves.

## **What Should Happen**

When you are aware of inappropriate boundary invasions by another educator, Board Policy requires you to report the matter to administration. If the administrator is aware of all boundary invasion behaviors that other employees observe with a particular educator, the administrator can talk with that individual, find out what is happening, and if necessary counsel the educator to more professional conduct. If nothing inappropriate is happening, it becomes a training experience in professional judgment for the educator. In some situations, discipline may be necessary.

What administration would do depends completely on the situation. If the boundary invasions are not inappropriate, nothing would happen. In minor

situations, a verbal or written reminder may be necessary. In repeat situations, progressive discipline may be warranted. In extreme situations, such as involving molestation of a student, termination and loss of credentialing would be warranted.

In any case involving child abuse, mandatory child abuse reporting duties must be met.

### **What About Small Communities?**

Sometimes educators have relationships with students outside of school which have nothing to do with school but begin at church, Boy Scouts, Little League, Young Life, or having a neighbor's kid mow the lawn or baby sit. This can be especially true in small communities. Regardless of contacts outside of school, it is still be inappropriate for the educator to engage in a peer-to-peer relationship with a student even if the personal relationship is outside of school.

### **Staff Member Duties**

The staff member's role in preventing sexual abuse of students is two-fold: first, to avoid engaging in behaviors which could be mistaken for boundary invasion or grooming behaviors; and second, to report situations where such behaviors by other employees take place.

1. *Do not engage in inappropriate boundary invasion behaviors* described above or behaviors like them. Keep your interactions with students on a professional level. Refer students who need emotional or other support to appropriately trained staff such as counselors or school psychologists. Staff can be caring while maintaining an appropriate level of professional decorum.
2. *Report the Boundary Invasion:* If a staff member observes any adult engaging in the behaviors described above with students, or other behaviors which raise concerns, the staff member must:
  - a. Inform your principal or the appropriate person at the District Office at your earliest opportunity.<sup>1</sup> Do not wait or mull things over or attempt to determine for yourself whether the behavior you have observed has a plausible, innocent explanation. You may not be aware of or understand the entire situation, and allowing the

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<sup>1</sup> Make your report to the appropriate administrator, but do not make the report to an administrator who may be the one involved in the boundary invasion behaviors.

conduct to continue could be bad for both the staff member and students.

- b. DO NOT confront or discuss the matter with the adult. Do not inform the person of your concern, unless it is a situation where immediate intervention is necessary to protect a child.
- c. ***Maintain confidentiality.*** Failure to do so may impede official investigations, foster untrue rumors or violate privacy. You owe a legal duty of confidentiality to students on matters which a reasonable person would want to remain confidential. Therefore, you are directed not to tell your concerns to anyone other than the appropriate administrator, Child Protective Services, or the police. If approached by anyone other than the appropriate administrator, CPS, the police or parent of the child, or a person conducting an official investigation on behalf of the District, you may not discuss the matter unless otherwise permitted in writing by the administrator in charge of the matter.
- d. Document who you notified, where and when and what you reported for your own records.

### **What if the Person Is a Friend?**

If the person engaging in the boundary invasion or misconduct is a friend, it is still necessary to report the conduct to protect students, yourself and the friend. Sometimes an employee ends up getting too close to a student without originally intending anything sexual. Eventually an opportunity may present itself for something unprofessional to occur, and the employee may make a career ending mistake which hurts the employee, the employee's family, and the student. Reporting boundary invasions early on to administration helps to prevent such problems from developing.