Healthy Boundaries in Electronic Communications

Learning Objectives:

1) **To establish personal boundaries for various forms of electronic communications**

2) **To identify behavior that is inappropriate or "out of bounds" in various forms of electronic communication**

In the *Called to Protect*^{TM} video, you learned about three types of boundaries. What were they? (Physical, Emotional, Behavioral)

What about when you are communicating with someone, but not face-to-face? It's a little bit different, right? Have you ever noticed how people are usually more willing to say certain things in a text or an email that they would not say to a person's face?

How do we understand our boundaries in those situations? What kind of boundaries should you have when communicating in these ways? Is it easier or more difficult to draw the line?

Activity: Out of Bounds!

Divide the youths into small groups of 3-4. Assign each group a form of communication:

- **Email**
- **Social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace, etc.)**
- **Texting**
- **Chat rooms**
- **File sharing**
- **Gaming (Xbox Live, etc.)**
- **Other forms that the group identifies as relevant.**

For each form of communication, have the youths discuss the questions on the Activity Sheet and create a poster that maps out the boundaries for the form of communication.

Have each group present their findings to the larger group.

Wrap-up

In today's world, there are so many ways to communicate with others. It is easy to reach people anytime and anywhere, but we need to remain aware of the potential hazards in any form of communication. Remaining conscious of your boundaries, and mindful of how easy it is to violate others' boundaries, is an important part of maintaining healthy relationships.

Resources

Internet Tips for Teens **– a resource from the Crimes against Children Research Center (attached)**

Activity Sheet: Out Of Bounds!

Type of Communication: _____

Definition: _____

Under what circumstances do you choose this type of communication over other forms of communication?

_____

_____

With whom do you communicate this way?

_____

_____

How often do you communicate this way?

_____

_____

What kinds of things do you share this way?

_____

_____

What is "out of bounds" in this type of communication?

_____

_____

Have you ever been in a situation where this form of communication "backfired" or had a negative consequence?

_____

_____

What are some good rules for using this type of communication in ways that protect your boundaries?

_____

_____

What are some good rules for using this type of communication in ways that protect others' boundaries?

_____

_____

Resource: Internet Tips for Teens

SOURCE: Crimes against Children Research Center, Univ. of NH

1) Be smart about what you post on the Web and what you say to others. The Web is a lot more public and permanent than it seems.

2) Provocative and sexy names and pictures can draw attention from people you don't want in your life.

3) Sexy pictures can get you into trouble with the law. If you are underage, they may be considered child pornography, a serious crime.

4) Be careful what you download or look at, even for a laugh. Some of the images on the Internet are extreme, and you can't "unsee" something.

5) Going to sex chat rooms and other sex sites may connect you with people who can harass you in ways you don't anticipate.

6) Free downloads and file-sharing can put pornography on your computer that you may not want and can be hard to get rid of. Any pornography that shows children or teens under 18 is illegal child pornography and can get you in big trouble.

7) Adults who talk to you about sex online are committing a crime. So are adults who meet underage teens for sex. Some teens think it might be fun, harmless or romantic, but it means serious trouble for everyone. It's best to report it.

8) Don't play along with people on the Web who are acting badly, taking risks and being weird. Even if you think it's harmless and feel like you can handle it, it only encourages them and may endanger other young people.

9) Report it when other people are acting weird and inappropriately or harassing you or others. It's less trouble just to log off, but these people may be dangerous. Save the communication. Contact the site management, your service provider, the CyberTipline or even the police.

10) Don't let friends influence your better judgment. If you are surfing with other kids, don't let them pressure you to do things you ordinarily wouldn't.

11) Be careful if you ever go to meet someone you have gotten to know through the Internet. You may think you know them well, but they may fool you. Go with a friend. Tell your parents. Meet in a public place. Make sure your have your cell phone and an exit plan.

12) Don't harass others. People may retaliate in ways you don't expect.

13) You can overestimate your ability to handle things. It may feel like you are careful, savvy, aware of dangers, and able to manage the risks you take, but there are always unknowns. Don't risk disasters.

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