

Standards and Boundaries When Working With Children

The Safe Environment program is for employees/volunteers who work with or around, children, youth, or vulnerable people. As such, Criminal Record Checks are mandatory for all Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas employees, parish employees/volunteers and volunteers that may come into contact with these groups. The form for these checks will be given to all new staff, which may work with these groups, and will be updated every five years. The form for these checks can be obtained from the Diocesan Office.

Introduction

At the Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas, we are committed to providing a safe and secure spiritual and educational environment for everyone in our community

The Standards and Boundaries were written with the intent to:

- ❖ To clarify expectations. Sometimes it is hard for employees/volunteers to know what exactly to do in a situation. This will be a great tool in dealing with those awkward times. If employees/volunteers know what is expected from everyone it can help them make their decisions more quickly and more comfortably.
- ❖ This will also strengthen the existing professional relationships between children/youth and employees/volunteers. When people know what is expected of them, they can offer better support and service. The better the service, the better the professional relationship.
- ❖ The Standards and Boundaries document will also help protect our children/youth and our staff. The children/youth will be protected as everyone in the community will be able to notice the signs that something is not right and will be able to step in if the need arises. It will help protect staff legally because, if followed correctly, our actions will not be able to be misinterpreted by anyone. We will be beyond reproach.

There is a power imbalance in any professional relationship. This is seen the most in working with children/youth, due to the age gap between the child/youth and the adult. We hold a position of authority and trust in relation to the children/youth. This type of power imbalance makes it awkward if not difficult for the children/youth to recognize or defend themselves against us. Children/youth may be unaware of the need for these boundaries and may at times even start behaviour or make requests of us that could constitute boundary violations.

We must always act in a manner that withstands scrutiny. Being “under the microscope” is a very real part of working with or near children/youth. By knowing and using these standards and boundaries, we will help to protect ourselves from false allegations and suspicions. Unfortunately, these can and do occur. By using these standards and boundaries as a tool in your dealings with children/youth, you can help reduce your risk to this.

Professional Standards

There are ten Standards to be mindful of.

1. Respect the dignity and well-being of all children/youth.
 - ❖ Ensure that all children/youth are spoken to in a respectful and age appropriate manner.
2. Exercise standard of care
 - ❖ The standard of care expected of employees/volunteers is that of a reasonably careful parent in the same circumstances.
3. Work together: obligations to the professional community
 - ❖ Our employees/volunteers support one another. While we may often work independently, we must keep in mind that we create a stronger and more responsible community when we work as members of a team to share the care of children/youth.
4. Act on suspicion of boundary violations
 - ❖ You all must act on any concerns you have regarding the well-being of a child/youth.
5. Maintain known, visible, and supported interaction
 - ❖ Any contact between employees/volunteers and children/youth must always be known to, supported by and visible to others. If a private conversation needs to take place, move out of hearing of others, but preferably not out of sight.
6. Use positive discipline and management
 - ❖ You must use age appropriate techniques and discipline that respect the dignity and well-being of children/youth.
7. Follow procedures and guidelines for supervision
 - ❖ You must follow all procedures and guidelines for the care and supervision of children/youth at all times. This includes overnight and extended trips.
8. Observe one's legal responsibility to report
 - ❖ If you suspect or are told about any physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, the law says you have a legal "duty to report". If you have a reasonable suspicion or concern about the actions of any staff member, volunteer, adult, or caregiver, you have a duty to report it to the Archdiocese.
9. Respond to emergencies
 - ❖ Emergencies happen. First, make sure that the injured children/youth is properly cared for, depending on the situation. Next, make sure that any other children/youth in your care are supervised safely and responsibly. Ensure that you inform the Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas of the situation and of what you are doing, even if the situation is under control.
10. Maintain professional propriety at all times
 - ❖ In recent court cases, it has been determined that due to the authority and trust you hold, employees/volunteers can be held liable for their judgment and actions outside of planned activities. Staff members need to keep in mind this ever-present standard.

Boundaries

Boundaries are “limits or restrictions” to actions that serve to prevent the relationship from being adversely affected and are critical to maintaining the professional integrity of the relationship with children/youth.

There are six (6) Boundaries:

1. Prohibited Conduct

- ❖ Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas employees/volunteers cannot engage in any the following:
 - Sexual relations or sexual intercourse with a child/youth.
 - Any form of sexual touching of a child/youth.
 - Any sexual contact including behaviour or remarks of a sexual nature, regardless of the age of the child/youth or any apparent consent by the child/youth.
 - Sexual harassment or discrimination against a student.
 - Attempts to establish a sexual relationship with a child/youth, such as sending intimate letters, emails, or Internet messages, making telephone calls of a personal nature, socializing, or dating.

There may be forms of professional misconduct that do not fall within the definition of sexual abuse, but which may be considered sexual misconduct and constitute professional misconduct. These behaviours may include sexual harassment and sexual relationships with children/youth or any conduct, which may lead to an unprofessional and inappropriate relationship with a child/youth. This is often called grooming behaviour. It is inciting a child to gain your trust and then abusing that trust.

Employees/volunteers are also prohibited from harassment of any other kind including, but not limited to:

- ❖ Humiliation, demeaning language, ridicule, personal attacks, breach of privacy, humour that is offensive on the basis of race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, or disability

2. “Touch” Boundary.

- ❖ Touching is human, especially as an expression of care with younger children. However, inappropriate touching is or may be harmful to the integrity of the child/youth. Never touch a child/youth in a way that is unwanted or that might make the child/youth feel uncomfortable; that you would not do in the presence of other employees/volunteers; or that is not supportive of positive adult relationships with child/youth. Sexual touching or invitation to sexual touching is strictly prohibited. If a child/youth is injured in your care, always be sure to ask them if it is okay to touch them before picking them up or caring for the injured area.

3. Personal Boundary

- ❖ Relationships with children/youth are friendly, but they are not our friends. We must keep in mind that friends are those people whom we consider as equals and who share common goals, desires, and interests. The nature of our responsibility creates and requires a professional “distance” that must always be maintained. The responsibility for ensuring that this boundary is respected rests with the employee/volunteers and not with the child/youth. Disclosing personal or intimate information to a group of children/youth outside of planned activities also violates the boundary. When communicating to children/youth or parents electronically we should use the Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas approved channels like Outlook e-mails. Personal Facebook, Twitter, or other social networking sites like it are not the place to communicate with children/youth. We can use these sites to get information out, such as Church events or activities, but we should not use them to have written conversations. These types of sites are called

“Social Networking” sites and we should not use them to socialize with children/youth. Please also watch your privacy settings on these sites. In many cases, you should not add anything to your site that you would not like to see posted in your church or office.

4. Secrecy Boundary.

- ❖ Secrecy in a relationship with a child/youth is a boundary violation. One-on-one interactions with children/youth must be known to, supported by and preferably visible to others, to protect the dignity of the children/youth, and to prevent the appearance of misconduct. Secrecy is different from confidentiality. For our purposes, secrecy is defined as a condition designed to conceal or hide a specific activity usually for an illicit or unauthorized purpose and often is motivated by the fear of being discovered. Confidentiality on the other hand conceals information and bona fide activities due to professional and/or legal obligations and is motivated by respect for others.

5. Socializing Boundary

- ❖ Employees/volunteers should not organize or attend unsanctioned social events or meetings with a children/youth, unless sanctioned by the Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas in accordance with governing policy and procedures. Socializing in this manner undermines the professional relationship and invites the appearance of misconduct. Chance meetings in public places and invitations by families to social events are unavoidable, and good judgment should be exercised in such situations, be friendly and courteous, and always mindful of one’s professional authority and responsibility.

6. Privacy Boundary

- ❖ Circumstances commonly occur where there is a reasonable expectation of personal privacy for children/youth, particularly when a child/youth is in the care of the Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas or involved in activities. Such activities include overnight trips and events, and they require that employees/volunteers take appropriate measures to supervise the children/youth in their care. However, they also require a greater level of responsibility, trust, and diligence in recognizing situations that require respect for privacy. In the course of supervising these activities, employees/volunteers must refrain from putting themselves in a situation in which they are alone with a child/youth in a setting which is reasonably considered to be private. Such settings may include a bathing facility, change room, hotel room, and tent. In any such instance, it is expected that employees/volunteers act in a manner that withstands scrutiny.

Guidelines for Preventing Boundary Violations

Scrutiny and ongoing collegial support are the best guarantees against actions that may lead to the compromise of standards and the violation of boundaries.

There are three guidelines for preventing boundary violations.

- ❖ Act in a Manner That Withstands Scrutiny. Employee/volunteers actions need to pass the test of scrutiny on four levels:
 - Scrutiny by self: your conduct must satisfy your own professional standards
 - Scrutiny by a reasonable observer: a parent or other reasonable observer would not have suspicions about your conduct
 - Scrutiny by the test of law: your conduct is within the standards and direction of all legislation
 - Scrutiny by the Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas: your conduct meets our standards, practices, and regulations

- ❖ Know your limits
 - Children/youth need to feel that they are supported by adults, and employees/volunteers play an important role in the development of children/youth in their care. From time to time when they are in distress, children/youth may seek your support and disclose personal information. The children/youth needs to know that the law requires employees/volunteers to report disclosures of abuse, and to take immediate action if the children/youth's safety or the safety of others is at risk. In other situations where you are concerned about the child/youth welfare or state of mind, inform, and seek guidance from a colleague, counselor or administrator. This can be done without breaching confidentiality and trust.
- ❖ Work as a team
 - Employees/volunteers are responsible to one another for the shared care of children and for the professional integrity of the community. Cooperation and support among colleagues help to ensure that good judgment prevails to prevent the incidence or appearance of boundary violations.

Guidelines for Responding to Boundary Violations

It is an Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas standard that employees/volunteers will always respond when there is a reasonable concern of a boundary violation.

Do not ignore or fail to respond to the situation.

- ❖ Clarify your doubt or concern: would a reasonable observer familiar with Standards and Boundaries share your concern?
- ❖ Consider testing your concern by consulting in confidence a trusted colleague or priest.
- ❖ Talk with the colleague whose conduct concerns you, identify and discuss the nature of your concern, and offer support, advice, and direction.

Serious boundary violations always call for more formal intervention. These include:

- ❖ Serious violations of standards, procedures and practices that are in place to protect children in our care and to maintain professional and institutional integrity,
- ❖ Concern about a pattern or the possibility of a pattern of misconduct and boundary violation,
- ❖ Concern about a single serious act of misconduct or boundary violation,
- ❖ Disregard of advice and direction offered.

In a case of a reasonable concern about such a serious boundary violation:

- ❖ Do not ignore or fail to respond to a concern.
- ❖ Inform the Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas promptly.
- ❖ The person to whom disclosure is made will take the necessary actions to investigate and to respond appropriately.

Questions to Consider

In some cases, boundary issues may pose dilemmas for an employee/volunteer and there may be no clear or obvious answer.

In determining how to proceed, the following questions may be helpful:

- ❖ Is this in the child/youth's best interest?
- ❖ Whose needs are being met by my actions?
- ❖ Will this have a negative impact on the service I am delivering?
- ❖ Should I make note of my concerns or consult with a colleague?
- ❖ How would the children/youth's family view this?
- ❖ How would I feel telling a colleague about this?
- ❖ Am I treating this child/youth differently from other children/youth for their benefit or mine? (i.e. spending a disproportionate amount of time with a child/youth)?
- ❖ Would my action or intervention make me uncomfortable if I were in the child/youth's place?
- ❖ How would others judge my behaviour?
- ❖ Would I feel uncomfortable if another employee/volunteer were to do the same thing to my own child or to a child in my family?