



Overview

Summary

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are harmed by sexual assault more often than others. They are usually harmed by someone they know. This can include family members and other people with IDD. It can include support staff. It is hard to set and keep clear boundaries with the different people in our lives. Some things make it even harder:

- Others use words and actions that don't match their relationship. They may try to convince others to cross a boundary.
- A person wants friendship so much that they ignore safe boundaries. Others may take advantage of this.

We stay safe by learning what healthy boundaries look like. We must also learn to keep boundaries strong. To keep from being harmed, we must watch for the signs of crossed boundaries. We must also know what to do when boundaries are crossed.

You can use this toolkit in many ways.

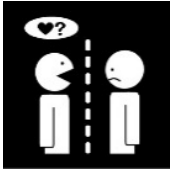

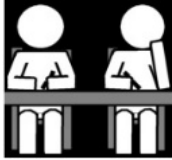


- You learn on your own.
- You can learn with your family or others who support you.
- You can learn with other self-advocates.



Safe Boundaries Toolkit


Vocabulary

This is a list of words we use in the toolkit. Read it before you start working the activities. If you don't understand one or more of the words, ask someone you trust for help. If you're working in a group, talk about each word together.

Word	Picture	Definition
Boundary		The line between what's okay and not okay between two people. A person's words and actions may not match the relationship. If that happens, the person has crossed a boundary.
Grooming		When a person plans ahead to harm someone. They might pretend to be a friend or romantic partner. They build trust. They know that a person is less likely to report harm done by someone they trust.
Professional Relationship		People who work together. You may high-five or shake hands. You usually don't hug. You never kiss, touch each other sexually, or have sex.
Friendly Relationship		Caring friends who support each other. You may hug or hold hands. You do not kiss, touch each other sexually, or have sex.
Romantic Relationship		Beyond friendship. You may have long hugs and kiss. It may lead to a sexual relationship. Both people understand and agree to this.



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Word	Picture	Definition
Sexual Relationship	 A black and white illustration of two stylized human figures in a sexual relationship. One figure is lying on a bed, and the other is leaning over them.	Beyond a romantic relationship. You touch each other sexually. You may have sexual intercourse. Both people understand and agree to this.

Symbols used/adapted from: www.sclera.be



Staying Safe & Healthy

Many people with IDD have been harmed by sexual assault. Some don't want others to know. Some do. Some don't realize it happened to them until they start talking about it. Some survivors get upset when they hear and talk about sexuality. They relive the bad things that happened to them. This can be painful. It can happen suddenly.

It's important to talk about sexuality. It's also important to keep everyone safe and healthy. Use these rules when you work on this toolkit.

Plan Ahead

- Read these rules. Share them with people you work with on this toolkit.
- Have a safe space ready. That could be a Zoom breakout room. It could be a place away from where you are talking. Tell people where it is. Tell them they can use it whenever they need. They do not need to ask permission.

Watch for Triggers

- A trigger is something that makes a person remember past harm. You can sometimes see when this happens.
- Watch faces and bodies. You may see signs of anger, fear, or sadness.
- A person may fidget. They may get up and try to leave. They may rock or hug their arms to themselves.
- Sometimes, you can't tell at all from the outside.

Give Support

- You might see someone struggling. Ask if they need a break.
- Someone might share something personal. It might be upsetting. Don't judge. Instead, use words of support:

“I believe you.”

“You are brave to share this.”



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“It is not your fault.”

“I care about you.”

“I’m sorry this happened to you.”

“I am here to help.”

Follow Up

- Check in after you work on the toolkit. Check in more than once.
- Share good resources like:
 - National Sexual Assault Hotline:
800.656.HOPE (4673)
[RAINN Online Hotline-English](https://hotline.rainn.org) (https://hotline.rainn.org)
[RAINN Online Hotline-Spanish](https://hotline.rainn.org/es) (https://hotline.rainn.org/es)
 - Your local rape crisis center. [Find a list at RAINN](https://centers.rainn.org) (https://centers.rainn.org).
 - Some self-care activities [Find some at RAINN](https://rainn.org/articles/self-care-after-trauma) (https://rainn.org/articles/self-care-after-trauma)



Schedule

There are three modules in the Safe Boundaries Toolkit. You don't have to do them all at once. You can do them in three 30-minute blocks.

Block 1: What Are Boundaries?

1. Think Ahead, 5 min.
2. Watch the Video, 5 min.
3. Talk About It, 20 min.

Block 2: Teaching & Learning Boundaries

1. Think Ahead, 5 min.
2. Watch the Video, 5 min.
3. Use the Role-Play, 20 min.

Block 3: Crossing Boundaries

1. Think Ahead, 5 min.
2. Watch the Video, 5 min.
3. Use the Checklist, 20 min.



What Are Boundaries?

Think Ahead

We all have different boundaries. Some people like to touch and be touched. Some do not. Some people use loving names for everyone, like “sweetie” or “honey.” Some only use those names for people they know well.

Physical touch or loving words that don’t match your relationship can be confusing. They can cause pain to people who have been hurt in the past. They can make people think it’s OK to cross boundaries, too. This creates small and large problems.

Talking honestly about healthy boundaries helps us all. We learn to think or ask before we speak or act. We learn that it’s OK to talk about uncomfortable things.

Before you watch the video, read the vocabulary list. Talk about any confusing words.

Watch the Video

- Watch [What Are Boundaries](https://youtu.be/LdZkQufoQOo?si=sD-LbUHbLy-rOiAC) on YouTube.
(<https://youtu.be/LdZkQufoQOo?si=sD-LbUHbLy-rOiAC>)
- Remember to follow the rules for staying safe and healthy.



Talk About It

Think and talk about the questions below. Watch for signs of past harm. Remind everyone that it's OK to:

- Take a break.
- Walk away or leave the group.
- Ask to talk with someone privately about what they are feeling.

1. How do your words change with different people in your life?

- What names do you use with people you work with?
- What names do you use with your friends?
- What names do you use with your boyfriend or girlfriend?

2. How does your physical touch change with different people in your life?

- What kinds of touch do you use with your family? Do you also use them with your friends?
- What kinds of touch do you use with your friends? Do you also use them with people at work or school?

3. Has someone ever used words or touch that crossed your boundary?

- How did it make you feel?
- Do you think they knew they were crossing your boundary?
- Did you tell them they crossed a boundary? Why or why not?

4. Have you ever used words or touch that crossed a boundary?

- How did you know you had done that?
- What happened because you did that?

5. How can you keep from crossing boundaries with people you know?



Teaching & Learning Boundaries

Think Ahead

Knowing our own and others' boundaries keeps us safe and healthy. We can make sure people treat us with respect. We can recognize people who might want to harm us.

We can also keep from crossing the boundaries of others. They will feel safe and comfortable with us. It will keep bad things from happening. We all make mistakes. But it's important to fix them in a positive way.

Before you watch the video, read the vocabulary list. Talk about any confusing words.

Watch the Video

- Watch [Teaching Boundaries](https://youtu.be/4TtzqYTS5zI?si=ww2VmwaCU0HZgBNP) on YouTube.
(<https://youtu.be/4TtzqYTS5zI?si=ww2VmwaCU0HZgBNP>)
- Remember to follow the rules for staying safe and healthy.



Use the Role-Play

Roleplay 1: When Someone Crosses Your Boundary

Read the role play out loud. Do the role-play with different volunteers. Then answer the questions.

Aide: Hi sweetie! I haven't seen you in a while. Give me a big hug!

Self-Advocate: I don't want a hug.

Aide: Now honey, it's just my way. I hug everyone!

Self-Advocate: I'm not OK with that.

Aide: Aren't we friends?

Self-Advocate: We are friendly. But we work together. And I don't want a hug.

Please respect my boundary.

Aide: I didn't realize. I'll try to do better.

Self-Advocate: Thank you!

Questions:

- Has anyone tried to hug you when you did not want to? What did you do or say?
- How do you like to greet friends? Family? People you don't know well?
- What if you don't know how someone wants to be greeted? How can you know for sure?
- Were the self-advocate's words respectful?
- How did the aide respond to that respect?



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- How can role-play help you plan ahead in case this happens to you?

Roleplay 2: When You Cross Someone's Boundary

Read the role play out loud. Do the role-play with different volunteers. Then answer the questions.

Self-Advocate: Hi. I'm new to this advocacy group.

Group Member: Hi. Do you have a boyfriend?

Self-Advocate: No...

Group Member: Give me your phone number. I want to text you. I will be your boyfriend.

Self-Advocate: I don't know you. That makes me really uncomfortable.

Group Member: Don't you want to be my girlfriend?

Self-Advocate: I don't think I want to come to this group anymore.

Group Member: Why?

Self-Advocate: You crossed a boundary. I don't feel comfortable here.

Group Member: I'm sorry. I made a mistake. How can I fix it?

Self-Advocate: Please don't talk about romantic stuff to me.

Group Member: OK. I won't. I'm really sorry.

Discussion Questions:

- Why did the self-advocate almost leave the group?
- Has anyone ever made you feel like this? What happened?
- Have you ever made someone else feel like this? What happened?



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- Were the self-advocate's words respectful?
- How did the group member respond to that respect?
- How can role-play help you plan ahead in case this happens to you?



Crossing Boundaries

Think Ahead

Most people are harmed by people they know. This could include family members. It could include other people with IDD. It could include support staff. Often, these people groom their victims. That means they plan ahead to harm the person. They may offer gifts. They may offer friendship. They may convince the person that they are a romantic partner.

That's why setting and keeping clear boundaries is important. People know exactly what the relationship is. They know when something happens that is not right for that relationship. They know when a person crosses their boundary.

Before you watch the video, read the vocabulary list. Talk about any confusing words.

Watch the Video

- Watch [Crossing Boundaries](https://youtu.be/xyZZEVUcgyI?si=h_eSfujmZS6e1C-K) on YouTube.
(https://youtu.be/xyZZEVUcgyI?si=h_eSfujmZS6e1C-K)
- Remember to follow the rules for staying safe and healthy.



Use the Checklist

The checklist helps you avoid crossing boundaries. Read each item. If you are working alone, think about it. If you are working in a group, talk about it.

- Why is it important?
- Is this something you already do?
- Can you think of other examples?

Watch for signs of past harm. Remind everyone that it's OK to:

- Take a break.
- Walk away or leave the group.
- Ask to talk with someone privately about what they are feeling.

Healthy Boundaries Checklist

1. Set Ground Rules

- ✓ Tell people what kind of relationship you have. Be specific. For example, “You’re my friend. We don’t have a romantic relationship.”
- ✓ Be clear about the use of touch. For example, you might make a new friend. You might say, “It’s OK to high five. But please don’t hug me.”
- ✓ Practice what to say if a boundary is crossed. For example, someone might call you “honey.” That might make you uncomfortable. You could say, “Please don’t call me “honey.” We don’t know each other well enough for that.”

2. Match Words to Relationship

- ✓ Greet people in ways that match your relationship. For example, you might have a new aide. Use their title and last name (Mr. Jones). After a while or if they say it’s okay, you may use their first name (Jeff).



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- ✓ Use words that match your relationship. For example, some people use “sweetie” or “buddy” for people they don’t know. Those words might be confusing. The person might think you mean that you are romantic or that your relationship is closer than it is.
- ✓ Use touch that matches your relationship. For example, you might celebrate someone’s victory. Offer a high five instead of a hug. If you ask for a hug and the person does not want one, respect that.

3. Be an Ally

- ✓ Help everyone set healthy boundaries. For example, a new person might join your group. Talk about roles and behavior. “Brian is new to our group. Brian, what do you want people to call you? Are you OK with high fives?”
- ✓ Watch for others crossing boundaries. If you see something that doesn’t seem right, ask the person. For example, “I saw Angela hug you. Was that OK with you? Do you want help asking her not to do that?” Or talk to the other person. For example, “We don’t call people sweetie. It makes them uncomfortable.”
- ✓ Trust your gut. People with IDD are more likely to be harmed by sexual assault than others. If you think someone might be crossing a boundary, do or say something about it.

4. Have a Plan and Use It

- ✓ Crossing boundaries can be an early sign of trouble. It might mean a person is planning to harm someone. Make a plan for what to do when boundaries are first crossed. The plan should focus on keeping people safe.



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- ✓ Share the plan with everyone. Include self-advocates and all people who work with them. Let everyone ask questions and make suggestions.
- ✓ Follow the plan. Make sure that everyone knows you will follow the plan. Then make sure you do when something happens.



For More Information

Visit [Seen and Heard: IDD Community](https://www.youtube.com/@SeenHeardIDD) (<https://www.youtube.com/@SeenHeardIDD>) on YouTube. You will find more videos about this topic. You will find videos about related topics.

Credit

This toolkit was developed by [Strategic Education Solutions](https://www.strategicsolutions.com) (<https://www.strategicsolutions.com>) in partnership with [UMass Chan Medical School](https://www.umassmed.edu) (<https://www.umassmed.edu>).

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