



## Social Media and Appropriate Boundaries

Grooming and boundary violations may take place in person, but these days there is often an online component. Beware of these common tactics used by adults who contact minors via electronic means:

- Act like a teen or pretend to be a minor themselves
- Frequent sites that children and young people enjoy
- Send private messages through applications such as Snap Chat, Kik, etc.
- Request pictures (which may be used to blackmail the child)
- Encourage the child to disobey or disregard parents' rules
- Show pornography to minors



One main reason teens fail to report inappropriate social media contacts to their parents is because they fear that their parents will punish them by taking away their phones.

## Action Steps for Parents and Concerned Adults

How can you help to prevent your children from being victims? Here are some tips:

### Talk with your children about appropriate boundaries

- Let them know that they can come to you if a situation makes them uncomfortable
- Explain the information in this guide to them so that they are aware of methods used by those who wish to take advantage of them
- Check their social media accounts to make sure they do not disclose personal information or post/send inappropriate photos
- Help them to understand that when using social media, they should not befriend people whom they do not know. Unfortunately, adults often pose as teens in their quest to lure and groom young people
- Because research shows that teens often tell a friend rather than a parent, coach your children to tell a trusted adult if their friend discloses to them inappropriate behavior by an adult or online "friend"
- Let your children know that you will not punish them if they report suspicious or inappropriate behavior.

### Model appropriate boundaries

- If a young child does not want to hug or kiss someone, don't force it
- Teach them about the private parts of their body
- Do not share your son or daughter's cell phone number with unrelated adults such as teachers, coaches, or youth ministers
- Be careful about posting personal or private information online, including photos
- Speak up if you notice that an adult appears to be violating appropriate boundaries. Report any concerns to the pastor, principal, or the adult's supervisor.

Visit the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's website for resources and information on reporting:  
[www.catholiccincinnati.org](http://www.catholiccincinnati.org)

# Appropriate Boundaries

*A Guide for Parents*





## What are boundaries?

Boundaries are limits...lines that should not be crossed. When adults observe appropriate boundaries with minors, it helps to create a healthy and safe environment for children and youth.

Displaying appropriate boundaries means:

- Interacting with children and youth as a professional rather than as a peer or friend
- Respecting others' personal space: not being intrusive or domineering
- Recognizing the limits of one's role (e.g., a teacher is not a counselor; a coach is not a social media friend, and a club advisor is not a confidante)
- Recognizing that parents are the most important adults in their children's lives

**Grooming:** When an adult violates boundaries with a minor, an unhealthy relationship may be formed. Boundary violations are also part of the process known as "grooming," whereby offenders seek to gain a young person's trust (and often the trust of other adults) in order to satisfy their own personal needs. Grooming may lead to sexual abuse.

## Healthy vs. Unhealthy Adult-Child Relationships

**Healthy relationships** are based upon trust, mutual caring, and respect. Appropriate boundaries are very important when it comes to adult-minor relationships. In healthy adult-minor relationships, the adult serves as a role model, adheres to rules, respects the minor and his/her parents, and does not play favorites.

**Unhealthy Relationships:** Sometimes, adults veer from the path of healthy relationship development and violate physical, emotional, or behavioral boundaries. Although a single instance involving crossing a boundary may occur inadvertently or due to naivety, a pattern of boundary violations may indicate that an unhealthy and potentially abusive relationship is being formed through the process known as "grooming."

## Signs of Grooming

Some signs that an adult may be grooming a minor are when an adult:

- Develops an excessively familiar relationship with the minor (acts like a friend)
- Contacts the youth via social media or for reasons not related to church or school
- Touches, hugs, kisses, tickles, or wrestles with minors
- Is emotionally manipulative
- Violates established rules and/or encourages the minor to break rules
- Treats a minor as "special" or a "favorite" and/or gives them gifts
- Shares personal information with minors, such as sexual history or personal problems
- Is excessively helpful/available
- Encourages the minor to keep secrets