

## Supporting Boundaries

This activity provides guidelines for direct support professionals (DSPs) and the individuals they support as they identify and work within their professional and personal boundaries.

### Types of Boundaries

**Personal boundaries** are the individual limits held between you and another person. All healthy relationships require respect for each other’s personal boundaries. DSPs can work together with people supported to interact in comfortable and safe ways that can foster relationships of mutual respect.

**Physical boundaries:** DSPs may have to support individuals with bathing, dressing, or other kinds of personal hygiene care. Knowing how to practice and model healthy physical boundaries they can help individuals learn to avoid abuse in other relationships.

### Tips for DSPs to Build Healthy Boundaries

This tip list is adapted from the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services.

Main Point	How You Can Better Support
A friendly DSP is different from a friend.	Follow individual service plans and company policies so everyone involved has clear expectations.
Sharing work-related information on personal social media is potentially illegal.	Keep information about all people supported private.
Model socially appropriate greetings with individuals you support.	Use handshakes, high-fives, or pats on the shoulder. Always ask permission before touching or hugging someone.
Do not give or lend money, clothing, or personal items to or from those you work with.	If the individuals you support need help, find resources or trustworthy people that they could ask.
Be respectful of other people’s religious, political, and social beliefs.	Keep your personal beliefs private when you’re working.
Use care when speaking about job duties and co-workers.	Focus on the positives while you’re at work. Your focus is to support the individual in need.
You shouldn’t talk about work issues with the individual you support.	Find support at your agency to deal with work issues that may impede your ability to provide support to individual.

## Respecting Boundaries: Developing a Person-Centered Profile

Every person has their own personal preferences and values. There are general guidelines to respecting a person's boundaries, but the individuals you support may have additional boundaries that they want respected.

For example, someone may not feel comfortable having their back touched. This may be due to having had back surgery or experiencing back pain, but it could also just be a personal preference. Whatever the reason, this boundary should be respected.

Read the example person-centered support profile for "Annie Zample" (a fake name) to see how you can incorporate an individual's personal boundaries into a support profile. Building this profile together can help prevent unhealthy or confusing support relationships.

You can assist individuals supported, as needed, in filling out the blank template on the following page.

### **Tip: Boundaries are a "two-way street"**

Boundaries are a two-way street; both individuals should respect each other's boundaries. It may be helpful for support staff to define their boundaries as well, by using this profile activity or in another way.

### **Tip: This activity can be used for multiple places**

Each individual's support needs and boundaries may differ based on where they are. It may be helpful to create different profile for these different places, such as at home, at the hospital, or at my day program. Customize the profile activity as needed!

## Additional Resources:

- From Washington State:  
<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/DDA/dda/documents/1163/Chapter%201%20RSC%204%20toolkit%204-2-15.pdf>
- Dave Hingsburger has many resources on the Ethics of Touch and boundaries in DSP relationships with individuals with developmental disabilities:  
<https://www.openfuturelearning.org/blog/index.php/category/dave-hingsburger/>

## Annie Zample's Personal Profile

### What People Appreciate About Me

- My creativity in making crafts
- My laugh
- My helping my grandmother

### What Is Important to Me (my interests, my values)

- Watching movies
- Hanging out with my friends
- Having time to myself to read my books in my room
- Going to church with my grandmother
- Doing things by myself

### How to Support Me

- Ask me my opinions and then listen
- Ask me before you touch my body
- Don't do things that I can do for myself

#### Respecting My Boundaries

- I am OK with high fives, but not hugs
- I don't like people touching my back
- Don't come in my room unless I invite you

\_\_\_\_\_ 's Personal Profile

What People Appreciate  
About Me

What Is Important to Me  
(my interests, my values)

How to Support Me

Respecting My  
Boundaries