

# Institutional Norms Exercise

*For agencies serving young children*

The following questions can be used to start discussions among staff in child serving institutions as a tool for management to communicate the policies and procedures in place to promote appropriate boundaries. These answers will change with the age of the children being served, the formality of the institution and the experience of the staff.

Detail on these and related topics can be found in *The Sex-Wise Parent*, (Skyhorse, 2012) Chapter 6.

**What terms will we use with kids about all body parts? How and when will you use them?**

*Discussion point:* Children need words for genitalia easily understood by others.

**Will we have a dress code for both staff and students?**

*Discussion point:* Privacy, modesty, self-respect

**When will we let a child toilet by himself?**

*Discussion points:* Privacy, modesty, safety.

**How will we react to hugging and kissing?**

*Discussion points:* Control over their own body, choice, respect.

**What will we do when a child's curiosity leads him to touch your body?**

*Discussion points:* Privacy, role-modeling setting boundaries gently but firmly.

**How will we react when we see a child touching his or her genitalia?**

*Discussion points:* Autonomic arousal, avoid associating sexual pleasure with fear/guilt/shame.

**How can we support a child's enjoyment of all her senses: the taste of food, the smell of a beloved person, the feel of fabric, the warmth of human touch?**

*Discussion points:* Healthy sexuality is positive, wonderful and life affirming; too many parents only discuss the dangers and kids deserve a balanced perspective.

Once a child serving agency has clarified their values on these issues, these positions should be codified into policies and procedures and shared with all staff and parents.

Like any policy, it should be reviewed annually.

# Institutional Norms Exercise

*For schools and agencies serving adolescents and teens*

The following questions can be used to start discussions among staff in child serving institutions as a tool for management to communicate the policies and procedures in place to promote appropriate boundaries. These answers will change with the age of the children being served, the formality of the institution and the experience of the staff.

Detail on these and related topics can be found in *The Sex-Wise Parent*, (Skyhorse, 2012) Chapter 6.

## **What terms will we use with kids about all body parts? How and when will you use them?**

*Discussion point:* Children and youth need words for genitalia easily understood by others; they deserve the opportunity to hear these words used appropriately and without negative affect.

## **Will we have a dress code for both staff and students?**

*Discussion point:* Privacy, modesty, self-respect, personal boundaries, roles

## **How do we monitor safety in bathrooms and locker rooms?**

*Discussion points:* Privacy, modesty, safety; poor impulse control among adolescents

## **How will we react to hugging and kissing?**

*Discussion points:* Public displays of affection, consent, developing good judgment, impulse control

## **What will we do when we notice a student with a crush on a teacher?**

*Discussion points:* Adolescent development, faculty boundaries

## **What will we do if we find a teacher sharing social media with students?**

*Discussion points:* Roles and boundaries!

## **How will we react when we see a child touching his or her genitalia?**

*Discussion points:* Autonomic arousal, avoid associating sexual pleasure with fear/guilt/shame.

## **How can we support a child's enjoyment of all her senses: the taste of food, the smell of a beloved person, the feel of fabric, the warmth of human touch?**

*Discussion points:* Healthy sexuality is positive, and life affirming. Too often, kids only hear about dangers and they deserve a balanced perspective from trusted, reliable sources.

Once a youth serving agency or school has clarified their values on these issues, these positions should be codified into policies and procedures and shared with all staff and parents.

Like any policy, it should be reviewed annually.

## Family Norms Exercise

The following questions can be used to start discussions in parent education groups, or be given to couples to discuss. The goal is to encourage people to articulate the norms they wish to set for their family. Encourage families to pick a date for an annual family and sexuality values talk – maybe start a new Valentine’s Day tradition!

**What terms will you use to teach your kids about all of their (and your) body parts? How and when will you use them?**

Discussion point: Children need words for genitalia easily understood by others.

**Will you have a dress code?**

Discussion points: Privacy, modesty, self-respect, personal choice vs. fads.

**When will you let your child bathe by himself?**

Discussion points: Privacy, modesty, safety.

**What rules do you want about having kids in your bed?**

Discussion points: Privacy, autonomic arousal.

**Will you give your kids a choice about hugging and kissing relatives?**

Discussion points: Control over their own body, choice, consent, respect.

**What will you do when your child’s curiosity leads him to touch your body?**

Discussion points: Privacy, consent, role-modeling setting boundaries gently but firmly.

**Will your physical signs of affection with your children change over time? How? Why?**

Discussion points: Autonomic arousal, puberty, ensuring children feel loved.

**How will you react when you see your child touching his or her genitalia?**

Discussion points: Autonomic arousal, privacy avoid associating sexual pleasure with fear/guilt/shame.

**How will you react when you find your child viewing pornography on-line, or ?**

Discussion points: Autonomic arousal, avoid associating sexual pleasure with fear/guilt/shame or the acts of violence often depicted in 21<sup>st</sup> century porn; empathy for the people in the images.

**How can you support your child’s enjoyment of all her/his senses: the taste of food, the smell of a beloved person, the feel of fabric, the warmth of human touch?**

Discussion points: Healthy sexuality is positive, wonderful and life affirming; too many parents only discuss the dangers and kids deserve a balanced perspective.

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Detail on these and related topics can be found in Chapter 6.

**Dr. Janet Rosenzweig's  
Checklist for  
Assessing the Sexual Climate in a School**

**1. Is the school's physical environment welcoming and conducive to learning?**

If using the restroom or moving between classes feels leaves a child breathless with anxiety, the school climate is out of balance. Graffiti of any kind, and certainly sexually suggestive graffiti must be removed immediately.

**2. What are the school's policies and track record around bullying and sexual harassment?**

Formal policies mean little unless administered and implemented by the committed people with both skills and emotional intelligence. If you attend a school event and hear an administrator making jokes at the expense of staff or otherwise insulting them, take that as a warning signal that this environment tolerates bullying. If the staff work in an environment that disrespects or humiliates them, it is much more likely that they will respond

The school district should be offering in-service training for all faculty and staff periodically to ensure that they are aware of the policy and their responsibility to carry it out. Some schools also offer workshops for students; if taught by a sensitive teacher who understands how very important this is, it can be a great learning experience. If, however, the school assigns teaching the workshop to the wise-cracking guy who smirks as he says "I wish someone would sexually harass me a little bit" we know that the climate in this school only allows for lip service to the policy.

**3. What is the school's policy and track record regarding teacher-student contact?**

- Are student allowed to address faculty and staff by first names?
- Are there clear rules for both actual and virtual out of school contact between student and faculty/staff?

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<sup>1</sup> Information on school climate adapted from: Tableman, Betty; Herron, Adrienne. 2004. *School Climate and Learning. Best Practice Briefs Number 31, University-Community Partnerships @ Michigan State University*

A healthy sexual climate encourages interaction between students and faculty with age-appropriate boundaries. Use of first names between teachers and students requires careful consideration. In most schools it implies an artificial familiarity inconsistent with the roles.

Clear formal rules on out of school interaction between staff and students should exist and be enforced. This includes both actual interaction and virtual interaction like E-mail, texting, and connecting on social networking sites. This is particularly important since sexual climate can erode gradually and the impersonal nature of virtual communication makes it easier to slip across boundaries.

#### **4) Are administrators consistently visible on campus?**

While administrators are responsible for everything from budgets to bathrooms, they MUST get out of their office, walk the halls and make periodic, friendly, and unannounced visits to classrooms.

#### **5) What is the policy on dress code and how is it enforced?**

Butt cleavage, breast cleavage, midriffs and suggestive slogans on clothing are not conducive to learning. It is perfectly natural for kids to push boundaries and show up to school wearing something that bends -- if not actually breaks -- the rules. School staff should react firmly and without embarrassing or humiliating the student.

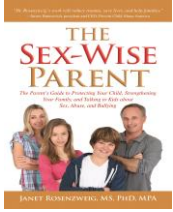
#### **6) How are sexuality related issues handled in the classroom?**

To be sexually safe and healthy, we expect that academically appropriate language about sexual issues will be used in context in art, literature, health, biology, social studies or other classes.

Sexual issues permeate the arts and it is disingenuous to pretend they don't. Sexual violence is a theme in many historical events and sexual discrimination permeates history. Can the teachers discuss this in context? Is open discussion encouraged?

*In my concept of an ideal world, students would come to school with a clear understanding of their family's particular set of values and beliefs around sexuality. School classes would provide the opportunity to add solid information on anatomy, physiology, psychosexual development and other related areas. Parents would read what their children are reading and have family discussions about the content. Facts and opinions would be clearly labeled as such and differences in opinions could be debated with mutual respect.*

What would it take to make that happen in your family and community?



*Dr. Janet Rosenzweig presents:*  
**A Sex-Wise Parents Guide:**  
**Sexual health and safety checklist for  
child care and summer camp**

- Does the program check the background for all people who have access to children, including maintenance and food services staff as well as the counselors, teachers or volunteers working directly with the kids?
- Does the program check references and work history for all people who have access to children? Never forget that criminal background checks identify only the small groups of abusers who have been reported, caught and convicted.
- If the program uses high school or college students as aides, are these young folks required to participate in pre-service training to learn the rules, values and standards of the program? Are they assigned an experienced supervisor? Remember that young are still developing good judgment and empathy.
- How does the program handle 'hands in the pants' at nap time? Ideally, they let young children sleep peacefully.
- What words do they staff use for genitals when diapering a baby or toddler? Ideally, they use the anatomically correct terms.
- How does the program handle bullying and intimidation? Many young children have to be taught how to be nice to other children.
- If the program includes swimming, has the staff been prepared to deal with children who get embarrassed changing clothes in front of others?
- If there is a focus on sports, are all children encouraged to participate? Is competition kept to a healthy level? Participation is more important than winning for the development of a young child.
- What is the program's policy about discipline? If it consistent with your values?
- Are children supervised as they move about the building or grounds for example to use a rest room?
- Does the program have strong supervision and safety protocols for field trips?
- Can parents observe the day care or camp day? Parents should be required to sign in, and be respectful and not interfere with activities.
- If the children will be picked up by a bus or van, will there be someone other than the driver to provide supervision?
- Does the organization maintain tight control over their vehicles, including requiring all trips to be recorded in a mileage logs? Several years ago, a staff member allegedly sexually abused a child in a child care center's van, and the lack of vehicle logs hindered the investigation!
- If parents drop off the children, do children pass from the parents' supervision directly to a staff member? Is there a safe path to travel when the child leaves the car?
- Does the program maintain a list of people allowed to pick up the child? Parents need to provide the list when they enroll their child and honor the process by not calling with last minute changes that the program can't verify.
- Does the program have all licenses required by the state, county or municipality? Departments of education or human services may license child care centers, departments of health may certify centers or camps; regulations vary by community, so find the expert in your community by contacting the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies at [www.NACCRRRA.org](http://www.NACCRRRA.org)