

My personal boundaries within the social work profession

[Business](#), [Work](#)



Currently, I am interning at Jowonio School, which is a special class integrated preschool. Jowonio provides inclusive programs for children while also celebrating diversity within the students and staff. Before starting at Jowonio, I was eager to see the ways in which my supervisor and others determine boundaries in this environment. Setting boundaries is essential when developing a working relationship with one's client(s). Some potential boundaries include physical contact, social interaction, self-disclosing, and intimate relationships. I was interested in how I would approach establishing my own boundaries in this setting, while keeping in mind the Code of Ethics and the agency's policies.

At Jowonio, I am mindful of the boundaries I set as they are very dependent on situation, environment, and person. In one instance, my supervisor placed me in a classroom to observe and interact with children. I was excited to interact with the children in the classroom. I feel comfortable in this setting because of prior experience working in a daycare/pre-school. Although I felt confident, I did experience a bit of anxiety. I wondered how my new role as a social work intern might alter the way I will approach children from now.

Once I walked into the classroom, I observed its design. The class had visual posters and labels, sensory activities, tables and chairs for children to sit in, a bathroom, and a lounge area. I thought about how the children must be fascinated by everything going on in the classroom. While looking around, a few children approached me asking if I could play with them on the circle time rug. I was delighted the children approached me and asked if I wanted to play because I was eager to start to learn from them. Before engaging with the children, I looked around to see what the other therapists and

teachers were doing with the children; they were playing with the children, so I decided it was appropriate to engage in such activities.

On the rug, I sat down with three children and assisted them in assembling Legos. Quickly, an altercation arose where one child broke another child's Lego building, and the upset child ran into my lap crying. At the moment I was taken off guard and unsure what to do. I did not want to cross any boundaries by engaging in physical contact, but I felt sorry that the child was upset and empathized with him. I quickly tried to relate to the child's feelings. I compared it to how I felt when a peer of mine in middle school destroyed my art project. I thought he would benefit from a hug and it would help him understand I acknowledged his feelings. So, I decided to hug the child back and assure him that together we could build another creation. The child then stopped crying and proceeded to grab more Legos for us to build. After I left the room, I questioned if what I did was appropriate. I reexamined the situation, environment, and people involved to determine if hugging the child back was the right action to take. The case was that a young child was in distress due to his building being torn down. It took place in a classroom environment, which had a handful of other professionals such as head teachers, support teachers, aids, and therapists. Also, the child was about four years old and was seeking comfort in the nearest adult figure, which was me. Although I felt comfortable hugging the child back in this scenario, I questioned whether I needed to explain to the child that hugging could not occur on a daily basis due to professional ethics. In this situation, I did not because I acted quickly. I wondered if the child would have even understood

my attempt to set boundaries about physical touch. On the contrary, if the same child decided to display inappropriate physical contact after I hugged him, I would then address our boundaries in a language that a four-year-old may be able to comprehend. I believe boundaries can be very tricky. If boundaries are not appropriately set or suitable for specific clients, it can lead to the downfall of a client/worker relationship.

In my experience, using physical contact to hug the child back did not lead to harm, but I believe other situations, environments, or persons can differ. For example, I observed my supervisor doing an intake for a new family looking to join Jowonio. The mother brought her child in with her to complete the intake and was visibly overwhelmed, evident by her nonverbal cues. After being asked a few questions about her son, she broke down crying. My impulse reaction was to approach the mother, hug her and ask her what was wrong. Instead, I watched as my supervisor grabbed a box of tissues and handed them to her rather than using physical contact to comfort her. My supervisor then proceeded to ask how she was feeling, which led the mother to reveal how difficult it is as a single parent. In this scenario, the situation, environment, and person involved are significantly different. Unlike my previous experience with the child in the classroom, this situation involved meeting with a distraught mother for the first time who was overwhelmed by being a single parent of a special needs child. Initially, I thought hugging the client would make her feel better but after reflecting on the situation, I realized my impulse reaction would not have been the best decision. I came to an unexpected discovery that when I am upset I feel being physically

comforted helps me feel better. This instance made me realize that although I may be comfortable with my own personal boundaries that do not mean they will be appropriate to others or within the social work profession.

My response toward the child whose Lego building got destroyed is what I believe to be a suitable action within my boundaries as a social work intern. Meanwhile, my reaction toward the distressed woman would have been more harmful than helpful. Both cases, although very different in terms of the situation, environment, and person, further validated the importance of establishing boundaries.

Through these experiences I have also come to realize that implementing boundaries is harder than I expected. I believe I embody a lot of knowledge from coursework about the importance of having boundaries and setting boundaries to prevent inappropriate actions that may lead to unethical acts. However, in practice I tend to have more confusion about establishing professional boundaries than anticipated. Both scenarios taught me something new about boundaries. I believe this assignment has aided in my own self-assessment of what I should focus my attention on throughout this process. As an aspiring social worker, I reflect upon my experiences in my internship as an opportunity to grow and better myself. I trust I will look back at these specific experiences and remember the importance of setting and respecting boundaries with clients as I continue my internship at Jowonio. I will continue to be mindful that professional boundaries should be established to prevent unethical instances from occurring. Nevertheless, I will be attentive to how and why established boundaries may vary.

Overall, I will continue to strive to be more self-aware of my boundaries, as well as the agency's boundary policies, to have more confidence as an ambitious social worker.