Boundaries

Personal

- See the person not the behaviour
- Maintain your respect for the other person even when they choose not to follow what you believe to be the best course of action
- Follow what you believe to be the best course of action only if it fits within the project guidelines
- Do not feel that you have failed if the relationship does not work out

Emotional

- Try to understand the other person’s thoughts and feelings
- Remember, you may not understand a situation when you see only a part of it
- Even if you have had a similar problem, you may not fully understand the other person’s difficulties
- Everyone has different ways of coping. Your way of coping may not be right for another person

Organisational

- It is your right to ask what the project does to maintain its boundaries and if they are consistent with the project’s expectations of volunteers
- It is your responsibility to maintain contact with the project
- It is both your right and your responsibility to accept support in your role as a volunteer

Boundary Guidelines

Clearly identified boundaries are essential in mentoring for several reasons:

- They protect both the volunteer and the service user by providing clarity about what is and is not acceptable behaviour
- They give both parties greater confidence in opening up about sensitive issues, where otherwise they might feel vulnerable
- They provide a clear framework so that participants can recognise when to stop and question what they are doing

Do’s and Don’ts

Do

- Recognise your own personal boundaries
- Avoid getting into situations that could be misunderstood
- Think before you say ‘Yes’
- Remember that the main focus of the relationship is the needs and progress of the other person

Don’t

- Give out your home telephone number or address
- Take the other person to your own home
- Become emotionally over-involved
- Get involved in a sexual or intimate relationship
- Accept any form of harassment/violence from the other person
- Buy expensive gifts or give money to the other person
- Lend money/material goods or ever borrow from the other person

If you are ever in doubt about a boundary issue, speak to the Mentoring Team about it.
Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure means ‘opening up’ about your own personal experiences. Sharing these experiences can be helpful in strengthening the relationship. The other person may be more likely to see you as someone who is approachable and, in return, may be encouraged to share more about themselves. The skill is in deciding what, and how much to reveal. Generally, good practice is to reveal only as much as is relevant and helpful.

- Always be clear that your purpose is to help the other person express themselves more freely.
- When in doubt, don’t reveal anything
- Keep it brief - focus on how you resolved a situation or how it felt, rather than talking about the detail
- Be careful that you don’t distort the overall balance of the relationship – the student should remain at the centre and focus of the relationship, not the volunteer

Guidelines on Confidentiality

Do

- Share with project staff any concerns that you might have about anything that has been disclosed to you
- Be very careful what you talk about so that you don’t break confidentiality
- Ensure that any information about your work as a mentor that you share with family, friends or colleagues is restricted to general information only
- Be aware of your own needs and limits about what you disclose to the other person

Don’t

- Reveal personal information about the other person to anyone outside the project
- Disclose confidential information without the other person’s consent

If in doubt, ask yourself:

- Does my action place the other person at risk?
- Does it place someone else at risk?
- Does it place me at risk?

If the answer to any of these questions is ‘yes’, then the action is almost certainly inappropriate.