



Professional Boundaries

and PSHE Education in Staffordshire &
Stoke-on-Trent.

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The PSHE Education Service, funded by the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, aims to support the development and delivery of age-appropriate, good-quality, consistent PSHE education across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

The PSHE Education Service Pan-Staffordshire is committed to supporting education settings to develop safe, inclusive and nurturing environments where children and young people can thrive.

Within our Key Principles for Effective PSHE Education, we recognise that children and young people learn best within environments where they feel safe, respected and valued. This requires staff to build positive, safe and trusting relationships whilst maintaining clear professional boundaries.

This is particularly important for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), who may require additional emotional, communication or personal care support.

Professional boundaries are not simply a safeguarding requirement. They are a key component of a whole-school approach to:

- Safeguarding
- PSHE/RSHE
- Wellbeing
- Inclusion
- Staff conduct
- Supporting policies

The purpose of this guidance is to support educational settings in establishing a culture in which professionals' boundaries are understood, modelled and consistently applied by all members



NATIONAL GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE RSHE

The updated Relationships Education, Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education (RSHE) guidance has an overarching set of guiding principles that education settings are asked to keep in mind when developing their curriculum.

- **Engagement with pupils.** An inclusive and well-sequenced RSHE curriculum should be informed by meaningful engagement with pupils to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and engaging.
- **Engagement and transparency with parents.** Schools should engage with parents on the content of RSHE and be transparent with parents about all materials used in RSHE. All materials should be available to parents. Parents have a right to request that their children are withdrawn from sex education (pupils can opt back in from three terms before they turn 16), and schools should ensure parents are aware of sex education content within lessons in advance.
- **Positivity.** Schools should focus on building positive attitudes and skills, promoting healthy norms about relationships, including sexual relationships where relevant, and about health, including mental health. Schools should avoid language which might normalise harmful behaviour among young people – for example, gendered language which might normalise male violence or stigmatise boys.
- **Careful sequencing.** Schools should cover all statutory topics, recognising that young people can start developing healthy behaviour and relationship skills as soon as they start school. Schools should sequence teaching so that pupils are supported and equipped with the knowledge to navigate different experiences in a positive way before they occur, and to prevent harms.
- **Relevant and responsive.** Schools should develop their curriculum to be relevant, age- and stage-appropriate, and accessible to pupils in their area, where appropriate, working with local partners and other bodies to understand specific local issues and ensure that needs are met.
- **Skilled delivery of participative education.** The curriculum should be delivered by school staff or, where schools choose to use them, external providers who have the knowledge, skills and confidence to create a safe and supportive environment and to facilitate participative and interactive education which aims to support and not to alarm pupils. *Staff should be trained in safeguarding* and offering support, recognising the increased possibility of disclosures.
- **Whole school approach.** *The curriculum is best delivered as part of a whole school approach to wellbeing and positive relationships, supported by other school policies, including behaviour and safeguarding policies.*

LOCAL KEY PRINCIPLES FOR 5 EFFECTIVE PSHE EDUCATION

Within Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire we believe that for PSHE education to be effective it must be:

- *Delivered within a safe learning environment* based on the principle that prejudice, discrimination and bullying are harmful and unacceptable
- With clear learning objectives and outcomes and ensure sessions and programmes are well-planned, resourced and appropriately underpinned by solid research and evidence.
- Relevant, accurate and factual, including using the correct terminology
- Positively inclusive in terms of:
 - Age
 - Disability
 - Gender reassignment
 - Pregnancy and maternity
 - Race
 - Religion or belief
 - Sex
 - Sexual orientation
- Designed to include the development of knowledge, skills and values to support positive life choices
- Using positive messaging that does not cause shame or victim-blaming
- Challenging attitudes and values within society, such as perceived social norms and those portrayed in the media
- Reflective of the age and stage of the children and young people and tailored to the environment and group
- Utilising active skill-based learning techniques that accommodate a range of learning styles
- Ensuring that children and young people are aware of their rights, including their right to access confidential advice and support services within the boundaries of safeguarding
- *Delivered by trained, confident and competent professionals*
- Empowering and involving children and young people as participants, advocates and evaluators in the development of PSHE education.

WHY ARE PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES IMPORTANT?

The Department for Education (DfE) promotes a whole-school approach within its 7 Guiding Principles for Relationships, Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) statutory guidance.

Professional boundaries should be viewed as part of this wider approach and should align with:

- Safeguarding policies
- Behaviour policies
- Staff code of conduct
- PSHE/RSHE education
- Online Safety procedures
- Attendance and inclusion strategies
- Mental health and wellbeing approaches
- Staff induction and professional development

Children and young people learn about relationships not only through taught PSHE lessons but through the relationships they experience every day.

Adults model:

- Healthy Relationships
- Respect
- Consent
- Boundaries
- Communication
- Trust
- Personal Responsibility
- Emotional Regulation
- Appropriate use of power

When boundaries are consistently maintained across a setting, children and young people experience the very skills and behaviours they are taught through the PSHE curriculum.

Professional boundaries should therefore be viewed as everyone's responsibility and embedded across the whole setting.

CREATING A CULTURE OF PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

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Embedding professional boundaries is most effective when approached as a whole-school priority rather than an individual Safeguarding or PSHE Lead responsibility.

Settings should consider the following:

Leadership

Senior leaders should ensure professional boundaries are recognised as part of safeguarding and personal development practice.

This may include:

- Including professional boundaries within safeguarding systems
- Regular discussion during staff meetings
- Expectations being reflected during induction processes
- Professional boundaries forming part of supervision and appraisal discussions
- Clear reporting pathways for concerns

Consider



- Can all staff explain what professional boundaries mean?
- Would all staff know what to do if they were concerned about a colleague's practice, including recognising a low-level concern (about a member of staff) and understanding how to report it in line with the setting's safeguarding procedures?
- Are expectations consistently applied across all staff groups?

Policies and Procedures

Professional boundaries should be reflected within:

- Staff Code of Conduct (example Code of Conduct from the PSHE Education Service)
- Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- PSHE/RSE Policy
- Online Safety Policy
- Staff Wellbeing Policy
- Personal/Intimate Care Procedures
- Visitor Policy

Staff should understand how these documents connect and reinforce one another.

Professional boundaries should not only be covered during induction.

Settings should provide opportunities for staff to:

- Discuss realistic scenarios
- Explore SEND-specific challenges
- Reflect upon their own practice
- Develop confidence in responding to boundary concerns
- Understand how boundaries support safeguarding.

Scenarios, case studies and discussion-based learning are often more effective than simply reading policies. This also provides an opportunity to demonstrate and reinforce effective PSHE pedagogy and the use of active learning techniques.



WHAT DO PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

Communication

Effective Practice

Staff:

- Speak respectfully to children and young people
- Use professional language
- Maintain transparency with colleagues and families
- Use approved communication systems
- Maintain confidentiality appropriately

Practice That Should Prompt Reflection

Staff:

- Frequently share personal information
- Communicate with families outside agreed procedures
- Become involved in family disputes
- Develop informal patterns of communication that others are aware of

Questions to Consider

- Would this communication be appropriate if viewed by a parent, carer, colleague or senior leader?
- Is this communication necessary for my role?
- Has it been recorded (where appropriate)?



Positive relationships are essential.

Professional boundaries do not mean being distant.

Children and young people should experience adults who are:

- Warm
- Consistent
- Reliable
- Approachable
- Fair

At the same time, staff should avoid becoming:

- A child or young person's "best friend"
- Their sole source of support
- The adult who always makes exceptions
- The person who operates outside of agreed systems

Signs Boundaries May Be Becoming Blurred

- A pupil consistently seeks out one particular adult
- A staff member feels protective beyond their professional role
- Rules are applied differently to 1 child or young person
- Other staff express concerns regarding the relationship



As outlined within the RSHE Guidance, the 2nd guiding principle is :
“Engagement and transparency with parents”

PSHE is most effective when delivered in partnership between education and home. This means that strong partnerships with families are essential.

However, staff should remain within their professional role.

Effective Practice

- Clear communication
- Regular updates through agreed systems
- Respectful partnership working
- Professional challenge, where necessary

Less Helpful Practice

- Sharing personal opinions regarding family issues
- Providing support beyond professional roles
- Offering preferential treatment
- Becoming involved in disputes

Online and Digital Boundaries

Digital communication can create additional risks.

Settings should ensure staff understand expectations regarding:

- Social media.
- Messaging platforms.
- Personal devices.
- Photography.
- Online learning environments.

As a minimum, staff should not:

- Accept pupil friend requests.
- Use personal accounts to communicate with pupils.
- Share personal contact details.
- Communicate through unauthorised platforms.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN PSHE EDUCATION? 12

Professional boundaries should reinforce the messages children and young people receive through PSHE education.

Supporting Teaching Around Healthy Relationships

Staff should model:

- Respectful language
- Listening skills
- Kind disagreement
- Equality
- Healthy boundaries

Supporting Teaching Around Consent

Staff should model:

- Seeking permission where appropriate.
- Respecting a child's voice.
- Explaining actions before carrying them out.
- Accepting and responding appropriately to concerns.

Supporting Teaching Around Safe Adults

Staff should help children and young people understand:

- The role of Safe Adults
- The limits of confidentiality
- How adults help keep children safe
- How to seek help from different safe adults rather than relying on one person

Supporting Teaching Around Online Safety

Staff should mirror curriculum messages.

Children and young people are more likely to have a better understanding of healthy boundaries if adults are consistently modelling them.

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES 13 THROUGH PSHE PEDAGOGY

Professional boundaries are not only maintained through policies and procedures. They are also reinforced through the pedagogical approaches used across the setting.

The Pan-Staffordshire PSHE Education Service promotes evidence-based approaches that enable children and young people to explore sensitive issues whilst ensuring that adults maintain appropriate professional boundaries.

2 key components of effective PSHE practice are:

- Creating a Safe Learning Environment
- Using Distancing Techniques

These approaches support both safeguarding and relationship-building whilst modelling the healthy boundaries we want children and young people to understand and model themselves.

For further guidance, please see our Best Practice Guidance Documents on the [Best Practice page](#) on our website.



CREATING A SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

A safe learning environment is a cornerstone of effective PSHE education. It provides a framework within which children and young people can discuss sensitive issues, ask questions and explore different perspectives safely.

Importantly, a safe learning environment also helps staff maintain professional boundaries.

When clear expectations are established, the focus remains on learning rather than personal disclosure or personal relationships.

What Should Be In Place?

Agreed Ground Rules

Ground rules should be developed with children and young people and revisited regularly.

Examples may include:

- Respect each other's views.
- Listen without interruption.
- Challenge ideas, not people.
- No personal questions.
- No personal disclosures.
- Use appropriate language.
- Everyone has the right to pass.

These expectations help children understand appropriate relational boundaries and reinforce that this is a different learning space from other subjects. It also enables the professional to take on the role of “facilitator” rather than “teacher” or “expert”.

Rights and Responsibilities

Children and young people should understand:

- Their right to be heard.
- Their right to feel safe.
- Their right not to participate in discussions that make them uncomfortable.

Equally, they should understand their responsibility to respect others' boundaries.

Clear Safeguarding Messages

Children and young people should understand:

- Which adults can help them.
- How to report worries or concerns.
- That adults cannot always keep secrets if someone is unsafe.

This reinforces healthy expectations about adult-child relationships and models transparency.

How This Supports Professional Boundaries

Safe learning environments help staff avoid:

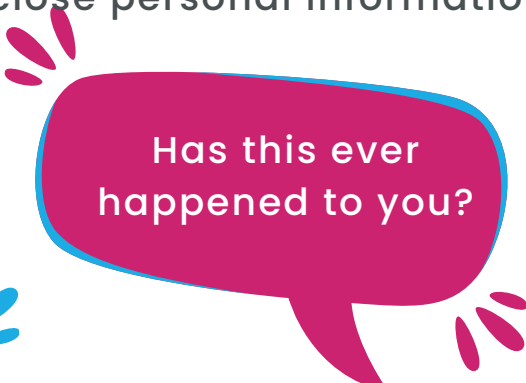
- Being positioned as the “expert”
- Becoming involved in discussions that are overly personal.
- Feeling pressure to share personal experiences.
- Being drawn into inappropriate disclosures during lessons

Instead, staff are clearly positioned as facilitators of learning.

Distancing techniques are a key part of effective PSHE pedagogy and can play an important role in maintaining professional boundaries.

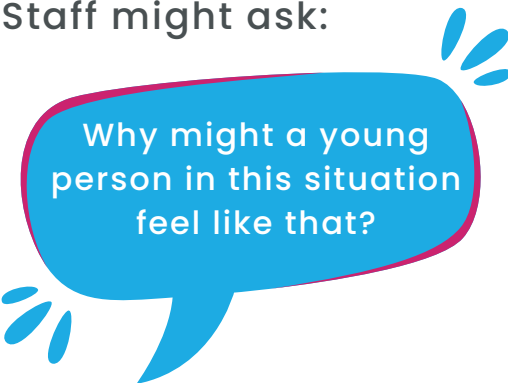
Distancing allows children and young people to explore sensitive issues without feeling pressure to discuss their own experiences or disclose personal information.

Rather than asking:



Has this ever happened to you?

Staff might ask:



Why might a young person in this situation feel like that?

Examples of Distancing Techniques

Fictional Characters

Using characters from:

- Books
- Films
- Television
- Stories
- Scenario cards

allows children and young people to explore issues objectively.

Example:

“What advice would you give this character?”

Rather than:

“What would you do?”

Role Play and Scenarios

Scenario-based activities allow children and young people to develop skills and knowledge without discussing their own lives.

Examples:

- Managing friendship difficulties
- Recognising unhealthy relationships
- Responding to online safety concerns
- Seeking help from safe adults

Case Studies

Realistic but fictional case studies create opportunities for discussion around:

- Boundaries
- Consent
- Respect
- Safety
- Decision-making

without requiring personal disclosure.

Third-Person Language

Staff can use language such as:

- "Some young people may...."
- "A child might feel...."
- "What advice could be given?"
- "Why might someone respond in this way?"

This creates emotional distance whilst maintaining engagement.

Using distancing techniques helps staff maintain professional boundaries because it reduces the likelihood of:

Inappropriate Personal Disclosure by Children and Young People

Children are less likely to share highly personal information in front of their peers when discussions are framed around fictional situations.

Inappropriate Self-Disclosure by Staff

Staff should not feel obliged to conceal their identity, but nor should their personal lives become the focus of their professional role. Any self-disclosure should be purposeful, appropriate, brief and in the best interests of children and young people's learning, wellbeing or safety.

Children and young people benefit from seeing people with protected characteristics represented in everyday life. However, good PSHE pedagogy encourages staff to avoid making lessons about their own personal experiences.

Before sharing personal information consider:

- Is it relevant to the learning?
- Does this support inclusion or safeguarding?
- Am I sharing this for the benefit of the child or young person, rather than myself?
- Would I be comfortable explaining this disclosure to a parent, colleague or senior leader?
- Does this model the professional boundaries we wish children and young people to understand?

If the answer is yes, the disclosure is likely to be professionally appropriate. If it shifts the focus from learning to the staff member's personal life, it may be a sign that boundaries need reconsideration.

Adults Being Viewed as Friends Rather Than Educators

Distancing techniques reinforce the role of the adult as a facilitator of learning rather than a participant in personal discussions.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH?

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A whole-school approach to professional boundaries means children and young people experience consistent messages across:

Curriculum

Children learn about:

- Healthy relationships
- Consent
- Personal boundaries
- Safe adults
- Respect
- Online boundaries

through PSHE education.

Staff Practice

Adults consistently:

- Respect privacy.
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality.
- Follow agreed procedures.
- Model healthy communication.
- Maintain professional relationships.

Learning Environments

Children experience:

- Clear expectations.
- Psychological safety.
- Consistent routines.
- Respectful interactions.
- Appropriate adult-child relationships.

School Culture

Children and young people see boundaries being modelled every day through interactions between:

- Staff and pupils
- Staff and families
- Staff and colleagues
- Leaders and staff

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES 20 IN SEND SETTINGS

Maintaining professional boundaries is important in all educational settings. However, SEND environments can present additional considerations due to the nature of support provided.

Children and young people with SEND may require:

- Increased adult support.
- Personal care and medical interventions.
- Support with emotional regulation.
- Physical prompting or guidance.
- Assistance with communication.
- Higher levels of reassurance and relationship-based practice.

These factors can sometimes increase the likelihood of boundaries becoming blurred if expectations and professional conduct are not clearly understood.

A whole-school approach should support staff to develop positive, trusting, safe relationships whilst maintaining clear professional roles.

Relationship-Based Practice

Relationship-based practice is a key feature of many SEND settings and can positively impact engagement, attendance, behaviour, wellbeing and learning.

Staff should be encouraged to develop relationships that are:

- Warm
- Consistent
- Predictable
- Respectful
- Professional

Whilst avoiding relationships that become:

- Exclusive
- Dependent
- Secretive
- Preferential

The goal is not to reduce meaningful relationships, but to ensure they remain safe, equitable and in the best interests of the child or young person.

Promoting Independence

Professional boundaries should support independence rather than dependency.

Staff should regularly reflect on questions such as:

- Am I encouraging this child or young person to develop independence?
- Have I become their sole source of support?
- Are there opportunities to widen their safe adult network?
- Would another member of staff be able to provide similar support?

Whilst some children and young people may need enhanced support, staff should remain mindful that long-term outcomes are strengthened when independence and resilience are promoted.

Communication and Social Understanding

Some children and young people with SEND may experience difficulties understanding:

- Social rules
- Personal space
- Consent
- Privacy
- Professional relationships

This means settings should explicitly teach and model:

- Personal boundaries
- Safe adults
- Appropriate touch
- Online boundaries
- Respectful communication
- Seeking help safely

These concepts should be reinforced through both the taught PSHE curriculum and everyday interactions.

Many SEND staff will need to provide physical support that would not typically occur in mainstream classroom practice.

Settings should ensure:

- Clear intimate care and personal care procedures are in place.
- Staff receive appropriate training.
- Care plans are regularly reviewed.
- Decisions are recorded and communicated clearly.
- Children and young people are involved wherever possible.

Physical support should always be:

- Necessary
- Proportionate
- Dignified
- In the child's best interests

Reflective Question

“

If this interaction was observed by a colleague, parent/carer or senior leader, would it clearly demonstrate both a positive relationship and appropriate professional boundaries?

”

This is often the simplest and most effective test of boundary-centred practice in SEND settings.

Creating a safe learning environment is particularly important for children and young people who may be more vulnerable to exploitation, coercion or misunderstanding social cues.

Staff should:

- Use clear and consistent expectations.
- Revisit ground rules regularly.
- Provide opportunities to contribute in different ways.
- Respect a child's right to pass.
- Avoid encouraging personal disclosures during lessons.
- Reinforce safeguarding messages frequently.

These approaches help children and young people understand and recognise that adults have a professional role and model healthy boundaries in action.

Distancing Techniques and SEND

Distancing techniques are especially valuable within SEND education.

Using:

- Stories
- Social situations
- Case studies
- Role play
- Characters
- Visual scenarios

allows children and young people to explore sensitive issues safely without needing to discuss their own experiences.

Distancing techniques help:

- Reduce pressure to disclose personal information.
- Make abstract concepts more accessible.
- Support emotional safety.
- Model appropriate boundaries between staff and pupils.

This reinforces the role of the adult as a facilitator of learning rather than a participant in personal discussions.

When planning lessons, interventions or interactions, staff may wish to ask:

Am I facilitating learning or encouraging personal disclosure?

Have I used distancing techniques where appropriate?

Does the activity maintain a safe learning environment?

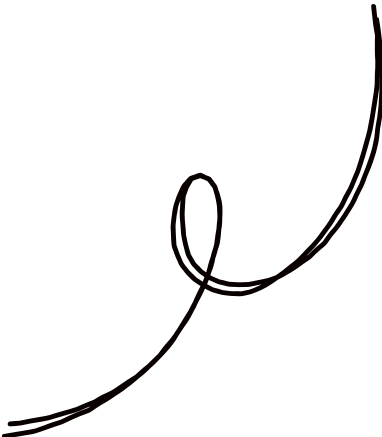
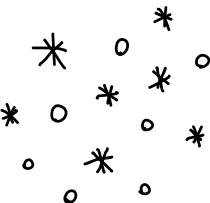
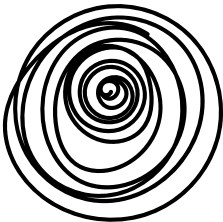
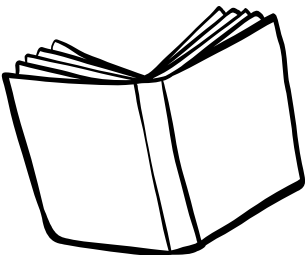
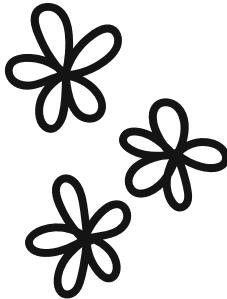
Am I modelling the same healthy boundaries that we teach through PSHE?

Does this interaction help children understand what healthy, professional and respectful relationships look like?

A whole-school approach to professional boundaries goes beyond preventing inappropriate practice. It is about consistently modelling the healthy relationships, communication and boundaries that children and young people learn about through PSHE education.

Creating safe learning environments and using distancing techniques are key strategies that help staff maintain professional boundaries while fostering positive, supportive relationships.

PAGE FOR NOTES





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