

WHEN A TRUSTED COMMUNITY MEMBER CROSSES BOUNDARIES

Guidance for Parents and Staff

Purpose

This guide is intended to support parents, educators, and communal leaders in responding thoughtfully and responsibly after a painful breach of trust within our community.

Its focus is on protecting children, supporting families and staff, and strengthening safeguards going forward. Our shared responsibility is to move forward with clarity, care, and accountability.

This document offers guiding principles and practical considerations to encourage responsible reflection – not answers, rulings, or directives.

Critical Disclaimer (Please Read Carefully)

- **Do not rely on this document for guidance or decision-making. It is not a policy manual or investigative tool.**
- **Every situation requires direct involvement of competent Rabbanim who understand the halachic, communal, and pastoral complexities involved.**
- **Professional engagement is essential, including licensed mental-health professionals, safeguarding and risk-assessment specialists, child-safety experts, and legal counsel when appropriate.**
- **No written guide can address the nuance, sensitivity, and detail required in real-world situations.**
- **Qualified organizations with expertise in safeguarding and trauma should be consulted early to help develop an individualized plan for each case.**

This resource is solely intended to promote thoughtful, responsible communal processes that prioritize safety and dignity.

Guiding Values

Our response must be rooted in Torah values while meeting contemporary standards of child protection and professional responsibility.

- **Pikuach nefesh** – Protecting children and preventing harm comes first.
- **Kavod habriyos** – Every person deserves dignity, especially those who were harmed.
- **Lashon hara** – Gossip and speculation cause harm; information should be shared only when necessary for safety and through appropriate channels.
- **Emunah and achrayus** – Faith in our community and institutions does not replace the obligation to act clearly, responsibly, and decisively.

What Helps and What Hurts

What helps:

- Believing and supporting those who disclose harm or discomfort.
- Protecting privacy and avoiding the sharing of names or identifying details.
- Allowing space for complex emotions such as shock, anger, grief, and betrayal.
- Using official reporting and safeguarding channels.

What hurts:

- Pressing for details or trying to “figure out” what happened.
- Questioning why a child or teen did not stop the behavior.
- Speculation, rumor-spreading, or informal investigations

Talking with Children

Before you talk:

- Take a moment to ground yourself; children absorb tone more than words.
- Decide in advance what you can say factually.
- Plan for composure, and know it is okay to pause and return to the conversation.
- Suggested opening:

You may have heard that something painful happened in our community. We call it a boundary crossing—when someone uses trust or authority in a way that is not appropriate. I am here to answer what I can, and most importantly, to make sure you are safe.

Key messages to include:

- You can always talk to me. You will not be in trouble.
- You never owe an adult secrecy. Safe surprises are different.
- If something feels off, even if you cannot explain it, tell a trusted adult.
- It is okay to have big or confusing feelings.

Inviting disclosure gently:

- Has anyone ever made you uncomfortable, asked you to keep secrets, or crossed a line with touch, talk, or messages?
- If something did happen, thank you for telling me. We will focus on keeping you safe.
- You can also talk to another trusted adult—parent, rebbi or morah, counselor, therapist, or administrator.

Understanding Grooming and Red Flags

- Grooming is a deliberate process some abusers use to build trust and emotional connection in order to gain access. Red flags do not prove wrongdoing, but they do require attention and consultation.
- Unbalanced or special attention toward one child or teen.
- Secretive meetings or conversations.
- Requests for secrecy from parents or supervisors.
- Private texting, messaging, or social media communication.
- Any attempt to discuss, view, or involve private areas of the body.

These situations are rare, and most community members and leaders are caring and trustworthy. At the same time, safety requires clear boundaries and attentiveness - without exceptions.

Monitoring and Follow-Up

- Notice sudden changes in mood, behavior, appetite, or openness.
- Be attentive to avoidance of certain people or places.
- Check in periodically without repeated or leading questioning.
- Seek professional support if strong feelings persist or interfere with daily functioning.

Privacy and Community Responsibility

- Protecting privacy is a form of respect and prevents further harm.
- Information should be shared only through designated leadership or safeguarding channels.

This is not about snitching—it is about protecting.

For School and Community Staff

- Warmth and care are essential, and so are boundaries. A safe community is both compassionate and clear.
- Professional boundaries:
- Intimacy is not part of an educator–student relationship.
- Saying “I love my students” is appropriate; personal or exclusive language such as “I love this student” is not.
- Confidentiality from parents should always involve another staff member and follow policy.

Examples of clear boundaries include not allowing:

- Students babysitting for staff or staff babysitting students.
- Tutoring in a staff member's home.
- Giving students rides alone without explicit, documented approval.
- Running personal errands for staff.
- Communication through personal texting or social media.

Visibility, documentation, and adherence to mandated reporting laws and organizational policies protect students, staff, and the integrity of the community.