



Red Flag behaviors

What is a 'red flag' behavior?

A "red flag behavior" is an undesirable behavior that needs attention and correction. Red flag behaviors are not necessarily abusive in singular or infrequent occasions, nor are they in of themselves against the law. However, these behaviors can be a pre-cursor to abuse, especially when a person or group exhibits them frequently or repeatedly. In many cases these behaviors can be corrected through setting and enforcing guidelines for conduct, along with modeling appropriate interactions and providing constructive feedback when necessary.

Examples of 'red flag' behaviors seen in program settings: (not an exhaustive list)

- Missing or ignoring social cues about the personal boundaries of others.
- Minimizing behaviors or becoming defensive when confronted about them.
- Paying noticeably more attention to one particular person (talks about, spends time with- or you hear accounts from youth indicating this).
- Often pushing boundaries, saying things like, 'we're not supposed to do this but...."
- Encouraging secrets.
- Isolating themselves self and other person from the group- encourages 1:1, private interactions, closed doors.
- Using emotional tactics to coerce a person, such as guilt, teasing, intimidation or threats to get them to do something they don't want to do.
- Making comments about physical appearance or other personal traits of another person. These comments might be made directly to a youth, or about a youth among peers or other adults.
- Talking about sex, sexual activity, or using sexualized phrases.
- Insisting on frequent physical touching.
- Giving gifts, outside of typical customary or acceptable practices.
- Volunteering to spend time outside acceptable hours (especially when alone) with a person.
- Relating closely to youth but appearing distant or defensive among peer-aged adults.

Someone who intentionally uses the above behaviors for the purpose of eventually abusing another person is said to be "grooming" their victim. Grooming is a series of acts that de-sensitizes or disables a victim from maintaining healthy boundaries, opening the door to sexual abuse.

How to set a tone of appropriate expectations for safe conduct in a youth program setting

- Implement and reinforce your codes of conduct for staff and participants
- Model healthy boundaries for others.
- Send a clear message to youth about what they can expect from adults and who they can come to with concerns or problems.

What a supervisor can do if you observe red flag behaviors

- Confront the behavior- even if it is a lower level behavior, still address it, providing constructive feedback including examples of more desirable alternative behaviors.
- Explain why the behavior doesn't fit the situation, e.g., as volunteers we keep a boundary that is guided by the shared program goals we have for program participants.
- If the behavior is repeated, or other red flag behaviors are observed, move to a corrective action plan. Keep written documentation of occurrences. *There are always choices and alternative ways to act and interact with others. Staff should be able to adjust their behaviors as directed.*