

Relationship Boundaries

Where do Scotland's Residential Child Care Workers Draw the Lines?

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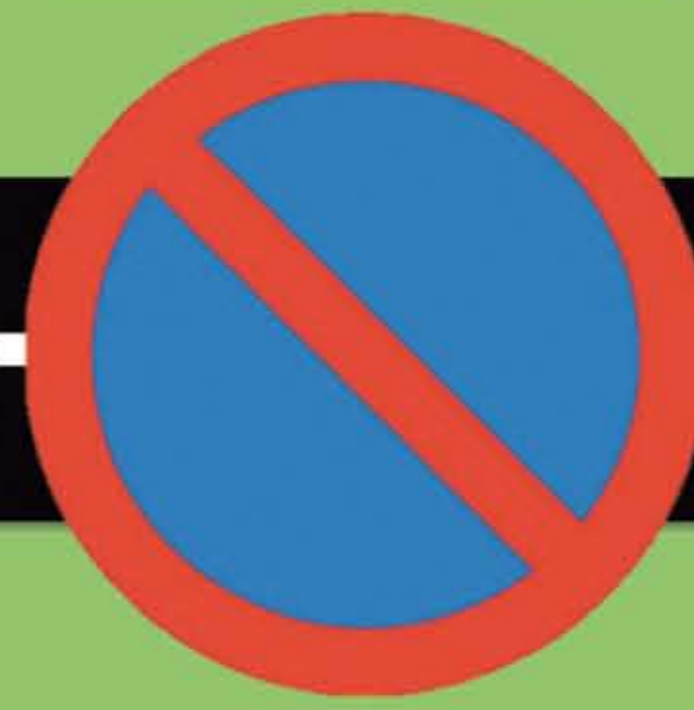
Over 100 residential workers contributed to local or national samples of workers' views.

Physical Contact



59% of workers have physical contact with young people routinely or frequently. Only 3% report having no physical contact. Routine physical contact was more common (47% compared to 27%) in settings including younger children, and in privately run settings (74% compared to 52%) and larger settings (72% compared to 53%). Physical intervention was considered by most (70%) to be occasional. Significantly more male workers (21% compared to 4% of female workers) described this as routine or frequent.

Bedrooms



94% report spending time alone with young people in their bedrooms, although this tends to be a regular occurrence for female workers (53%) and an occasional one for males (65%). Time spent in bedrooms seems to be more frequent in placements with only older children (51% compared to 41%). 35% have shared sleeping accommodation with young people.

Lending and Gifts



Over half of workers give gifts (59%) and lend possessions (77%) to young people. Women and managers do both of these more frequently. Over half of workers use their own money to buy items, such as snacks, for the group (63%) but less than half (46%) do so for individual young people. Gift giving is both more common and more frequent in settings that include younger children.

Summary of Main Findings

- Contextual factors, particularly the age of children, type of setting and length of placements, often had an effect on boundary decisions. For example, more gift giving and physical contact in placements including younger children.
- Worker effects, particularly work role and gender, were significant. In particular, managers were significantly more flexible about gift giving and extended contact, and female workers were likely to give gifts more frequently and to be involved in physical intervention less frequently.
- Culture can have a very significant influence on boundary decisions. Workers in the local sample were substantially more flexible in their decisions than in the national sample.
- Individual beliefs and preferences are also very significant. Both in the local sample and in the national sample, the range of responses was very wide.

Sharing Information



Most workers are happy to share some personal information and information about life events with young people. More workers share information about events (90%) than detailed personal information (69%).

Family and Home Contact



48% of workers have had some contact between a young person they work with and a friend or family member. 86% report that a young person has never visited their home. Managers, and, to a lesser extent, supervisors, were significantly more likely to have contact both between a young person and a friend or family member (73% compared to 50% and 35%) and with a young person at home (24% compared to 15% and 9%).

Special Relationships



Most workers (63%) report never having relationships with a young person that are different from their relationships with others. Male workers (44% compared to 35%) and managers and supervisors (50% compared to 28%) were more likely to report developing relationships of this kind.

Extended Contact



58% never have any contact with young people outside their normal working hours. 47% never have contact with young people who have left and only 10% have frequent contact. Managers were significantly more likely to have contact both outside their normal working hours (60% compared to 35%) and after the young person has left (86% compared to 43%). Workers in settings offering short-term placements have more contact with young people who have left (65% compared to 52%).

Phone, Text and Social Media



Over 80% of workers report never having contact with young people using any personal mobile phone or social media technology. A higher number of workers (29%) have some contact with young people by phone whilst not at work. Overall, contact by social media was the activity in which most workers (92%) reported that they never participated.