Understanding Professional Boundaries

A simple definition

Professional boundaries are limits which protect a worker’s professional power and their client’s vulnerability.

Successful and ethical working relationships are based on a clear understanding of what the workers’ role is – and just as importantly – what their role isn’t.

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Best People Fit
Putting Professional Boundaries principles into practice

| Why do we need Professional Boundaries? | • Reduces “burn out” of support workers  
• Prevents the client becoming dependant on a particular support worker  
• Protects the client from potential harm – intentional and unintentional  
• Ensures we maintain our ethical standards  
• Increasing or unreasonable demands and expectations from the client or family  
• Difficulty setting limits and dealing with behaviour  
• Distress when relationships break down  
• Grief and loss for clients when workers leave |
| Essential Professional Boundaries | • Keep your family/home life private  
• Use professional language at all times  
• Do not pay for your client or let them pay for you  
• Whilst on shift do not attend to any personal business  
• Empower clients, don’t make yourself irreplaceable  
• Do not accept gifts or buy gifts for your clients |
| Signs of Professional Boundaries being over stepped | • Feeling that you are the only one who “understands” the client  
• Accepting money or expensive gifts from clients or their family  
• Asking clients or their families for “favours” with shift arrangements  
• Noticing feelings of friendship or sexual attraction towards clients or their family  
• Having clients or family members refer to you as “a friend” or a “part of the family”  
• Disclosing your own personal information with your clients or their family.  
• Visiting clients outside of your shift  
• Taking clients to your home or introducing clients to your family members or friends.  
• Staying at the clients home after your shift has finished |
| Tips for maintaining boundaries | • Do not seek out a personal relationship with your clients, nor with their family, friends or support network  
• Do not have a sexual relationship with clients, their family, friends or people in their support network  
• Do not introduce clients to your own family, friends or support network  
  e.g. don’t invite people home for family gatherings etc. Work and home should be kept separate  
• Do not socialise with clients, their family or friends outside of work hours. Your work finishes at the end of your shift  
• Turn up on time for your shift. Don’t arrive late and leave early  
• Do not smoke or drink alcohol in front of clients  
• Do not borrow, ask for or lend money to clients  
• Do not talk about your personal financial or other life problems with clients  
• Do not ask for money, gifts or special favours from your clients  
• Do not allow clients to drive your own/work motor vehicle  
• Respect confidentiality and privacy  
• Do not disclose personal information  
• Do not criticize, complain about or discuss issues relating to other workers, staff or your employer with your clients or their family  
• Do not give advice outside of your skills and expertise |

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