

# Professional Boundaries

Professional boundaries are guidelines for maintaining a positive and helpful relationship with your clients or residents. Understanding boundaries helps caregivers avoid stress and misconduct, recognize boundary crossings and provide the best possible care.

## Type of Boundary Crossing

### **Sharing Personal Information:**

It may be tempting to talk to your client about your personal life or problems. Doing so may cause the client to see you as a friend instead of seeing you as a health care professional. As a result, the client may take on your worries as well as their own.

### **Endearments:**

Calling a client 'sweetie' or 'honey' may be comforting to that client, or it might suggest a more personal interest than you intend. It might also point out that you favor one client over another. Some clients may find the use of nicknames or endearments offensive.

### **Touch:**

Touch is a powerful tool. It can be healing and comforting or it can be confusing, hurtful, or simply unwelcome. Touch should be used thoughtfully.

### **Gifts/Tips/Favors:**

Giving or receiving gifts, or doing special favors, can blur the line between a personal relationship and a professional one. Accepting a gift from a client might be taken as fraud or theft by another person or family member

## Staying in Bounds

- Use caution when talking to a client about your personal life
  - Do not share information because you need to talk, or to help you feel better
- Remember that your relationship with your client must be therapeutic, not social

Avoid using terms like honey and sweetie

- Ask your client how they would like to be addressed. Some may allow you to use their first name. Others might prefer a more formal approach: Mr., Mrs., Ms, or Miss
- Remember that the way you address a client indicates your level of professionalism

- Use touch only when it will serve a good purpose for the client
- Ask your client if he/she is comfortable with your touch
- Be aware that a client may react differently to touch than you intend
- When using touch, be sure it is serving the client's needs and not your own

- Follow your facility's policy on gifts
- Practice saying no graciously to a resident who offers a gift that is outside your facility's boundaries
- It's ok to tell clients that you are not allowed to accept gifts, tips
- To protect yourself, report offers of unusual or large gifts to your supervisor.

## **Type of Boundary Crossing**

### **Over-involvement:**

Signs may include spending inappropriate amounts of time with a particular client, visiting the client when off duty, trading assignments to be with the client, thinking that you are the only caregiver who can meet the client's needs. Under-involvement is the opposite of over-involvement and may include disinterest and neglect.

### **Unprofessional Demeanor:**

Demeanor includes appearance, tone and volume of voice, speech patterns, body language, etc. Your professional demeanor affects how others perceive you. Personal and professional demeanor may be different.

## **Staying in Bounds**

- Focus on the needs of those in your care, rather than personalities
- Don't confuse the needs of the client with your own needs
- Maintain a helpful relationship, treating each client with the same quality of care and attention, regardless of your emotional reaction to the client
- Ask yourself: Are you becoming overly involved with the client's personal life? If so, discuss your feelings with your supervisor.

Clients may be frightened or confused by loud voices or fast talk • Good personal hygiene is a top priority due to close proximity to clients • Professional attire sends the message that you are serious about your job • Off-color jokes, racial slurs, profanity are never appropriate • Body language and facial expressions speak volumes to clients

## **Do you need help getting back in bounds?**

- Talk to a trusted colleague
- Talk to your supervisor or manager
- Consider a re-assignment
- Explain to clients that you are unable to behave in certain ways due to professional guidelines (e.g. accept gifts, keep secrets, etc.)
- To protect yourself, draw a line between your work life and your private life