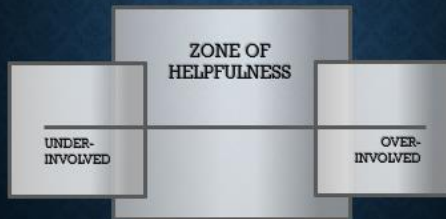


WHAT ARE PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES?

Wesley E. Anderson
Director, Training and Consultation Services
The Arc of New Jersey



- Role modeling to the client healthy communication and professional relationships
- Avoiding the "rescuer" role
- Staying focused on one's responsibilities to/as the client
- Avoiding burn-out ("compassion fatigue")
- If working in conjunction with other services providers: maintaining a healthy, open, communicating and functioning team
- Maintaining one's physical and emotional safety

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE

LANDMARKS OF PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES:

- Time spent with family/child
- Time of session day or evening
- Personal disclosure
- Limits regarding the use of touch
- The general tone of the relationship
- Dual relationships
- Lending



CONSEQUENCES OF LOOSE/POOR BOUNDARIES



WHY IS IT DIFFICULT TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES?



SIGNS THAT BOUNDARY ISSUES MAY BE PRESENT

QUESTIONS:

<p>1</p> <p>1. What is the boundary issue?</p>	<p>2</p> <p>2. How could this boundary issue affect the client?</p>	<p>3</p> <p>3. How could this boundary issue affect the worker?</p>	<p>4</p> <p>4. What could the worker have done differently to establish and maintain healthy boundaries with the client?</p>
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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Is this in my client's best interest?
2. Whose needs are being served?
3. Will this have an impact on the service I am delivering?
4. Should I make a note of my concerns or consult with a colleague?
5. How would this be viewed by the client's family or significant other?
6. How would I feel telling a colleague about this?
7. Am I treating this client differently (e.g., appointment length, time of appointments, extent of personal disclosures)?
8. Does this client mean something special to me?
9. Am I taking advantage of the client? 1
0. Does this action benefit me rather than the client?
11. Am I comfortable in documenting this decision or behavior in the client file?



Thank you

Wesley E. Anderson
 Director, Training and Consultation Services
 The Arc of New Jersey
 T: 732-609-1022
 www.theavcnjtraining.org
 https://tinyurl.com/TCSETHICS

**ZONE OF
HELPFULNESS**

The diagram consists of a central light gray rectangular box with a dark gray border. This box is partially overlapped by two other light gray rectangular boxes with dark gray borders, one on the left and one on the right. A horizontal dark gray line passes through the middle of the central box, extending to the edges of the side boxes. The text 'ZONE OF HELPFULNESS' is centered in the top half of the central box. The text 'UNDER-INVOLVED' is centered in the bottom half of the left box. The text 'OVER-INVOLVED' is centered in the bottom half of the right box.

**UNDER-
INVOLVED**

**OVER-
INVOLVED**

- Role modeling to the client healthy communication and professional relationships
- Avoiding the “rescuer” role
- Staying focused on one’s responsibilities to/as the client
- Avoiding burn-out (“compassion fatigue”)
- If working in conjunction with other services providers: maintaining a healthy, open, communicating and functioning team
- Maintaining one’s physical and emotional safety

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE

Always OK

Sometimes OK

Never OK

Touch

Disclose

Business

Presents

Lending

Socializing

Always OK

Sometimes OK

Never OK

Touch

Disclose

Business

Presents

Lending

Socializing

Always OK

Sometimes OK

Never OK

Touch

Disclose

Business

Presents

Lending

Socializing

Always OK

Sometimes OK

Never OK

Touch

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LANDMARKS OF PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES:

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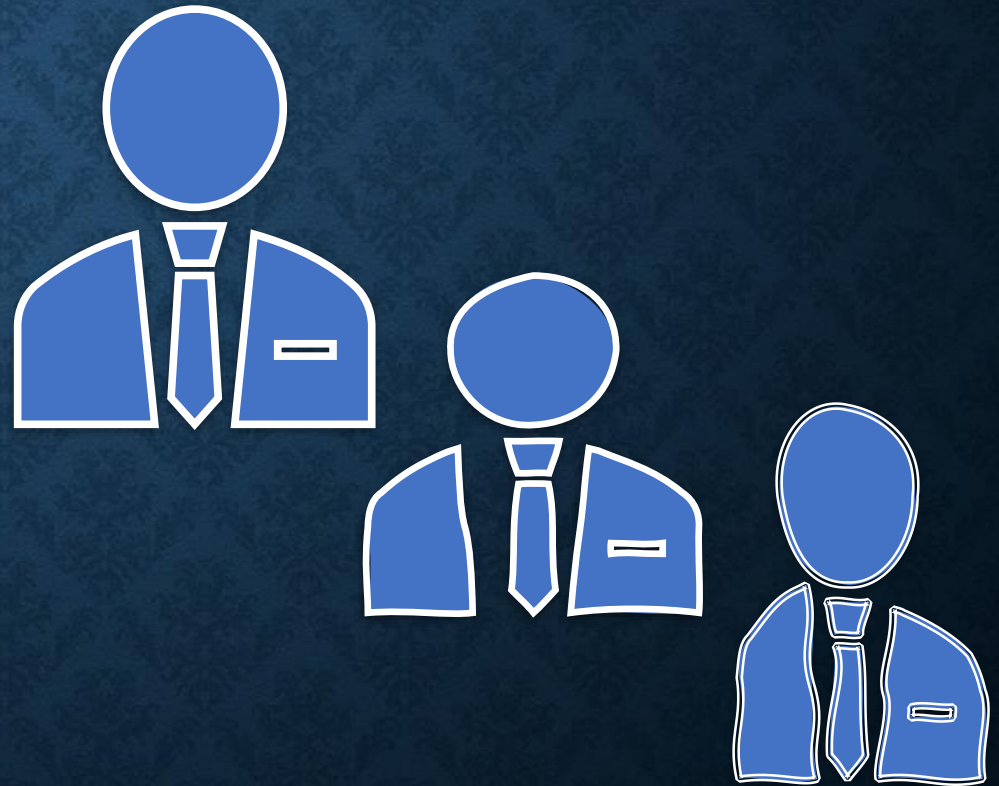


CONSEQUENCES OF LOOSE/POOR BOUNDARIES



Going beyond the parameters of your service system or role creates an unfair expectation that your coworkers do the same.

Inconsistent professional boundaries within teams and organizations may confuse clients and erode their confidence in your organization

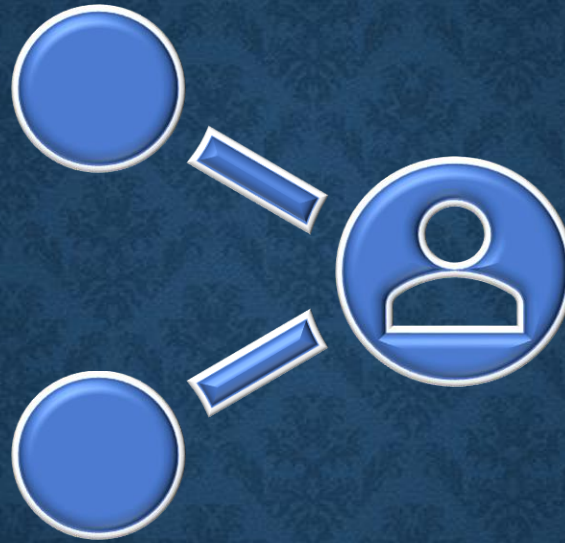


**WHY IS IT DIFFICULT TO
ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN
PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES?**

THE MAIN REASON

There is an inherent **power imbalance** between worker and client. Worker is often perceived as having power and control.





The service provider & client know each other in a personal context from another setting.

Dual relationships

The client's choices, history, relationships, feelings, lifestyle and/or life circumstances conflict with the service provider's values and/or knowledge about best practices



VALUES CONFLICTS

The service provider experiences trauma symptoms from hearing about the client's experiences. The service provider may be triggered due to having a history of similar circumstances.

VICARIOUS TRAUMA



The service provider feels the need to “save” the client.



Playing the “hero” role

The service provider does not trust that other team members are fulfilling their responsibilities to the client, believes that he/she can provide their services better than they can, and/or believes that the client works best only with him/her. The service provider takes over the roles of the other team members



POOR TEAMWORK



UNHEALTHY THOUGHTS UNHEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Unhealthy: I can never say no to others

Healthy Boundary Builder: I have a right to say no to others if it is an invasion of my boundaries

Unhealthy: It is my duty to hold them together.

HBB: I have a right to take care of myself.

UNHEALTHY THOUGHTS UNHEALTHY BOUNDARIES

2



Unhealthy: I would feel guilty if I set my work aside tonight.

HBB: I have a right and need to explore my own interests and do things for myself so I don't become enmeshed.

Unhealthy: I can never tell where to draw the line with others

Healthy Boundary Builder: There is a line I have drawn over which I do not allow others that ensures me privacy and independence.



**SIGNS THAT BOUNDARY ISSUES MAY BE
PRESENT**

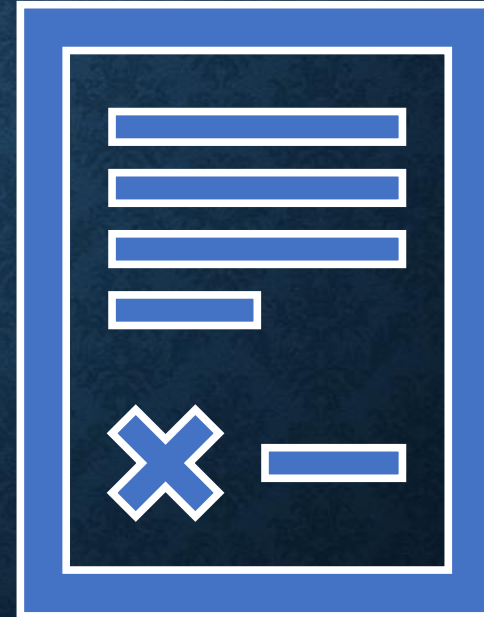
- Client and service provider begin referring to each other as **friends**
- Service provider receives gifts from or gives gifts to client
- Client has or is asking for service provider's home phone number or other significant personal information
- Client asks/expects service provider to socialize with him/her outside of professional setting

- Service provider reveals excessive personal information to client
- Service provider is unable to sleep due to anxiety related to client/client's situation
- Discussion regarding work/clients dominates service provider's social interactions with friends & family
- Service provider offers to provide assistance to client outside of his/her role
- Service provider finds him/herself "venting" with client about other service providers on team



TIPS FOR WALKING THE LINE

- As early as possible in the relationship (ideally at your initial meeting/intake/ assessment), **establish clear agreements** with the client regarding your role as a service provider, your availability, best ways to communicate with you, and what to do if you see one another in public.



- When boundary issues or warning signs appear, **address these issues** with the client quickly. Be sensitive to their feelings when doing this; emphasize the importance of and your commitment to maintaining healthy boundaries.



- Self-disclosure: if you do decide to tell a client something personal about yourself, **ensure that the information is related to the client's goals.** Too much self-disclosure shifts the focus from the client to the service provider and can confuse both parties in terms of roles and expectations for the relationship.



Realize that how someone interprets your words and actions might not match what you were trying to communicate.

With these sensitive relationships, you **may need to frequently clarify your role and boundaries** and ask the other person to repeat back what you said to ensure that he/she understands. This will also give the other person an opportunity to ask clarifying questions

Use your supervisor, professional colleagues and/or a mental health professional as a sounding board when you have questions or concerns regarding boundaries, and especially when boundary issues are impacting your ability to provide objective, compassionate care.

FOR SUPERVISORS:



For supervisors:
Recognize that questioning someone's boundaries can create defensiveness.



Rather than instructing someone to “have better boundaries”, use open-ended questions to help the service provider identify for him/herself that his/her work would benefit from the establishment of clearer boundaries.

- **Take care of yourself!** Make sure you are getting enough sleep, eating well, spending time with friends and family, exercising, seeking supervision as needed, and “leaving work at work” to the greatest extent possible.



QUESTIONS:



1

1. What is the boundary issue?



2

2. How could this boundary issue affect the client?



3

3. How could this boundary issue affect the worker?



4

4. What could the worker have done differently to establish and maintain healthy boundaries with the client?

- Harvey is a new staff member at a group home for teen boys. During his **first week on the job**, one of the boys, Larry, asked Harvey to take him to the DMV to get his driver's license on his 17th birthday, and **Harvey agreed to do so**. When Harvey arrived for his shift at the group home **two** days before Larry's birthday, he found out from the group home staff that Larry had failed 2 classes and ended the school year with a 2.0 GPA.
- The rules of the group home are that residents must have a 2.5 GPA with no failing classes in order to test for a driver's license. Harvey **avoided Larry that day** and didn't sleep that night because he was so stressed about the situation. The next day he met with Larry and told him he wouldn't be able to take him to get his license because of the 2.5 GPA requirement.
- Larry became upset and stated that the rule didn't make sense because academics have nothing to do with driving. Harvey vented with Larry about the situation and finally stated, "It sucks you can't get your license because of some **stupid group home rule**."

- Claudia has been working with Sara, a mother of three children, on vocational training and financial planning for the past year. During their time together, Sara has talked some with Claudia about her on- again, off-again boyfriend, Eddie. Eddie is the father of Sara's two younger children and is an undocumented migrant farm worker.
- Based on what Sara has disclosed about Eddie, Claudia believes that he is quite possessive and has rigid ideas about women's roles vs. men's roles. Claudia identifies herself as a feminist and finds Eddie's value system offensive. She also doesn't see how he could contribute adequately to the family system since he is undocumented.
- When Sara tells Claudia that she and Eddie have reconciled, Claudia tells Sara that she believes Eddie is no good for her since he is "sexist" and "illegal". She further states that this will only disrupt the children since "he's bound to disappear again at some point, anyway." After this conversation, Sara misses her next three appointments with Claudia.

- Sergio was removed from his biological parents at age 10 due to abuse and neglect and lived in foster homes until his mother was able to regain custody of him when he was 15. Sergio is now a case manager through a social service agency.
- When he is assigned the case of Jonathan Chavez, he sees many similarities between Jonathan's history and his own. During his initial meeting with Jonathan's parents, Sergio discloses many details about his own history and informs the parents of the steps his mother went through, including inpatient rehab, intensive therapy, and taking psychotropic medication, that helped her turn her life around.
- Based on what he has read in previous social worker reports, he informs Jonathan's mother that she "sounds a lot like my mom" and suggests that she be evaluated for psychotropic meds.

- Blanca is the counselor for a young mother of two children. Her client has practically no positive, adult support system and frequently tells Blanca that she feels isolated and doesn't know how to meet people.
- Blanca's close friend, Cindy, who is now in her 40's, was a teenager and a single mom when she had her two children. Blanca decides to introduce her client to Cindy as she believes Cindy could be a strong, positive and supportive role model to her client and could also introduce her client to a supportive community of adults.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

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The Arc of New Jersey

T: 732-609-7022

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Sources

Source: Professional Boundaries: A Nurse's Guide to the Importance of Professional Boundaries, https://www.ncsbn.org/Professional_Boundaries_2007_Web.pdf

Maintaining Healthy Boundaries: Presented by: Jennifer Mitchell, MS, LPCC

**Social Work Code of Ethics