

Professional Boundaries Policy

Purpose: The purpose of this policy is to establish clear and consistent guidelines for maintaining boundaries within a healthcare setting to ensure the safety, well-being, and ethical treatment of clients, as well as the professional conduct of staff and clinicians.

Scope: This policy applies to all staff, clinicians, and individuals involved in the provision of services within this organization. It covers both in-person and virtual interactions.

Policy Statement:

DEFINITION OF BOUNDARY

Boundaries are the framework within which the clinician/client relationship occurs. A boundary may be defined as the “edge” of appropriate professional behavior, transgression of which involves the clinician stepping out of or breaching the clinical role. Boundaries define the expected and accepted psychological and social distance between practitioners and patients. In a more subtle fashion, the boundary can refer to the line between the private, personal life of the client and of the clinician. Boundaries are derived from ethical treatise, cultural morality, and jurisprudence. Professional boundaries are the spaces between the practitioner’s power and the patient’s vulnerability.

BOUNDARY ISSUES

A therapeutic relationship is one that allows nurses to apply their professional knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences towards meeting the health needs of the client. Whenever this relationship deviates from its basic goal of treatment, it is called a boundary violation and becomes nontherapeutic. Boundary issues are disruptions of the expected and accepted social, physical, and psychological boundaries that separate clinicians from clients. Boundary violations may be inadvertent, thoughtless, or even purposeful. Respect for the dignity of the patient is the fundamental ethical principle in boundary problems. Boundary violations can result when there is confusion between the needs of the clinician and those of the client. Clearly defined and established professional boundaries create safety for both clinicians and clients.

1. Client-Clinician Relationship:

- a. All clinicians shall establish and maintain a professional, therapeutic relationship with their clients, maintaining clear boundaries.
- b. Clinicians should avoid engaging in dual relationships that could compromise the therapeutic relationship or create conflicts of interest. Clinicians should avoid situations where he or she has a personal or business relationship with the client.

2. **Confidentiality:**
 - a. All information shared by clients during sessions, including personal, medical, and psychological details, must be kept confidential. Sharing such information should only occur with the informed, written consent of the client or when required by law.
3. **Physical Boundaries:**
 - a. Physical contact with clients should be limited to situations where it is clinically appropriate (e.g., handshake or consensual comforting gestures).
 - b. Personal physical space and privacy should be respected during in-person sessions.
4. **Emotional Boundaries:**
 - a. Clinicians must maintain professional emotional distance from clients. They should avoid becoming personally involved in clients' issues or disclosing their own personal problems.
 - b. In cases where a clinician experiences emotional distress due to a client's situation, they should seek supervision and support to address their feelings appropriately.
 - c. Clinicians shall use professional and respectful terminology. Referring to patients as “dear,” or telling patients you “love them” is inappropriate and to be avoided.
5. **Social Media and Electronic Communication:**
 - a. Clinicians should maintain professional boundaries when communicating with clients through email, text, or social media. Any electronic communication should be secure and related to the client's treatment.
6. **Gifts and Financial Boundaries:**
 - a. Clinicians should not accept gifts, loans, or financial support from clients, as it may compromise the therapeutic relationship.
7. **Dual Relationships:**
 - a. Clinicians should avoid engaging in dual relationships, where they have multiple roles with the same client, as it may compromise objectivity and professionalism.
8. **Termination of Services:**
 - a. Clinicians must provide appropriate notice to clients when terminating services and refer clients to other suitable mental health professionals if necessary.
9. **Cultural Competence:**
 - a. Clinicians should be culturally sensitive and aware of the potential impact of cultural differences on boundary issues.
10. **Sexual Misconduct:**
 - a. Even if a patient consents, and even if the patient initiates sexual conduct, a sexual relationship is still considered sexual misconduct and absolutely forbidden.
 - b. It is ALWAYS the responsibility of a health care professional to establish appropriate boundaries with current and former patients. It is an abuse if the therapist puts their needs ahead of the clients.
11. **Reporting Violations:**
 - a. Any staff member or client who believes that a boundary violation has occurred should report it to the appropriate facility supervisor AND Worldwide’s Clinical director.

- b. Staff members need to be prepared to deal with violations by any member of the healthcare team. Patient safety and the right to dignified care must always be the priority. Staff must be familiar with reporting requirements and both the ethical and legal requirements for reporting.

12. Staff Must

- a. Be aware.
- b. Be cognizant of feelings and behavior.
- c. Be observant of the behavior of other professionals.
- d. Always act in the best interest of the patient.

Consequences of Violations:

Violations of this policy may result in disciplinary actions, up to and including termination of employment for staff and revocation of clinical privileges for clinicians. Legal actions may also be pursued in cases of severe misconduct.

Review and Revision:

This policy will be reviewed and updated as necessary to ensure its effectiveness and compliance with current professional standards and legal requirements. By adhering to this boundaries policy, we commit to providing ethical and effective mental health services to our clients while maintaining the highest standards of professionalism and integrity.