

Boundaries in Allied Health

Are you at Risk for a Professional Boundary Violation?

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Boundaries

- ▶ Effectively establishing and maintaining professional boundaries is essential when providing quality healthcare.
- ▶ Professional boundaries provide limits that enable the healthcare provider to interact with others in a professional setting.
- ▶ Boundaries ensure a secure and therapeutic environment where the healthcare provider and the client are mutually respected.

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Objectives

- ▶ Define Professional Boundaries
- ▶ Discuss the Parameters of Professional Boundaries
- ▶ Identify Professional Boundary Violations
- ▶ Recognize the Warning Signs
- ▶ Determine the Steps to Prevent Boundary Violations

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Boundary Defined

- ▶ -noun, plural -ries.
 1. something that indicates bounds or limits; a limiting or bounding line.
- ▶ Working definition: The Rules that define the limits of professional behavior.

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Hippocratic Oath



- ▶ Authored between 3rd and 2nd century BC
- ▶ First doctrine of ethical boundaries for medical practitioners
- ▶ Has been adapted to fit today's medical practices

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What are Professional Boundaries?

- ▶ Professional boundaries distinguish the therapeutic behavior of allied health professionals from any behavior that could lessen the benefit of care to clients, families, and communities.
- ▶ Boundaries give each person a sense of control in a relationship.



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How are Professional Boundaries Established?

- ▶ By law
- ▶ Set by licensing and/or certifying bodies
- ▶ Facility set policies
- ▶ Individually

Healthy Boundaries

- ▶ Provide a professional safe atmosphere where the client and the healthcare provider are mutually respected.
- ▶ Safeguard the client's dignity, autonomy and privacy.
- ▶ Are flexible within the bounds sound professional judgment.
- ▶ Grants individuals the opportunity to relate genuinely with others



Boundary Violations

- ▶ May occur when a professional is not aware of their own boundaries.
- ▶ May occur when the client boundaries are undefined.
- ▶ May occur as a process rather than a single event.

What is a Boundary Violation?

- ▶ An act of abuse in the healthcare provider/client relationship
- ▶ May encompass confusion between the professional's needs with the client/patient's needs

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ABUSE

- ▶ The misuse of power or a betrayal of trust, respect or intimacy between the healthcare provider and the client, which could reasonably be expected to cause, physical, emotional, sexual, financial and/or neglect.

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Professional Boundary Violations: Forms of Abuse

- ▶ Physical
- ▶ Verbal
- ▶ Emotional
- ▶ Sexual
- ▶ Financial
- ▶ Insensitivity to Religious and Cultural Beliefs and Values
- ▶ Neglect

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Why are Boundary Signs Important?

- ▶ They caution the allied health professional to stop and examine their relationship with a client.



Warning Signs

- ▶ Frequently thinking about a client when away from work.
- ▶ Sharing personal information or work concerns with the client.
- ▶ Observing more physical touching than is appropriate.
- ▶ Keeping secrets with the client.
- ▶ Selective reporting of client's behavior (negative or positive)



Warning Signs (cont.)

- ▶ Communicating in a guarded or defensive manner when questioned regarding interactions/relationship with client.
- ▶ Altering dress style while working with the client.
- ▶ Receiving gifts.
- ▶ Acting and/or feeling possessive about the client.

Warning Signs (cont.)

- ▶ Providing a client with special attention/treatment that differs from that of other clients under the same care.
- ▶ Denying that you have crossed the boundary from a therapeutic to a non-therapeutic relationship.

CAUTION

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Poll Question

Which one of the following would you consider a violation of boundaries?

- A. Superfluous hugging
- B. Becoming friends with client
- C. Accepting a gift from a client
- D. All of the above are boundary violations

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Boundary Violations

- ▶ Disclosing details of your personal life to a client
- ▶ Going out to eat with a client
- ▶ Inviting a client to a personal party or social event
- ▶ Accepting an invitation to a client special event
- ▶ Insensitivity to religious and cultural beliefs and values

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Most Common Violations

- ▶ Self disclosure
- ▶ Giving or Receiving Significant Gifts
- ▶ Overlapping Relationships
- ▶ Becoming Friends
- ▶ Romantic Relationships



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Questions to Consider

- ▶ Does this client mean something special to me?
- ▶ Am I treating this client differently?
- ▶ Is this in the client's best interest?
- ▶ Whose needs are being served?
- ▶ Is this behavior you would want other people to know you had engaged in with a client?
- ▶ Am I taking advantage of this client?
- ▶ Am I comfortable documenting this behavior in the client's chart?

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How to Prevent Boundary Violations

- ▶ Avoid discussing personal life (self-disclosure)
- ▶ Respect cultural and religious differences
- ▶ Do not accept invitations or invite clients to personal parties or social events
- ▶ Do not establish personal relationships with clients
- ▶ Do not accept gifts



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How to Prevent Boundary Violations (Cont.)

- ▶ Refrain from excessive or suggestive touching
- ▶ Do not use gestures, tone of voice, expressions, or any other behaviors which can be interpreted as seductive, sexually demeaning, or as sexually abusive



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Ethical Boundaries

- ▶ Honesty
- ▶ Fairness
- ▶ Confidentiality
- ▶ Right Behavior
- ▶ Diagnosing without a license
- ▶ Neutral Communications

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Consequences of a Boundary Violation

- ▶ Discipline and/or termination from employer
- ▶ Loss of license or certification from professional organization
- ▶ Criminal charges



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Summary

- ▶ Effectively establishing and maintaining professional boundaries is essential when providing quality healthcare.
- ▶ Continuously monitor yourself and your clients for boundary violation warning signs.
- ▶ Appropriately disengage yourself from any situation where boundaries may be violated.
- ▶ Boundaries ensure a secure and therapeutic environment where the healthcare provider and the client are mutually respected.

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