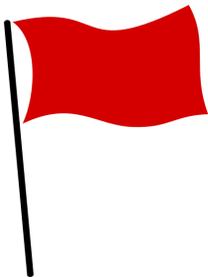


Maintaining Professional Boundaries: Recommendations for an Abuse Free Environment

The information outlined below is offered as recommendations to bolster your agency's abuse prevention efforts in the area of professional boundaries.

- ◇ Have an administrative presence in programs. Consider providing supervisory and management level support during non-traditional hours. Train staff on potential red flags that could signal a boundary violation.
- ◇ Consider the physical layout of the program—are there locations where video surveillance does not cover the area?
- ◇ Where are staff offices? Are other staff around during counseling sessions? Are there windows in staff offices to minimize the amount of “alone” time between staff and people receiving services?
- ◇ Are boundary violations occurring during recreation or while using an agency vehicle? Consider purchasing a GPS monitoring system to track the location of agency vehicles.
- ◇ Ensure sufficient and timely safeguards are implemented when there is concern related to a staff member's ability to maintain professional boundaries.

Potential Red Flags



Staff spends excessive time with a person receiving services during their shift

Staff meets a person receiving services outside of the care setting

Staff brings in special gifts or treats for a person receiving services

Staff bends the rules for a person receiving services

Staff always volunteers to transport person receiving services to outside appointments or other commitments

Staff is connected to a person receiving services on social media

Staff sharing their personal cell phone number and/or email address

Maintaining Professional Boundaries: Recommendations for an Abuse Free Environment

POLICIES

- ◇ Develop an abuse prevention policy.
- ◇ Develop a professional boundary policy. Include language that clearly outlines the prohibition of relationships between staff and people receiving services both while the person is in treatment and following discharge. Include language that speaks to the potential criminality of such conduct.
- ◇ Ensure incidents involving licensed and/or credentialed staff are also reported to the appropriate licensing agency and/or OASAS credentialing unit.
- ◇ Develop guidance on social media use and sharing personal contact information. If your agency permits staff and people receiving services to be connected on social media or to share personal contact information, establish clear parameters for when it is and is not appropriate to communicate via social media or to use personal contact information.
- ◇ Ensure agency policies address how and when staff disclose that they have had a personal relationship with a person receiving services.
- ◇ Ensure incident management policies align with the regulations of your state oversight agency and Justice Center legislation. Allegations of sexual abuse are to be reported to the Justice Center and NOT investigated by the agency prior to making the report.
- ◇ Ensure patient handbooks include procedures for people receiving services to make reports to the Justice Center and that people receiving services are supported in doing so. Refrain from using language that could be construed as punitive in nature.

TRAINING

- ◇ Train staff on recognizing “red flag” behaviors that may be a precursor to an inappropriate relationship. Ensure training includes a requirement to report such conduct to the Justice Center, your state oversight agency, and internally, as needed.
- ◇ Provide interactive training on maintaining professional boundaries. Mandate that staff attend this training upon hire and semi-annually at minimum. Ensure training includes practicing scenarios of real situations staff may encounter.

RESOURCES

- * Justice Center interactive training on Professional Boundaries with training guides for participants and facilitator
<https://www.justicecenter.ny.gov/professional-boundaries-training-course-0>
- * Justice Center Spotlight on Prevention: ***Maintaining Professional Boundaries*** <https://www.justicecenter.ny.gov/professional-boundaries-protection-people-special-needs-0>
- * ***It's Never Okay*** poster <https://www.justicecenter.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2020/12/52540-never-okay-poster.pdf>

