



PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES POLICY

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES POLICY

Introduction

This policy sets out JRH Support's policy principles and good practice guidelines on professional boundaries with service users.

Whilst it is recognised that staff must establish a rapport with service users and provide friendly and accessible services, they are responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries between themselves and service users.

The rights and needs of service users should be respected at all times. However, by the very nature of the disability of individual service users within the service and the role of the workers within the service, the relationship between the service users and workers is not one of equal balance.

Staff must recognise and understand that they are in a position of power. This power must not be abused at any time. It is essential therefore, that all interactions between service users and staff must be seen in terms of a professional relationship. Because there is a potential for positions of power to be abused and professional boundaries broken, the company makes it clear that the responsibility to maintain such boundaries rests with individual workers. Failure to meet this responsibility may lead to formal disciplinary action being taken against them.

Staff must ensure that working relationships are not misread or confused with friendship or other personal relationships. This is essential in order to protect staff from any risk of potential false allegations.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Clarify the roles of staff providing direct care or indirect care to the service users.
- Clarify the expectations of service users
- Clarify the division between the professional and personal relationships between service users and workers, and therefore enabling consistent approaches to service users.

Requirements

Immediately a member of staff thinks there is a risk of a potential breakdown of their professional boundaries they must bring it to the attention of the line manager.

If staff feel a colleague is at risk of potential breakdown of professional boundaries then they too have a duty to protect both service user and staff member, and should bring the matter to the line manager.

Staff must alert their line manager if they have previous personal knowledge of a service user who comes under their care.

If a member of staff is aware, or becomes aware that they are related to a service user this should be brought to the immediate attention of the line manager.

Definitions

Therapeutic Relationships

A therapeutic relationship is a professional relationship between the service user and the member of staff, in which the latter has a responsibility for ensuring that objectivity is achieved at all times.

Boundary

When the 'line' between the professional and personal relationship is crossed and the relationship between the service user and the staff member moves from being objective to subjective. An indication of this would be in the list of 'unacceptable practices' further on in this policy.

The Company

JRH Support

Staff

This is anyone who is employed by the company to provide direct or indirect care.

Working with Service Users

Staff must never overstep professional boundaries and confuse befriending with friendship. All workers must be aware of the difference between:

- **Befriending a service user** – which is a professional relationship, made to meet service user's needs, and
- **Becoming a service user's friend** – which is a relationship that focuses on the needs of both people. A professional relationship focuses solely on the needs of the service user.

Befriending is an appropriate relationship for staff, and part of building the necessary trust to work with service users. Becoming a friend is inappropriate. Staff are employed by JRH Support to work with service users as part of their contract of employment, and it is potentially an abuse of power to represent the relationship as a friendship.

Counselling

Staff must be aware of the difference between being a counsellor and using counselling skills (such as active listening with a non-judgemental approach) that are appropriate for the delivery of care and support. Counselling is not an appropriate

role for staff unless you have been employed specifically to counsel, and your job description outlines the areas of work for you to cover as professional counsellor.

Where it is identified that a service user may be in need of counselling, they should be given advice and support on accessing other appropriate agencies.

Influence

Staff must be careful not to influence service users with their own beliefs and personal values. Staff should also be aware of their potential to influence vulnerable and/or impressionable service users.

Although morality, religion and politics are common areas of conversation, and service users may wish to discuss their views with staff; staff should never promote or impose their own views.

Relationships and contact with service users within work

Where members of staff know service users prior to entering the service, the staff member must inform their line manager. The staff member should not be given the role of support worker with that individual.

New members of staff starting work may find that they know existing service users. This should be brought to the attention of their line manager. The line manager will explore with the member of staff issues around confidentiality and risk assessment.

Staff must never be accompanied by any member of their family or friends whilst supporting service users. This includes having non work related people waiting for them in their car whilst they support service users.

Relationships and contact with service users outside of work

- Staff must not allow service users to visit their homes.
- Staff must not encourage service users to develop relationships with the staff member's relatives or friends.
- Staff must not give service users their personal contact details, for example postal address, telephone number, fax number, email address, etc.
- Staff should not use their phone to contact service users. Any communication should be done through the office.
- Staff must not give service users the personal contact details of any colleague.
- Staff who encounter service users out of hours should be pleasant and civil if approached by the service user, but should generally discourage prolonged social contact. Staff should not approach service users in any social setting if the contact is not instigated by the service user especially where the service user's behaviour indicates that they do not want to be recognised or indeed identified as a user of the service.
- Staff must endeavour not to arrange out of hours contact with service users.
- Staff must not take a service user's pet home with them for any reason.
- Staff must not act on a service user's behalf outside of support time i.e. making phone calls for them, writing letters/emails etc.

Discussing others

- 'Gossip' or hearsay should not feature as an aspect of service culture and should be actively discouraged among both staff and service users.
- Staff must never share personal details about other staff with service users.
- Staff must never discuss other staff members with service users except on issues relating to care and support work.
- Staff must never discuss service users with other service users and other third parties.
- Where any of the above does occur the incident must be brought to the attention of the relevant line manager as soon as possible.

Unacceptable Practices

Unacceptable practices are those which put the professional/personal relationship in danger of crossing the therapeutic 'boundary'. The following list is not exhaustive and if staff are in any doubt they should consult with their line manager.

1.1 Sexual Contact

- Sexual acts
- Requests for/suggestion of sexual acts
- Physical contact which could be construed as sexually suggestive sexual innuendo and/or insinuation.

Some examples of more subtle inappropriate behaviour may include the following:

- Inappropriate dress
- Inappropriate use of body or verbal language i.e. language which is used to satisfy the need of the worker concerned and is not likely to have any therapeutic benefits for the service user.
- Asking the service user inappropriate questions regarding their sexual habits.
- Accessing pornographic material

1.2. Acceptance of Gifts

Staff must not accept personal gifts or cash from service users which may be interpreted as being given by the service user in return for preferential treatment. Where it is difficult to refuse a gift, then staff must discuss this with their line manager.

1.3 Inappropriate Personal Disclosure

Staff must not divulge any inappropriate personal information about themselves or other staff members.

1.4. Concealing Information from Colleagues about Service Users

This might include:

- Personal information
- The intention of the service user to self-harm or harm others
- Not reporting violent or critical incident issues
- Not reporting child protection or protection of vulnerable adult issues
- Not completing relevant records of service user interactions

1.5. Providing Substances to Service Users which are not Prescribed

All medication must be administered in accordance with the policies for the control and administration of medicines.

Staff must not purchase alcohol for service users.

1.6. Misuse of Service Users Money/Property

- Staff must at all times adhere to the policy for handling service users money
- Staff must not borrow money or property from service users or lend money or property to service users.
- Staff must not buy items from service users or sell items to service users
- Staff must not sell or dispose of goods belonging to the service user
- Staff must not use loyalty cards except those belonging to the service user when shopping with or for the service user
- Staff must not involve service users in gambling syndicates such as the National Lottery. (This does not prevent the service user choosing to enter a syndicate with other service users and being supported to do so, but staff should not be part of the syndicate)
- Staff must not incur any liability on behalf of a service user.
- Staff must not take responsibility for looking after valuables on behalf of a service user. (This relates to individual staff and does not preclude the provider from making arrangements with service users for storing valuables as long as appropriate recording and insurance is undertaken)
- Staff must not take any unauthorised person (including children) or pets into the service user's home without permission from the service user, their relatives or representatives and the line manager.

- Staff must not be a beneficiary of service user's wills or play any part in the will making procedure of any service user.

1.7. Misuse of Service User's Facilities

Staff must not use service user's facilities for their own use. Examples of this are as follows:

- Using washing machines/ironing boards/dryers etc
- Using the service user's telephone (except when this is on behalf of a service user)
- Accessing the internet (except for information purposes with or on behalf of a service user)
- Eating a service users food

1.8. Discrimination

This can take the form of subjective comments which can be either written or verbal about service users, such as:

- Culture or race
- Gender
- Disability
- Sexual orientation or preference
- Physical characteristics
- Age
- Any other personal aspects

1.9. Treatment and other Forms of Care

It is not acceptable for workers to carry out treatment or give other care when:

- It is not part of the service user's support plan
- The worker is not qualified to provide this element of care or support
- It has not been discussed with the team

Some examples of these are as follows:

- Giving haircuts
- Providing alternative therapies
- Carrying out religious rituals

1.10. Abuse of Power and Creating a Dependence

Staff have a responsibility to discourage over reliance of the service user on one worker and to encourage and enable the service user towards

Independence. Some examples of abuse of power and the potential for creating a dependence are as follows:

- Inviting service users to the worker's home
- Socialising outside the therapeutic boundary relationship
- Encouraging the service user to rely on one worker
- Using the service user for the worker's emotional needs

1.11. Staff can accompany service users to purchase alcohol, but must never buy it on their behalf without them being there.

1.12 Staff must only support service users with things that have been actually commissioned by social services and are documented in the person's support plan (unless staff have been specifically asked to do something additional as a one-off by the leadership team)

1.13 Social Media

Staff must not socialise with service users on social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter – for example being 'Friends' on Facebook or 'Following' on Twitter.

Staff must not support service users with tracking friends and relatives on social media unless this has been discussed with the relevant team leader and subsequently agreed by social services and other appropriate people.

Key Responsibilities of Staff and Management

Staff

- Staff must actively seek regular supervision, which is used constructively in the area of disclosing any feeling that they may be developing for a service user. These disclosures will be kept confidential unless the situation remains unresolved and the relationship develops into a personal one, in which case the supervisor will be responsible for seeking further advice on this.
- Workers have the responsibility to ensure that they have knowledge of and understanding of maintaining professional boundaries.
- Workers are expected to explain the professional relationship between them and the service user in a sensitive manner, and where appropriate seek support and advice from management.

Leadership Team

- The leadership team is responsible for facilitating regular training, supervision and updating of staff.