

Professional Boundaries when Working with a Client

It is evident that the majority of homemakers treat their clients respectfully, compassionately and responsibly and would not knowingly compromise the relationship established with them. This does not mean that relationship dilemmas or difficult situations do not arise.

The following provides information to help homemakers recognize potential problem situations, and suggests some strategies to consider in managing boundaries.

Characteristics of Appropriate Boundaries

Boundaries are the framework within which the homemaker/client relationship occurs. Boundaries make the relationship professional and safe for the client. It sets the parameters within which homemaker services are delivered. Professional boundaries typically include length of time to clean, time of day and day of the week of cleaning, cleaning tasks the client wants completed, limits regarding the use of touch and self disclosure. In more subtle fashion, the boundary can refer to the line between the self of the client and the self of the homemaker.

The primary concern in establishing and managing boundaries with each individual client must be the best interests of the client. Except for behaviors of a sexual nature or obvious conflict of interest activity, boundary considerations often are not clear-cut matters of right and wrong. Rather, they are dependent upon many factors and require careful thinking through of all the issues, always keeping in mind the best interests of the client.

Typical Areas Where it May Be Difficult to Draw A Line or Where Boundaries Can Become Blurred

There are a number of areas in which one has to maintain boundaries, that is, draw a line. Below are some typical areas that can present difficulties.

Self disclosure. Although in some cases self disclosure may be appropriate. Homemakers need to be careful that the purpose of the self disclosure is for the client's benefit. A number of dangers may exist in self disclosure including shifting the focus from the needs of the client to the needs of the homemaker or moving the professional relationship toward one of friendship. The blurring of boundaries can confuse the client with respect to roles and expectations. The primary question to be asked is, "Does the self disclosure serve the client's homemaking needs?"

Giving or receiving significant gifts. Giving or receiving gifts of more than token value is contrary to professional standards because of the risk of changing the relationship. For example, a client who receives a gift from a homemaker could feel pressured to reciprocate to avoid receiving inferior care. And, a homemaker who accepts a significant gift from a client risks altering the relationship and could feel pressured to reciprocate by offering "special" care.

Becoming friends. Generally, homemakers should avoid becoming friends with clients and should refrain from socializing with them outside of the working contract. Although there are no explicit guidelines that prohibit friendships from developing once the homemaker client has terminated services, homemakers must use their judgment in assessing the appropriateness of this for the individual client.

The definition of “sexual abuse” makes it clear that it is unacceptable to date a current client. Since power imbalances may continue to influence the client well past termination, professional standards tend to prohibit a homemaker from engaging in a sexual relationship with a former client to whom any homemaker service was provided in the past two years. Even the most casual dating relationship may lead to forms of affectionate behavior that could fall within the definition of sexual abuse. Our clients could be considered Vulnerable Adults and if sexual abuse is reported you could find yourself being investigated by the Police.

Physical contact. There are a variety of ways of using touch to communicate nurturing, understanding and support such as a pat on the back or shoulder, a hug or handshake. Such touch can however, also be interpreted as sexual or inappropriate which necessitates careful and sound judgment when using touch for supportive reasons. Homemakers must be cautious and respectful when any physical contact is involved, recognizing the diversity of cultural norms with respect to touching, and cognizant that such behavior may be misinterpreted.

Questions to Consider in Examining Potential Boundary Issues

In each individual case, boundary issues may pose dilemmas for the homemaker and there may be no clear or obvious answer. In determining how to proceed, consideration of the following questions may be helpful.

- Is this in my client’s best interest?
- Who needs are being served?
- Will this have an impact on the cleaning service I am delivering?
- Should I make a note of my concerns or consult with my Supervisor?
- How would this be viewed by the client’s family or significant other?
- How would I feel telling one of my homemaker peers about this?
- Am I treating this client differently than my other clients?
- Does this client mean something “special” to me?
- Am I taking advantage of the client?
- Does this action benefit me rather than the client?
- Am I comfortable in documenting this decision/behavior on the client’s task sheet?

Aging Services for Communities Self-Personal Boundaries

1. Don't talk to clients about your personal or sexual relationships.
2. Don't tell your clients your address.

3. Don't tell your clients your financial issues or problems
4. Don't bring your children along when cleaning.
5. Your client's names, addresses and diagnosis are not to be shared.
6. Don't talk on your cell phone to family and friends while with client.
7. If you are expecting an emergency call for example; your daughter is in labor or you have a child who you think the school might call and send home, then tell the client when you come that you are expecting an emergency call and ask if it is ok to have your cell phone turned on.
8. It's ok to give a birthday or holiday card to client. If giving a gift for birthday or holidays spend \$10.00 or less. If you give one client a gift you need to give all your clients a gift on their birthday or holiday.
9. It's ok to receive a birthday or holiday card from a client. Small gifts such as a box of candy or small gift \$10.00 or under are acceptable at birthday or holiday times.
10. Dress appropriately; no breasts showing when bending over or underwear hanging out your backside.

Professional Boundaries When Working With a Client Policy Homemaker Questionnaire

- 1: Boundaries make the relationship professional and safe for whom?**
- 2: Yes or no the giving or receiving of gifts of more than token value is contrary to professional standards.**
- 3: Are personal conversation on cell phones allowed while at the clients residence?**