
PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES & RELATIONSHIPS POLICY

POLICY AND GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES

This document sets out Independence Project's policy principles and good practice guidelines on professional boundaries with service users.

It is recognised that staff must establish rapport with service users and provide support that optimises the potential for service users to meet their basic human needs and rights. However staff are responsible for ensuring that they establish and maintain appropriate professional boundaries between themselves and service users.

There is no single all-encompassing definition of what constitutes professional boundaries. Our intention is to achieve a shared understanding of acceptable and unacceptable practice, enabling us to apply clear and consistent standards across Independence Projects service.

This guidance applies to all contact with service users, families and colleagues and should be incorporated into day-to-day support practices.

The Company therefore recognises this policy as an expectation of 'Reasonable Management Instruction' and expects all staff to abide by its contents.

STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES AND AUTHORITIES

The management has overall responsibility for ensuring that these guidelines are followed.

Line managers/team leaders and support workers all have the specific role of monitoring day to day team and individual practice and have a responsibility to challenge and address staff when standards are not being maintained.

All staff are individually responsible for applying and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries in their day-to-day work and for raising any associated issues or training needs with their line manager.

POLICY

Working with Service Users



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This section sets out a professional context for working with services users by describing basic values and principles that govern professional practice. These principles are:

- Boundaries define the limits of behaviour, which allow a member of staff and a service user to engage safely in a supportive caring relationship. These boundaries are based upon trust, respect and the appropriate use of power.
- The relationship between staff and service users is a therapeutic caring relationship that must focus solely upon meeting the needs of the service user. It is not established to build personal or social contacts for staff. Moving the focus of care away from meeting service user's needs towards meeting the employee's own needs is an unacceptable abuse of power.
- On occasions a member of staff may develop an attachment towards a particular service user. While this may be natural the staff member should ensure that this does not lead to a breach of professional boundaries. Staff should be encouraged to discuss these kinds of difficulties with their manager or colleague as part of practice supervision.

Befriending

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 users 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 Independence Project to work with service users as part of the contract of employment and it is potentially an abuse of power to represent the relationship as a friendship.

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Similarly, staff must be aware of the difference between being a counsellor and using counselling skills (such as active listening with a non-judgmental 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 a professional counsellor.

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

Providing advice

In general, advice should normally only be offered to service users when they request it, unless there are good reasons to be more directive. Where you do offer more directive advice, for example in a situation where there is a potential for physical harm or danger, you should aim to do this in a non-judgmental manner. When you offer advice to service users you should ensure that you provide sufficient information for service users to make an informed choice.

You should be aware of the areas in which you are not qualified to give advice and/or feel it is not appropriate for you to offer advice.

In these instances, you should inform the service user of this, making every effort to assist them in accessing appropriate and/or qualified advice.

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.

Approachability

Staff should be seen as approachable, open to fair challenge and criticism, and available to engage in meaningful dialogue. They should not be seen as intimidating or inaccessible people. Service users must not be discouraged from accessing support within agreed boundaries or from making complaints.



Privacy

Staff must respect service users' rights to privacy, and be sensitive and responsive to any different personal and cultural needs for privacy that may arise.

Inappropriate Personal Disclosure

Staff must not divulge any personal information about themselves or other staff members. Staff need to ensure that they only disclose information that the service user has given permission to do so. Family members do not have an automatic right to information about their relative, be aware and think before you speak. (Refer to the confidentiality policy for further clarity.) If in doubt refer to your line manager.

Concealing Information from Colleagues about Service Users.

Staff must not conceal any information about service users that could result in inconsistent practice or harm.

This might include:

- personal information
- the intention of the service user to self-harm or harm others
- not reporting violent or critical incident/issues
- child protection issues
- not completing full records of service user interactions

Touch – Physical Contact

Independence Project staff should approach touching with great care and caution.

Where touching does occur it must take place within the specific local work instructions or professional boundaries within the service.

Some service users may misinterpret physical contact as affection outside the professional relationship. Service users may also see physical contact as expressions or favouritism, for



example where a staff member hugs one service user and not another. All staff should therefore be aware that physical contact risks being misunderstood and it may result in staff being vulnerable to allegations of inappropriate professional behaviour.

In all service contexts where touching occurs it must only take place within the context of a professional relationship and with the service user's agreement. The limits and boundaries for touch between staff and service users should be fully described and documented.

In those service contexts where touching is an integral part of service delivery, staff should discuss the subject regularly at staff meetings so as to ensure consistency and clarity of approach.

Financial relationships:

Staff must not enter into any financial transactions with service users including buying, selling, exchanging or bartering goods or services.

- Staff must not lend their personal money or possessions to service users.
- Staff must not borrow money or possessions from service users.
- Staff should not give or accept gifts from service users.
- Staff should not accept monetary charitable donations to the service without the prior agreement of line managers.
- Staff should not normally handle money on behalf of service users except in clearly defined work instructions.
- Staff should not agree to become trustees, beneficiaries or executors in relation to the wills of service users.
- Staff should not accept the service user paying for their meals unless management have been notified and agree this practice (time specific).
- Staff should when transporting service user's look for the cheapest mode of transport.

Relationships and contact with service users within work:



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- Where members of staff know service users prior to entering the service, the staff member must inform their line manager. The line manager will explore with the member of staff issues around confidentiality and risk assessment.

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. Service users parents or carers can have staff members contact details.
- 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.

Discussing others:

- Staff must not partake in 'Gossip' or hearsay this should not feature as an aspect of service culture. Staff need to be aware that if people are taking part in gossip or hearsay then this should be actively discouraged among both staff and service users. Staff need to be aware that this behaviour is likely to result in a disciplinary, it is also worth mentioning that management are often informed of the Gossip or hearsay and people involved.
- 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 the care and support work.



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- 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.

Use of computers, social networking sites and texting:

- Staff must never discuss company business, service users or other staff members through private email or Instant messaging programs such as Messenger.
- Staff must never discuss company business, service users or other staff members using computers programs, such as Facebook.
- Where any of the above does occur the incident must be brought to the attention of the relevant line manager as soon as possible.

MANAGING BOUNDARY ISSUES

Staff may unwittingly be put in a position where their relationship with service users is compromised, or to be drawn into conversations or situations where their boundaries are being stretched or crossed. In some situations the fine line between good and bad practice may not always be obvious or clear.

A staff member should seek the guidance of their line manager if they are unsure about the nature of a relationship developing with a service user, or if they need advice on how they intend to deal with a situation.

In situations where it has not been possible to access support in this way, any action which has been taken must be discussed with the line manager as soon as is possible.

Other people in your team, particularly those who are likely to work with the service user must also be aware of where a boundary has been blurred or crossed. This is for two reasons:

- so they can maintain consistent practice with that service user (and a consistent explanation with other service users); and
- to ensure that the action taken does not look like a 'guilty secret'.

Boundary issues should be discussed with the line manager and within each team on a regular basis, and on occasions specific team training or facilitated discussion may be appropriate.



There are some events and arrangements planned with service users that are highly valued by them but may present potential boundary issues. In these instances there may at times be a need to exercise flexibility and discretion in the interpretation of this policy. Such instances where there are clear potential benefits to service users should be brought to the attention of the manager. The situation will then be 'risk assessed', any necessary safeguards agreed with the line manager and a record kept.

This approach should ensure that transparency is maintained in agreeing variations and that positive risk taking is managed.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

Line Managers and team leaders will be responsible for general monitoring of these guidelines. Transgression will be reviewed with individual staff members, but in some cases it may be appropriate to record examples for discussion as part of staff training or discussion at team meetings.

Significant and/or repeated breaches of this policy will lead to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

Reviewed Nov 2019

