PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL BOUNDARIES POLICY

Introduction

Staff and volunteers working within the Crows Nest Centre have a responsibility to provide safe, effective and caring services to clients within their care.

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

The rights and needs of clients should be respected at all times. However, by the very nature of the clients within the service the relationship between the client and worker is not one of equal balance.

Workers 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 clients and workers must be seen in terms of a professional relationship. Workers must have a clear framework within which to carry out therapeutic interactions. Because there is a potential for positions of power to be abused and professional boundaries broken the Crows Nest Centre must make 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.

Workers must ensure that working relationships are not misread or confused with friendship or other personal relationships. This is essential in order to protect clients at a time when they may be vulnerable. It is also to protect workers from any risk of potential false allegations.

If a worker is in any doubt they should refer to their Professional Code of Conduct for additional guidance on professional and personal boundaries and/or seek advice from their manager.

Scope

This policy is written for all clients who are currently receiving services and for all workers who are providing direct or indirect services for the Crows Nest Centre irrespective of grade or discipline.

It also covers all areas of service, whether in a day service or in the community.

Responsibility

It is the responsibility of managers to ensure their workers have a full understanding of this policy and that the policy requirements are adhered to by them and their workers at all times.
Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- clarify the roles of workers providing direct or indirect services to the clients
- clarify the expectations of clients and
- clarify the division between the professional and personal relationships between clients and workers to enable consistent approaches to clients.

Requirements

When a worker thinks there is a risk of potential breakdown of his/her professional boundaries he/she must immediately bring it to the attention of their manager.

If a worker feels a colleague is at risk of potential breakdown of professional boundaries then they too have a duty to protect both client and worker, and should bring the matter to their manager.

Workers must alert their manager if they have personal knowledge of a client who comes under their care.

If a worker is aware, or becomes aware that he/she is related to a client this should be brought to the immediate attention of their manager.

Definitions

Therapeutic Relationships

A therapeutic relationship is a professional relationship between the client and the worker in which the latter has a responsibility of 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 client and worker moves from being objective to subjective. An indication of this would be in the list of ‘Unacceptable Practices’, which identifies unacceptable behaviour.

Client

1. A current client for whom the worker is directly involved in providing services
2. A client who has previously received direct services from the worker
3. A current client who has no direct professional relationship with a worker

Worker

This is anyone who is employed by the Crows Nest Centre, whether paid or unpaid, to provide direct or indirect services.
Unacceptable Practices

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

Sexual Contact

1. Sexual acts
2. Requests for/suggestion of sexual acts
3. 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 client or
- asking the client inappropriate questions regarding their sexual habits.

Acceptance of Gifts and Hospitality

Workers must not accept personal gifts or hospitality from clients which may be interpreted as being given by the client in return for preferential treatment. Where it is difficult to refuse a gift, then workers must discuss this with their manager.

Inappropriate Personal Disclosure

Workers must not divulge any personal information about themselves or other workers.

Concealing Information from Colleagues about Clients

This might include:

- personal information
- the intention of the client to self-harm or harm others
- not reporting violent or critical incidents/issues or
- child protection issues.

Misuse of Money/Property

Staff must not loan their personal property.
Misuse of Clients' Facilities and Property

Workers must not use clients' facilities or property for their own use. Examples of these are as follows:

- washing machines/ironing boards/dryers etc.
- cooking facilities
- television/videos (except for education and information purposes and where it is part of the care plan) and
- eating clients’ food.

Discrimination

This can take the form of subjective comments which can be either written or verbal about clients:

- culture or race
- gender & age
- sexual orientation
- physical characteristics or
- any other personal aspects.

Treatment and Other Forms of Care

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

- it is not part of the client’s service
- the worker is not qualified to provide this element of care or
- it has not been discussed with the Coordinator.

Some examples of these are as follows:

- taking photographs without the client’s permission
- Administration of medication
- hair cuts
- alternative therapies and
- religious rituals.

Abuse of Power/Creating a Dependence

Workers have a responsibility to discourage over-reliance of the client on one worker and to encourage and enable the client towards independence. Some examples of abuse of power and the potential for creating dependence are as follows:

- inviting clients to the worker’s home
- socialising outside the therapeutic relationship
- encouraging the client to rely on one worker and
- using the client for the worker’s emotional needs.
Key Responsibilities of Staff and Managers

Workers

1. **Supervision** – Workers must actively seek regular supervision which is used constructively in the area of disclosing any feeling that they may be developing for the client. 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.

2. **Training and Updating** – Qualified workers have the responsibility to ensure that they have knowledge of and understanding of the importance of keeping personal boundaries and the theories and concepts of transference and counter-transference and to ensure that unqualified workers have an opportunity to understand these.

3. **Client Information** – Workers are expected to explain the relationship between them and the client in a sensitive manner and where appropriate form a contract of care with the client.

Managers

1. **Training and Updating** – Managers are responsible for facilitating regular training and updating.

2. **Client Information** – Managers must ensure that the clients have access to up-to-date information about services and service philosophies.

Monitoring Arrangements

This policy will be monitored via:

- the range of policies and standards which are referred to in this document
- the complaints and disciplinary procedures and
- an audit of the organisation’s standards and client feedback.

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