

# Offprint 24

## Guidance on professional boundaries between staff and service users

Enfield Social Services

A professional relationship between a worker and user is very different from that of friends or family members. It can lead to misunderstanding and confusion if worker and user are not clear as to their respective roles. This may be compounded by the fact that boundaries are less clear in social work than in some other professions.

If boundaries are not adhered to it leaves staff open to allegations of unprofessional conduct and abuse. The object of this policy is to protect staff and help them to feel more secure by making it clear what they can and cannot do.

The policy is intended for all employees at all levels and in all settings. However, no policy on professional boundaries can cover every eventuality and there will always be an element of debate as to what behaviour is acceptable or unacceptable.

Where there is doubt as to the appropriateness of behaviour a worker should always consult with the line manager.

Behaviours are listed under three headings:

- 1 Prohibited on all occasions
- 2 At line manager's discretion and recorded
- 3 At worker's own discretion.

### **Prohibited on all occasions**

Sexual relations.

Initiating gratuitous talk about sex.

Physical contact with sexual intent.

Rough handling.

Receiving money for yourself.

Social meeting in a restaurant or pub. (**Exception:** Unless part of written and agreed care plan or planned social skills programme.)

Social meeting in a user's home. (**Exception:** Unless part of written and agreed care plan or planned social skills programme.)

Social meeting outside working hours. (**Exception:** Unless part of written and agreed care plan or planned social skills programme.)

Social meeting in your own home. (**Exception:** In residential care there may be exceptional circumstances where a user is taken home. This should be entered into a disclosure report book to be checked by the line manager/inspection team. The Director of Social Services/Assistant Directors should also be formally notified.)

Saying you love a user. (**Exception:** With children the use of the word 'love' has to be seen in the context of their perception/understanding.)

Kiss on cheek. (**Exception:** Where it is in a user's interest or at their instigation or part of a user's culture.)

Calling a user 'dear' or 'love'. (**Exception:** Where a young child or older person finds these words reassuring.)

Accepting as a user someone with whom you have had a business relationship.

Accepting as a user someone who is or was a member of your family.

Accepting as a user someone you know or have known socially.

Accepting as a user someone you have taught or supervised.

Swearing.

Disclosing your own problems instead of listening to users' needs.

Disclosing your political views.

Disclosing whether you have received personal therapy.

Using power inappropriately. (The way a worker relates to a user can emphasise the worker's power verbally or in actions. Power can be used for personal advantage and users denied power might give more than they wish or behave differently to gain favour. The power relationship needs to be acknowledged.)

Lending money to a user outside financial regulations.

### ***At line manager's discretion and recorded***

Receiving funds for your team in a way that complies with financial regulations.

Receiving a gift for your team.

Giving a user a gift.

### ***At worker's own discretion***

Receiving a small gift for yourself. (Needs to be recorded.)

Expressing anger at a user. (Needs to be recorded.)

Hugging. (This is additionally at a user's discretion.)

Shaking hands. (This is additionally at a user's discretion.)

Using client's first name. (This is additionally at a user's discretion.)

Using your first name.

Saying you like a user.

Hand on shoulder.

### ***Disclosing personal information***

In disclosing personal information a worker must be personally responsible for exercising professional judgement about the validity, wisdom and necessity of such a disclosure with due account to outcome (e.g. disclosing marital status/sexual orientation).