Our mission is to provide behavioral health services that inspire hope and promote recovery, resilience, and wellness. People come to us when they are at their most vulnerable which is a privilege that carries significant responsibility.

# Professional Boundaries

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# The professional relationship

- Professional relationships are dynamic, goal-oriented and person centered, designed to meet the needs of the individual served.  Regardless of the service we provide or length of interaction, the provider-client relationship must protect the individual's dignity, autonomy and privacy and allow for the development of trust and respect.

- As providers, you protect the trust of the client and their families when you pay careful attention to the professional boundaries of your relationship with them.  You must respect how a person's experience can affect their feelings of personal power.  You are in a position of power regarding the relationship and are therefore responsible for managing boundaries even if the client's behavior encourages boundary violations.

# Professional boundaries

- Professional boundaries are the spaces between the provider's power and the patient's vulnerability. The power of the provider comes from their professional position and access to sensitive personal information. The difference in personal information the provider knows about the client versus personal information the client knows about the care provider creates an imbalance in the provider - client relationship. You must make every effort to respect the power imbalance and ensure a person-centered relationship

- Professional boundaries provide the framework for healthy relationships between providers and clients. They are physical and emotional limits that protect the vulnerability of the client and protect the provder from becoming over involved. Healthy professional boundaries keep the provider-client relationship a safe one where the focus remains on the client.

# It is your responsibility

- It is your responsibility to set and maintain clear appropriate, professional boundaries with clients.  Exceeding professional boundaries indicates that you are becoming over involved with the client.  You cannot be both a friend and a professional care provider.  Boundary violations may be both illegal and unethical.

- When professional boundaries are violated it causes the provider-client relationship to become untrustworthy, ambiguous, and possibly unethical or illegal.

- Boundary violations can have long-lasting effects and cause people not to seek help in the future, exasperate psychological conditions or promote dependence.

# Professional vs Social

| Professional | Social |
|---|---|
| Paid | Not Paid |
| Service Oriented | Social in Nature |
| Time & Location Limited | Spontaneous |
| Asymmetry in Power | Power is Shared |
| Person Centered | Focused on Shared Interests |
| IPOS Goal Oriented | Casual |

It is possible to have a dual relationship with the same person especially in small communities like ours.  Boundary issues can easily arise in these situations.  It is up to you to maintain healthy boundaries and if necessary, remove yourself from the professional relationship.

# Boundary Violations

- Boundary crossings can be brief excursions across professional lines of behavior that may be inadvertent, thoughtless or even purposeful, while attempting to meet a need of the client. Boundary crossings can result in a return to established boundaries or may continue for longer periods of time. Both should be avoided.

- Boundary violations occur when you violate or exploit the provider – client relationship. Often this occurs when you displace or confuse your needs with that of the client. Examples include:

  - Excessive self-disclosure
  - Deliberate socialization outside the professional work environment
  - Keeping secrets for a client
  - Breaching confidentiality

- Harmful, Illegal and unethical boundary violations include:

  - Abuse
  - Sexual relationships
  - Exploitive business transactions

# Warning Signs

- Boundary violations occur one small step at a time. Common warning signs include:
    - You share personal aspects of your life
    - You share secrets
    - You have received gifts or favors
    - You share your own needs
    - You speak poorly of coworkers or North Country CMH
    - You speak of things outside your scope of practice
    - You share personal contact information
    - You give/or loan money
    - You feel you know/serve the client better than others on the team
    - You frequently think of them when you're away from work
    - You spend free time with them
    - You selectively report behaviors (positive or negative) with the team
    - You have made efforts to have them assigned to your caseload

# Maintaining healthy boundaries

- Take care of yourself
- Ask for help if you are feeling vulnerable with a client/situation
- Avoid caring for family, friends, and people you know socially
- Do not use offensive or sexual language or jokes
- Do not do sell to or buy things from clients
- Use touch appropriately
- Do not give or accept gifts, money, favors or other valuables
- Do not spend free time with clients
- Do not share personal or financial information
- Maintain courteous professional attitude with all client equally

# Strategies

- Ask yourself whose needs are being met

- Remind yourself that you cannot be all things to all people

- Be aware of compassion fatigue

- Be aware of intimate feelings

- Be respectful of personal space - physically and verbally

- Anticipate that a client might act inappropriately with you

- Be prepared to clarify your role

- Document and Communicate

# If you see something do something

- Seek help for yourself by speaking with your manager, Human Resources, or the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

- Seek help for coworkers by speaking with your manager, Human Resources, or directly with the coworker if you're comfortable

- Seek help for clients by reporting all rights violations to Recipient Rights

- Seek compliant services by reporting compliance issues to the Compliance Officer.  (Employees and Contact Providers).