

# **PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES for SUNSHINE VILLAGE EMPLOYEES**

An important part of maintaining a positive and helpful relationship between a client and an employee of Sunshine Village is to follow guidelines of behavior often called professional boundaries. Maintaining professional boundaries helps employees maintain a helpful professional or "therapeutic" relationship with the client.

## **Sharing Personal Information**

It may be tempting to talk to your client about your personal life or problems. Doing so may cause the client to see you as a friend instead of seeing you as a healthcare professional. As a result, the client may adopt your worries as well as their own.

- Use caution when talking to a client about your personal life.
- Do not share information because you need to talk, or to help you feel better.
- Remember that your relationship with your client must be therapeutic, not social.

## **Engaging in Social Media**

It may be tempting to “friend” a client who asks to be part of your Facebook Page or engage a client thru a platform such as Instagram – but doing so may encourage the desire for more interaction or confuse the client as to the nature of the attention.

- It is recommended that employees do not “friend” clients on their own personal platforms or engage with clients on their social media accounts.
- If you do interact, you must always use good judgement – in terms of both frequency and content.

## **Not Seeing Client Behavior as Symptomatic**

Sometimes healthcare professionals react emotionally to the actions of a client and forget that those actions are caused by a disorder disability or disease. Personal emotional responses can cause a health care professional to lose sight of their role or miss important information from a client and can lead to abuse or neglect of a client.

- Be aware that a client's behavior is the result of a disease disability or disorder.
- Know the client's care plan!
  - If you are about to respond emotionally or reflexively to the negative behavior of a client, step back and re-approach the client later.
- Ask yourself if there is a way to problem solve and help the client communicate or react differently.

### **Nicknames/Endearments**

Calling a client “sweetie” or “honey” may be comforting to that client, or it might suggest a more personal interest than you intend. It might also point out that you favor one client over another. Some clients may find the use of nicknames or endearments offensive.

- Avoid using terms like honey and sweetie.
- Ask your client how they would like to be addressed. Some may want you to use their full name, such as Catherine – and others may want to be called a nickname, like Cathy.
- Remember that the way you address a client indicates your level of professionalism.

### **Touch**

Touch is a powerful tool. It can be healing and comforting or it can be confusing, hurtful or simply unwelcome. Touch should be used sparingly and thoughtfully.

- Use touch only when it will serve a good purpose for the client.
- Ask your client if they are comfortable with your touch.
- Be aware that a client may react differently to touch than you intend.
- When using touch, be sure it is serving the client's needs and not your own.

### **Unprofessional Demeanor**

Demeanor includes appearance, tone and volume of voice, speech patterns, body language, etc. Your professional demeanor affects how others perceive you. Personal and professional demeanor may be different.

- Clients may be frightened or confused by loud voices or fast talk.
- Good personal hygiene is a top priority due to close proximity to clients.
- Professional attire sends the message that you are serious about your job.
- Off-color jokes, racial slurs, profanity are never appropriate.
- Body language and facial expressions speak volumes to clients.

### **Gifts/Tips/Favors**

Sunshine Village has a policy that it is not acceptable to give or receive gifts that exceed \$50 or do special favors – as these can blur the line between a personal relationship and a professional one. Accepting an expensive gift from a client might be taken as fraud or theft by another person or family member.

- Follow the SSV “no gifts over \$50” policy.
- Practice saying “no” graciously to a client who offers gifts that is outside of guidelines.
- It is okay to tell clients that you are not allowed to accept gifts/tips/favors. • To protect yourself, report offers of unusual or large gifts to the Human Resources Department.

### **Scheduled Time**

A relationship between a client and health care professional is different than a personal relationship. Personal relationships involve two-way helping. A friend or family member is often expected to be available when needed. But a paid support staff is scheduled for particular times.

- Be aware that spending unscheduled time with a client may indicate that boundaries are becoming blurred.
- If you spend significant personal time thinking about a particular client, you may be crossing professional boundaries.
- If you recognize any of these warning signs, talk it over with your Program Manager or other trusted professional.

### **Over-involvement**

Signs of over-involvement may include spending inappropriate amounts of time with a particular client, visiting the client when off duty, trading assignments to be with a particular client, or thinking that you are the only health care professional who can meet the client's needs. Under-involvement is the opposite of over-involvement and may include disinterest and neglect.

- Focus on the needs of those in your care, rather than personalities.
- Don't confuse the needs of the client with your own needs.
- Maintain a helpful relationship, treating each client with the same quality of care and attention, regardless of your emotional reaction to the client.
- Ask yourself if you are becoming overly involved with the client's personal life.

### **Clothing**

Clothes help to define the boundaries of your role as a caregiver. Clothes send messages about how you feel about yourself and your role. Clothing choices can support your professional caregiving role or undermine it.

- Think about what message you are communicating with your choice of clothing.
- Outside of work you are free to dress in whatever style you choose.
- At work, your choice of clothing should reflect that you are a health care professional and sincere about your job.

### **Romantic or Sexual Relationships**

A health care professional is NEVER permitted to have a romantic or sexual relationship with a client.

- While it may be normal to be attracted to someone in your care, know that it is never appropriate to act on that attraction.
- Do not tell sexually oriented jokes or stories. It may send the wrong message to your client.
- Discourage flirting or suggestive behavior by your client.

## **Secrets**

Secrets between you and a client are different than client confidentiality. Confidential information is shared with a few other members of a team providing care to a client. Personal secrets compromise role boundaries and can result in abuse or neglect of a client.

- Do not keep personal or health-related secrets with a client.
- Remember that your role is to accurately report any changes in your client's condition to Sunshine Village.

## **In Conclusion**

Being a professional caregiver means having a positive attitude. A person's attitude is apparent from things they say, the manner in which they say them, the way they behave and the way they look. Having a professional, positive attitude means that you are caring and compassionate toward your clients and their family, and that you are committed to always doing your job to the best of your ability.

Professional boundaries are guidelines for health care professionals that work. Staying within these boundaries will result in a better outcome for you and those you care for.

*Helpful Hints Sheet developed July 2021*