



WALKING ALONGSIDE YOUNG PEOPLE

Acknowledging and Honoring their Individual Journeys

Positive Professional Boundaries

StreetWorks, Training 5

SUMMARY

Looking at personal and professional boundaries in a positive way, rather than in a negative way, will create healthy professional relationships between workers, their clients, and their partners. Focus on the positive!

KEY POINTS

- Professionals need to share a common rationale, language, and purpose for executing healthy boundaries. Understanding and believing boundaries are a positive and necessary part of the relationship is important.
 - Boundaries are not a list of “do-not do’s” but are instead guidelines for healthy professional relationships that keep the client and the worker both physically and emotionally safe.
- Professionals need to model good boundaries, as well as to articulate the rationale behind them, from the beginning of the relationship. Doing this will help ensure a positive experience for the client.
- Throughout every interaction, it is important to remember that everything is *about their needs, not yours*.
- **Appropriate roles.** Agencies should have clear roles written up so professionals know what their role in a client’s life is supposed to be. A provider should be able to clearly articulate roles and expectations to the client and use this defined role to help make daily decisions.
 - It is not a provider’s role to be there for the client at any given moment. It is important to create a safety net around the client, so you are not the only person they can go to in a time of need.
- **Power differentials.** The power of the helper comes from the professional position and the access to private knowledge about the individual receiving services. Youth experiencing homelessness and/or exploitation are a particularly vulnerable population!
 - Establishing boundaries allows professionals to control the power differential and allows a safe connection to meet the client’s needs.
 - The client needs to know they have the option to go to other people in your agency for help.
- **Professional vs Friendship: Creating non-transactional, independent relationships.** It is important for both the provider and the client to remember that this is a friendly, professional relationship but not a friendship. The client needs to understand that you help them because it is your job, not because you are friends. They need to know this is not a transactional relationship – this is not like some of the other relationships in their lives.
 - Clients need to know the professional will help them:
 - without having to manipulate in any way or give the provider anything in return for services.
 - even if the professional does not “like” them or approve of all of the things they are doing.
 - even if they are not overly nice to the provider.
 - without a promise of loyalty or sex.
- **Accountability.** A client needs to know that the provider is being held accountable for following the rules through their agency. This creates a safe environment; the client should know that providers talk through situations with their team and supervisors. If the client knows you have others you can consult with, they will know you have back up when a tough situation arises.

- **Agencies and Supervision.** Supervisors should:
 - Help service providers stay focused on their responsibilities to the youth they serve.
 - Help service providers model healthy communication and professional relationships.
 - Ensure a culture of open and honest communication with team members. This helps with providers' self-care as well as a better, more positive, outcome for the client.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Boundaries are guidelines for healthy professional relationships

1. In the video, there was a discussion surrounding a list of boundaries starting with “do not.” Why can looking at boundaries as a list of “do nots” be a negative thing?
2. What should a discussion about boundaries look like when framing them in a positive way? Why are having boundaries positive for a provider? For a client?
3. The PowerPoint shows a zone of professionalism graphic. What are some over-involved behaviors a professional might exhibit?
4. What does it mean to be consistent yet flexible?
5. Write down a phrase or paragraph you can use to articulate positive boundaries and appropriate roles with a client. It should include the rationale behind the positive boundaries and how they will help you and your agency better serve a client and will help ensure their needs will be met in a healthy way. You should be able to articulate this when you are first meeting with a client to immediately set realistic expectations.

Complexities and challenges are inherent in applying positive boundaries in daily work

1. What are some of the examples that were given about complex or gray areas when it comes to boundaries?
2. What are some examples of gray areas that have come up in your own work or agency? How could they have been handled better?
3. How can those gray areas be handled to make them more black and white, or less complex? What can an agency do to help overcome gray areas?
4. What kind of personal history or personal information may be okay to share with a client? What are other ways to frame helpful personal history rather than divulging that the information is your personal information?
5. What is the difference between a professional relationship and a friendship? How does avoiding friendship help the client?
6. What can you do to promote independence?
7. What is a transactional relationship? Why might a homeless or sexually exploited youth be used to transactional relationship? Why is it important to avoid this type of relationship at all levels?
8. Most people understand it is important not to have sexual relationships with clients. How can you deal with sexual attraction whether it is your attraction to a client or their attraction to you?

Boundaries require a team effort, involving the client, co-workers and positive oversight

1. What does it mean to build a safety net around a client?
2. Who else can be a part of that safety net when you are not available for a client? In your agency? In other agencies? Outside of agencies?
3. In the video, it was mentioned that good boundaries only work when they are a team effort. How does accountability fit into this rhetoric?
4. Why is it important for clients to know you are being supervised? How does this help them feel more independent or safe?
5. It can be difficult to consciously and consistently make sure every interaction and decision we are making is focusing on the client's needs and not our own. What kind of needs might a provider have that could be met in a provider/client relationship?
6. How can an agency help fulfill a provider's needs so they are not finding themselves looking to the provider/client relationship in order to fulfill their needs?

