Cyngor Gofal Cymru
Care Council for Wales

Hyder mewn Gofal - Confidence in Care

Professional boundaries:
A resource for managers

Contact

Care Council for Wales
South Gate House
Wood Street
Cardiff CF10 1EW

Tel: 0300 30 33 444
Fax: (029) 2038 4764
E-mail: info@ccwales.org.uk
www.ccwales.org.uk

Copies and other formats
Copies of this document are available in large print or other formats, if required.

Introduction

1

Relationships are a fundamental part of social care. The ability to build meaningful and rewarding relationships with a range of individuals using services, including carers, can have positive effects on promoting the well-being of the people both delivering and receiving social care services.[1]

The *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014* requires practice to be based on respectful and inclusive conversations between individuals using services and workers, with the aim of defining common outcomes about well-being. Delivering social care will mean developing relationships between a range of people in a range of contexts. Relationship centred working recognises the importance that the web of relationships around the individual play in promoting their well-being. Just as the

Introduction

1

individuals who use services are all different, so too are the individuals who make up the workforce. Developing good quality working relationships takes time and work, and a culture that supports the workforce to develop these relationships is crucial. Relationship centred working may cause uncertainty for some about how to carry out their roles and responsibilities. Professional boundaries help us to make sense of this and can be described as the 'boundary between what is acceptable and unacceptable for a professional both at work and outside work'.[2] Establishing a clear foundation about the nature and limitations of the working relationship from the outset will help both workers and people using services to explore their expectations and understand how they can best work together. A shared agreement will also help to protect individuals, the workforce and organisations, from misunderstandings about working relationships.

This resource provides a set of principles to guide your work in managing your own professional boundaries and those of the workers who you manage. It is intended to encourage reflection and development, but is not regulatory guidance. Scenarios have been included to help you to discuss and explore some of the issues which might arise, and how the principles could apply. They can be used to develop your own practice and to support workers through induction, ongoing support and supervision. We have also included unacceptable practices where professional boundaries are clearly crossed.

[1] Bell and Smerdon (2011) Deep Value: A literature review of the role of effective relationships in public services, Community Links; Imogen Blood (2013) A Better Life: valuing our later years, Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Andrews et al (2015) Developing evidence-enriched practice in health and social care with older people, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

[2] Professional Boundaries Research Report, Sheffield Hallam University. Available at:
www.gscc.org.uk/cmsFiles/Publications/GSCC_Professional_Boundaries_Research_Report_2009.pdf

Principles for maintaining professional boundaries

2

The following principles are broad to reflect differences in context and circumstance: they apply when working with adults or children. Individual circumstances will differ but principles can remain consistent and provide the basis for professional judgement.

- The relationship between a worker and an individual using the service may appear to have much in common with friendship or other relationships. However it is a professional relationship with a defined purpose to promote the wellbeing of the person using the service.

Principles for maintaining professional boundaries

2

- The social care professional is responsible for establishing and maintaining a meaningful and effective professional relationship with the individual, based upon an understanding of their individual needs and preferences in relating to others.

- The needs and well-being of the individual should be paramount. This includes providing opportunities for individuals to make active contributions to their lives, their relationships and their care and support.

- Professional boundaries apply to all forms of communication between social care professionals and individuals. This includes any use of social media.

- The social care professional is responsible for seeking support and taking sensitive action where an individual misreads or becomes confused about their relationship.

- Where it is not appropriate for a social care professional to provide, or continue to provide, care and support due to blurring or crossing of professional boundaries, alternative care and support must be provided.

- The social care professional should be supported to reflect on and understand the impact of caring on their own emotional well-being. They are also responsible for accessing additional support or specialist advice when relationship-based practice and managing of professional boundaries becomes difficult for them.

- Social care professionals should apply professional boundaries with fairness, clarity, consistency and transparency.

Supporting workers to maintain boundaries

3

As well as their own practice, the social care manager has a key role supporting workers to meet the above principles. Supervision will play a key role in supporting discussion, reflection and exploration of issues relating to professional judgements and boundaries. In particular, the social care manager should:

• Ensure workers are familiar with the *Code of Professional Practice for Social Care*;[3]

• Ensure workers are aware of their organisation's code of conduct;

[3] Code of Professional Practice for Social Care (2015) Care Council for Wales

Supporting workers to maintain boundaries

3

- Actively promote an open culture where workers regularly have the opportunity to discuss good practice, raise concerns and issues and to learn from mistakes;

- Provide leadership and a good role model for workers on managing professional boundaries;

- Ensure job descriptions clearly outline roles and responsibilities;

- Establish and maintain clear processes for person-centred assessment, risk assessment, care and support planning and review;

- Ensure individuals have an up-to-date care and support plan that reflects their unique, strengths, needs and desired outcomes, and that workers understand the plan and their role within it;
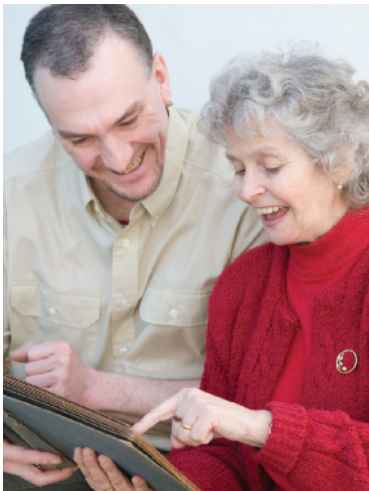
Supporting workers to maintain boundaries

3

- Provide support and guidance through supervision and appraisal with workers to explore and reflect on the nature and quality of their relationships with individuals. If necessary, to constructively challenge workers to address conflicts and dilemmas;

- Manage the behaviours and actions of workers which could potentially cross professional boundaries, ensuring that actions are transparent, collectively agreed and recorded. For example, managing requests for personal support outside the worker's contract of employment;

- Implement changes to systems, procedures or practice where there are identified areas for improvement;

- Require workers to report any previous or existing relationship they have with an individual outside work, for example, neighbour, friend or family member. This may not necessarily prevent their professional involvement, but will allow any potential issues to be managed;

- Require workers to report any relationship they have with an individual outside work, including through social media. This may not necessarily prevent their professional involvement, but will allow any potential issues to be managed;

- Where necessary, arrange training and development opportunities for workers to assist reflection on, and management of, professional relationships and boundaries;

- Ensure workers are clear about their responsibilities to report concerns and issues about their own or others' professional boundaries;

Supporting workers to maintain boundaries

3

- Ensure individuals using the service have information about its philosophy, aims and objectives, and the roles, responsibilities and limits of the workforce;

- Ensure workers know how to access information, care and support for an individual that they are not qualified or employed to provide, for example, counselling, advice, etc;

- Ensure workers know how to support individuals to establish and maintain friendships and personal relationships and their place in the community;

- Ensure family members and others close to the individual know the appropriate channels to communicate with the service and that workers know how to respond to comments, concerns and complaints.

Unacceptable practices

4

In many circumstances, applying the principles for maintaining professional boundaries will help to identify unacceptable practice and support workers to reflect on their role. However some practices will clearly breach acceptable professional boundaries, the code of practice and/or the law. Managers must take immediate and appropriate steps to address these as described in *The Social Care Manager*.[4]

Whilst we cannot provide a complete and detailed list, unacceptable practices include:

• Sexual contact with an individual using the service;

• Causing physical harm or injury to individuals;

4 The Social Care Manager (2013), section 40, Unsatisfactory performance and misconduct; Care Council for Wales

Unacceptable practices

4

- Making aggressive or insulting comments, gestures or suggestions;

- Seeking information on personal history where it is neither necessary nor relevant;

- Watching an individual undress where it is unnecessary;

- Sharing your own private or intimate information where it is unnecessary;

- Inappropriate touching, hugging or caressing;

- Concealing information about individuals from colleagues, for example, not reporting incidents and concerns, safeguarding issues, not completing records, colluding with criminal acts;

Unacceptable practices

4

- Acceptance of gifts and hospitality in return for better treatment;

- Spreading rumours or hearsay about an individual or others close to them;

- Misusing an individual's money or property;

- Encouraging individuals to become dependent or reliant for the worker's own gain;

- Giving special privileges to 'favourite' individuals, for example spending excessive time with someone, becoming over-involved, or using influence to benefit one individual more than others;

- Providing forms of care that will not achieve the planned outcome;

- Providing specialist advice or counselling where the worker is not qualified to do this;

- Failing to provide agreed care and support for or rejecting an individual, for example, due to negative feelings about an individual;

- Trying to impose own religious, moral or political beliefs on an individual;

- Failing to promote dignity and respect (see *The Social Care Manager, section 4, Dignity and respect*);[5]

- Any practices specifically prohibited in relevant legislation, statutory regulations, standards and guidance.

The consent of the individual is never a defence for any of these practices.

[5] The social care manager: Practice Guidance for Social Care Managers registered with the Care Council for Wales (2013), section 4, Dignity and respect; Care Council for Wales

What we say in the *Code of Professional Practice* and *The Social Care Manager*

5

The principles for developing professional boundaries are closely related to the *Code of Professional Practice for Social Care*,[6] which describes the standards of professional conduct and practice required of those employed in the social care profession in Wales. The following parts of the Code are particularly relevant:

- Recognising and using sensitively and responsibly the power that comes from your work with individuals and carers;

- Adhering to policies and procedures about accepting gifts and money from individuals, their families and carers.

- You must not…form inappropriate personal relationships with individuals, their families or carers.

- If you are responsible for managing or leading staff, you must embed the Code in their work.

[6] Code of Professional Practice for Social Care (2015) Care Council for Wales

What we say in the *Code of Professional Practice* and *The Social Care Manager*

5

In addition, in *The Social Care Manager* [7] we say:

Appropriate relationships and personal boundaries

The relationship between a social care professional and an individual using services will often involve an imbalance of power. This arises, for example, because the professional has superior access to information or resources or because the individual is in a vulnerable situation.

Recognising this imbalance of power, you must not:

a. use your professional position to establish or pursue a sexual or improper relationship with an individual using services or someone close to them;

b. express to individuals using services your personal beliefs, including political, religious or moral beliefs, in ways that exploit their vulnerability or are likely to cause them distress.

You must support staff to maintain appropriate personal boundaries with individuals whilst developing and maintaining positive relationships. You must address any concerns.

Gifts and donations

You must not encourage individuals, relatives or carers to give, lend or bequeath money or gifts that will directly or indirectly benefit you personally.

You should not put pressure on individuals, relatives or carers to make donations to other people or organisations.
You must comply with relevant statutory regulations concerning gifts, donations and bequests.

[7] The social care manager: Practice Guidance for Social Care Managers registered with the Care Council for Wales (2013) Care Council for Wales

Scenarios

6

The scenarios below have been included to help you think through how you could make judgements about professional boundaries. They are intended to provoke reflection and discussion; by yourself or as a resource in discussions with colleagues, individual workers or teams.

1. Rebecca is a teenager who lives in the residential children's home which you manage. She has recently asked one of the support workers, Paul, to be her friend on Facebook. Rebecca has opened up to Paul about her feelings since the death of her friend and says that Paul really listens to her. They both share a passion for music and Rebecca would like to share their interest in music through Facebook, which she thinks will help her recovery from the death of her friend. She also suggests exchanging mobile phone numbers: if she has a problem with her care she thinks that Paul will sort it out quicker than anyone else. This is the first time she has shown any real interest in getting on with life since her friend's death.

What are the risks in this situation?
What are the potential benefits?
How could you apply the principles outlined in the previous sections?
What advice would you give to Paul?
What action would you take?

Scenarios

6

2. Pauline is a mother of four grown up children and has lived in the care home where you work for five years. Since Lisa began working in the home, she and Pauline have had a close working relationship. One day, a member of the team approaches you as she is concerned that Lisa is sharing personal information with Pauline about some of the issues she is facing bringing up her children. Pauline appears happy to be asked for advice by Lisa.

What are the risks in this situation?
What are the potential benefits?
How could you apply the principles outlined in the previous sections?
What advice would you give to Lisa?
What advice would you give to the other member of the team?
What action would you take?

3. Gwyneth is a trusted and experienced member of your domiciliary care team. You have recently learnt that Gwyneth has been drawing money out from the cash point for Mr Edwards, one of the people your service supports. Mr Edwards says that without Gwyneth's help he wouldn't have any money available to him for the week. Mr Edwards is worried about money and has also asked advice from Gwyneth on moving it to another account. You do not suspect any dishonesty on Gwyneth's part.

What are the risks in this situation?
What are the potential benefits?
How could you apply the principles outlined in the previous sections?
What advice would you give to Gwyneth?
What action would you take?

Scenarios

6

4. Mr Reynolds has recently moved into an extra-care scheme following the death of his wife, who was his main carer. Louise works in the scheme and asks you, as her manager, if she can take Mr Reynolds home to meet her children. She also wants to show Mr Reynolds her photographic equipment as a way of encouraging and supporting him to take up a hobby.

What are the risks in this situation?
What are the potential benefits?
How could you apply the principles outlined in the previous sections?
What advice would you give to Louise?
What action would you take?

5. Dylan is a senior support worker for a voluntary mental health service. He has recently starting working with Megan, and they have built a strong rapport and an effective working relationship. Both Megan and Dylan speak Welsh and their relationship has been strengthened by their common language. Dylan has recently been offered a promotion to a Team Leader position, which will involve significantly less front-line support work. When Dylan explains his change in role to Megan, she is devastated, telling Dylan that she sees him as her best friend and that she will be 'heartbroken' not to see him in future. Dylan goes to his line manager for advice.

What are the risks in this situation?
What are the potential benefits?
How could you apply the principles outlined in the previous sections?
What advice would you give to Dylan?
What action would you take?

Scenarios

6

6. Stephen is a 10-year-old boy who is supported by the team you manage. Stephen gets on well with one of the support workers, Bob, who he says is kind to him and talks to him about football. Stephen's mother also likes Bob as she says that he really shows an interest in Stephen. In your most recent supervision meeting with Bob, he told you that he thinks that Stephen's mother is too protective with Stephen, that she does not let him take any risks because he has a learning disability. Bob has said that he would like to be able to take Stephen to a football match but he doesn't think Stephen's mother will allow it to happen. He said that he felt frustrated about this and was finding Stephen's mother increasingly difficult to work with.

What are the risks in this situation?
What are the potential benefits?
How could you apply the principles outlined in the previous sections?
What advice would you give to Bob?
What action would you take?

7. Manon lives with her husband on the outskirts of a large town. A member of your team, Sarah, has developed a good relationship with Manon and her family. Manon has dementia and is undoubtedly calmer with Sarah and responds well to her presence. The family has commented about Sarah as 'the only one who is able to get through to her'. In gratitude, Manon's son has offered her free legal advice about a dispute with one of her neighbours which Sarah had happened to mention (he is a lawyer). He suggests going out for a meal with Sarah to discuss it.

What are the risks in this situation?
What are the potential benefits?

Scenarios

6

How could you apply the principles outlined in the previous sections?
What advice would you give to Sarah?
What action would you take?

8. Mrs Griffiths is 82-years-old and lives alone in a cottage in a small market town. Mrs Griffiths has always been an active member of her church. She has recently been diagnosed with dementia, which means that she receives a service from a domiciliary care team who support her by remind her about domestic tasks and providing some practical assistance.

Joy is one of the team who has been working with Mrs Griffiths. She lives in the next town and they attend the same church. Joy has offered to accompany Mrs Griffiths to church and sit with her and her husband.

What are the risks in this situation?
What are the potential benefits?
How could you apply the principles outlined in the previous sections?
What advice would you give to Joy?
What action would you take?