

Residential and Short Breaks

Professional Boundaries with Service Users Policy

1.0 Introduction

A) This document must be read in conjunction with the Council's Employee Code of Conduct, in particular Section 09 Relationships with Clients / Service Users, and Children's Safeguarding Policy and Guidance. It is in your own interest to fully understand your rights at work and what is expected of you in the workplace". Paragraph 2 and 3 are direct quotes from the Council's Employee Code of Conduct.

B) This document sets out Residential and Short Break's policy on professional boundaries with service users.

C) It is recognised that employees must establish relationships with service users and provide support that optimises the potential for service users to meet their basic needs. However, employees are responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries between themselves and the service users with whom they work with.

D) There is no single definition of what constitutes professional boundaries. The intention of this Policy is to achieve a shared understanding of acceptable and unacceptable practice, enabling employees to apply clear and consistent standards throughout Residential and Short Breaks.

E) This Policy applies to all contact by employees of Residential and Short Breaks with service users and must be incorporated into day to day practices.

2.0 Staff Responsibilities

A) Line managers have the specific role of monitoring day to day team and individual practice and have a responsibility to challenge and address employees when standards are not being maintained.

B) Employees are individually responsible for applying and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries in their day-to-day work and for raising any associated issues or training needs with their line manager.

3.0 Safeguarding

A) Where a service user is dependent upon the Council and its employees the carer role must always be placed above all other interests. An employee must not compromise their professional relationship with service users by pursuing conflicts of interest such as unprofessional, personal, emotional or physical interaction and/or sexual interaction with them.

B) Employees' focus of care must always be towards meeting the needs of the service user and a deviation towards the needs of the employee is an unacceptable abuse of power.

C) Any behaviour or action on the part of employees must be open to scrutiny. Consequently, any behaviour or action which involves secrecy, for example non-work related text messaging, is almost certainly inappropriate.

D) Employees must not assist service users to break the law, including but not limited to the use of cigarettes, alcohol and illegal drugs.

F) Employees must inform their line manager immediately if they are subject to alleged misconduct and/or criminal activity (i.e. a conviction, caution, police enquiry or pending prosecution) outside of work. This will be considered within the context of the duties of the post held by an employee and the effect it has on their relationship with the Council, colleagues, service users and/or members of the public. This is essential in helping to safeguard the safety of service users.

4.0 Physical Contact

A) Where physical contact is a requirement of meeting service users' needs, this needs to take place within the guidelines of the service users' care plans, risk assessments and Individual Crisis Management Plans. Physical contact must in any event be age appropriate and meet the needs of the service user.

B) Some service users may misinterpret physical contact as affection outside the professional relationship. Some service users may also see physical contact as expressions of favoritism, for example where an employee hugs one service user and not another. Employees therefore need to be aware of time, location and circumstances of physical contact and any issues or concerns need to be fully described and documented in relevant risk assessments.

C) Unacceptable physical contact includes but is not limited to any contact not wanted by the service user or any contact that could result in sexual gratification by either the employee or the service user.

5.0 Relationships with service users outside work

- A) Employees must not allow service users to visit/reside at their homes.
- B) Employees must not encourage service users to develop relationships with the employee's relatives or friends.
- C) Employees must not give service users their personal contact details, for example postal address, personal telephone number, fax number, email address, etc. Work mobile phone numbers can be given to service users. If an employee has given their personal mobile number to a service user prior to the introduction of this policy they must immediately inform their line manager.
- D) Employees must not give service users the personal contact details of any colleague.
- E) Employees who encounter service users out of hours should be pleasant and civil if approached by the service user, but must generally discourage prolonged social contact.
- F) Employees must not to arrange out of hours contact with service users.
- G) Employees must not approach service users in any social setting if the contact is not instigated by the service user, especially where the service user's behaviour indicates that they do not want to be recognised or indeed identified as a user of the service.
- H) Employees must not have contact with service users which is of a social nature, including but not limited to contact through the internet and social networking sites or any other electronic media.
- I) Where an individual is no longer in receipt of services but remains vulnerable it is not appropriate for employees to develop a personal relationship or friendship with them. If an individual is no longer vulnerable and there is no imbalance of power, then employees should contact their line manager to discuss whether or not it would be appropriate to develop such a personal relationship or friendship.
- J) Where employees know service users non-professionally prior to them entering the service, the employee must inform their line manager at the earliest opportunity. If this is the case, the employee should not be given the role of the key worker. New employees starting work may find that they know existing service users. If so, this must be brought to the attention of their line manager at the earliest opportunity. The line manager will then explore with the employee issues around confidentiality and risk assessments.

6.0 Financial relationships

- A) Employees must not enter into any financial transactions with service users, including but not limited to buying, selling, exchanging or bartering goods or services.
- B) Employees must not lend their personal money or possessions to service users.
- C) Employees must not borrow money or possessions from service users.
- D) Employees handling money on behalf of service users must do so within the guidelines of the service users' care plans and relevant legislation.
- E) Employees must not agree to become trustees, beneficiaries or executors in relation to the wills of service users.
- F) Employees must not accept significant personal gifts from service users. However, accepting insignificant items of token value such as pens or diaries is acceptable.
- G) If an employee receives a gift with more than a token value without warning, it must be reported immediately to their Service Director, who will decide whether or not the gift can be kept or must be returned to the service user.

7.0 Discussing others

- A) Gossip or hearsay must not feature as an aspect of service culture and must be actively discouraged amongst both employees and service users.
- B) Employees must never share personal details about colleagues or other employees with service users.
- C) Employees must never discuss colleagues or other employees with service users except on issues relating to housing management and/or care and support work.

8.0 Dress and Appearance

Employees must ensure that their appearance is neat, clean and appropriate for their particular area of work. A high standard of personal hygiene is expected from employees at all times.

9.0 General

- A) Whilst it is expected that employees will build professional relationships with service users as part of their role a distinction needs to be made between professional relationships and personal relationships or friendships.

B) If an employee has difficulty enforcing or maintaining appropriate boundaries in terms of their relationship with a service user because of the actions or responses of the service user, the issue must be referred to their line manager immediately to allow appropriate action to be taken and recorded.

C) If an employee reasonably suspects employee colleague is acting contrary to this Policy, they must inform their Service Director immediately. Employees may also refer to the Council's Whistleblowing Policy.

D) Employees must never discuss service users with other service users and other third parties.

E) Breach of this Policy may lead to disciplinary action being taken against an employee under the Council's Disciplinary Policy, up to and including dismissal depending on the seriousness of the matter.

February 2014

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I confirm that I have read and understand this Policy and will comply with its provisions.

Signed:..... Date:.....