# **PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES**

# what are professional boundaries?

**Professional Boundaries**are integral to maintaining professional standards of practice and are essential guidelines that delineate the appropriate limits and behaviours within workers roles. These boundaries ensure the maintenance of a safe and respectful environment for both staff and people accessing services. They encompass maintaining confidentiality, establishing clear roles and responsibilities, and upholding ethical standards. It is imperative for workers to maintain a balance between empathy and objectivity, avoiding dual relationships or conflicts of interest that may compromise the quality of care provided. By adhering to these boundaries, staff can establish trust, promote autonomy and foster positive relationships with people, ultimately facilitating effective support and assistance within the community.

# why are professional boundaries important?

Professional boundaries are crucial in the sector for many reasons. Professional boundaries safeguard the wellbeing and dignity of people by ensuring that interactions remain respectful, appropriate, and focused on a person's needs. Maintaining boundaries also helps establish trust between the staff member and the person seeking support, fostering a safe environment for disclosure and collaboration. Additionally, clear boundaries help prevent potential conflicts of interest, exploitation, or harm to both clients and workers.

If professional boundaries are not upheld, several risks can arise. One significant risk is the erosion of trust between the worker and the person seeking support, which can lead to reluctance in seeking assistance or disclosing sensitive information. Blurred boundaries may also result in situations where the worker's personal needs or interests supersede the person's welfare, compromising the quality of care provided. Furthermore, violating professional boundaries can lead to ethical dilemmas, legal consequences, damage to one's professional reputation, and even harm to the emotional or physical wellbeing of the person seeking support. Overall, maintaining professional boundaries is essential for preserving the integrity of the person-worker relationship and ensuring the effectiveness and ethical practice of crucial services.

# **Ethical Standards for Professional Boundaries**

Professional Boundaries are crucial to work in the sector and everyone should ensure the following codes of practice are maintained to safeguard quality delivery:

|  |
| --- |
| Upholding privacy in interactions with individuals is a paramount commitment, ensuring confidentiality and respect are always maintained. |
| Workers have an obligation to treat people with dignity and to safeguard, promote, and acknowledge a person’s capacity for self-determination and personal decision making. |
| Maintain a friendly and supportive approach with someone in a professional relationship, that does not cross over into a personal relationship or friendship (real or perceived). |
| Recognise where there is a conflict of interest or dual relationship when working with someone, where there could be ethical dilemmas that arise in practice. Use supervision to openly discuss such instances and implement strategies to reduce or eliminate any risks or concerns. |
| Recognise and be self-aware of the automatic power imbalance in the professional-personal relationship and ensure the person/s feel safe, comfortable and are able to make self-determined decisions without professional bias or influence. |
| Critically reflect on personal beliefs and values that influence practice. Identify any that might impact on the rights of others or inform practice approaches that contradict the human rights and beliefs systems of the person they are working with. |
| Always behave ethically and professionally. Any behaviour deemed unprofessional or unethical should be reported to and addressed by a supervisor. |
| Acknowledge, uphold, and protect the rights and legal protections of others in all instances of work practice. |
| Know the limits to service delivery and ensure a person’s needs are met elsewhere if required, via active referrals and collaborative practices. |
| Prioritise the delivery of support services, ensuring the service and its staff possess the necessary knowledge and skills for proficient support delivery, whilst not providing services or information beyond the scope of one’s role. |
| Ensure all documentation and written reports are accurate, true and free from subjective or prejudicial language. |
| Adhere to a duty of care, where services implement safe practices to safeguard the psychological and physical wellbeing of the individual receiving support, and the workers providing it. Report any concerns with work practices which could pose a risk to safety, and seek guidance and support immediately via supervision or escalation processes. |
| Build rapport and commonality, but ensure excessive self-disclosure of worker’s personal details does not occur and privacy of the worker is maintained. |
| Equity and equality are human rights and no preferential treatment should occur in service delivery by any worker, with services to be delivered equitably to the target group. |
| Ensure all care, support and actions are taken are in the person’s best interests. |