

# MAINTAINING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

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# OBJECTIVES OF PRESENTATION

1. Identify if you are having problems maintaining professional boundaries with co-workers, children and/or their families
2. Identify if you are a compulsive fixer or rescuer which could impact your maintaining healthy boundaries with others
3. Identify tips on how to maintain healthy boundaries in your professional work

# WHAT ARE HEALTHY BOUNDARIES?

- They are framework in which the professional helper-client relationship occurs
- They make the relationship professional & safe for client
- They set parameters which helping services are delivered within
- They refer to line between client & professional helper

# WHAT DO HEALTHY BOUNDARIES INCLUDE?

## **Healthy Professional Boundaries include:**

- ▶ Time spent with a family/child
- ▶ Time of session day or evening
- ▶ Personal disclosure
- ▶ Limits regarding the use of touch
- ▶ The general tone of the relationship
- ▶ Dual relationships
- ▶ Lending

# WHAT DRIVES HEALTHY BOUNDARIES?

Boundaries must be set & maintained in helping relationship to insure:

- ▶ Rights of the client are respected & honored
- ▶ Helper is always respectful of & aware of need to guard privacy of client
- ▶ Helper does not take advantage of & recognizes extent of “vulnerability” of client in situation

# WHY TALK ABOUT BOUNDARIES?

- ◉ Reduces the risk of client exploitation
- ◉ Reduces client anxiety as rules and roles are clear
- ◉ Increases well-being of the worker
- ◉ Provides role model for clients

# WHO NEGOTIATES BOUNDARIES?

- ◉ Duty of the worker to act in the best interest of the client
- ◉ The worker is ultimately responsible for managing boundary issues.

# WHY THE WORKER?

- ◉ You are the professional!
- ◉ Clients may not be aware of the need for boundaries or be able to defend themselves against boundary violations
- ◉ There is an inherent power imbalance between worker and client-worker is perceived as having power and control



# EXERCISE



Always OK

OK Sometimes OK

Never OK

- ⦿ Touch
- ⦿ Disclose
- ⦿ Business
- ⦿ Presents
- ⦿ Lending
- ⦿ Socializing

# CLEAR BOUNDARY AREAS

- ◉ Planning social outings with clients
  - ◉ Having sexual relationships with clients
  - ◉ Having family members or friends as clients
- 
- ◉ \*\*Social Work Code of Ethics

# AREAS WHERE BOUNDARIES MAY BLUR:

- ◉ Self disclosure
- ◉ Gift giving
- ◉ Dual relationships
- ◉ Friendships
- ◉ Physical Contact

# 1<sup>ST</sup> EXAMPLE OF BLURRED PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES WITH CLIENTS

## Dual Relationships

- ▶ One cannot be both helper & “friend” or “significant other” to client due to reality it is too easy to lose perspective in helping client & client loses perspective as to helper’s real role in client’s life
- ▶ Helper has a “power or authority” role with client
- ▶ Important not to confuse client in creating relationship where roles become blurred & where expectations & demands change

# 2<sup>ND</sup> EXAMPLE OF BLURRED PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES WITH CLIENTS

## **Becoming a Friend with Client:**

- ▶ Providing “help” to another in need has visual & emotional aspect of “friendship” it is important while client is still in helping relationship to maintain boundary of no friendship
- ▶ Danger in becoming a friend while serving a client is that emotional vulnerability of client can become sensitized & if you should not be able to spend amount of time or provide amount of services which client expects to receive from a friend there is situation which is ripe for conflict, hurt feelings & conceivably exacerbating needs of client

# 3<sup>RD</sup> EXAMPLE OF BLURRED PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES WITH CLIENTS

## **Self-Disclosure**

- ▶ When helper reveals very personal information about self with client which sharing has no real purpose in goals of meeting the needs of client
- ▶ Such self-disclosure take spotlight off of client's issues & focuses rather on helper

# 4<sup>TH</sup> EXAMPLE OF BLURRED PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES WITH CLIENTS

**Not giving or receiving gifts of significant value between helpers & their clients**

- ▶ If such gift giving were to transpire, client who gave gift could expect “special” treatment from helper & conversely helper could feel “more obligated” to go outside norms of typical helping protocol to “pay back” client for client’s generosity in gift given
- ▶ To avoid such confusion in future rule would be to just abide by *No Gift Giving Guideline*

# WHAT MIGHT BE BLURRING BOUNDARIES?

- ◉ Are you an addicted fixer or rescuer? Maybe this is keeping you from maintaining healthy boundaries with your clients
- ◉ Take self-assessment instrument entitled:  
**Compulsive Fixer-Rescuer Self-Assessment**



# SO ARE YOU A COMPULSIVE FIXER OR RESCUER?

**Results:** if on this survey you have answered:

- ▶ **Always true** to 3 or more items or
- ▶ **Always true** and/or **Sometimes** to 5 or more items
- ▶ There is a strong possibility that you are maintaining weak boundaries with your clients and/or their families because of your being an “addicted fixer” or “rescuer”

# RESCUER-VICTIM-PERSECUTOR

The rescuer may put pressure on a family to be helped but they fail to engage so the rescuer becomes angry and persecutes the family member who becomes the victim.

The rescuer promised to rescue the family member but fails so the family member becomes angry with the rescuer and starts to persecute the rescuer who then becomes the victim.

# UNHEALTHY THINKING

Examples of unhealthy thoughts or beliefs which allow boundaries to be crossed.

**Unhealthy:** I can never say no to others

**Healthy Boundary Builder:** I have a right to say no to others if it is an invasion of my boundaries

**Unhealthy:** It is my duty to hold them together.

**HBB:** I have a right to take care of myself.

# UNHEALTHY THINKING

- ◉ **Unhealthy:** I can never tell where to draw the line with others
- ◉ **Healthy Boundary Builder:** There is a line I have drawn over which I do not allow others that ensures me privacy and independence.
- ◉ **Unhealthy:** I would feel guilty if I set my work aside tonight.
- ◉ **HBB:** I have a right and need to explore my own interests and do things for myself so I don't become enmeshed.

# MINIMIZING BOUNDARY CROSSINGS

- ◉ Be alert to potential or actual conflicts of interest
- ◉ Maintain supervision or consultation with staff members
- ◉ Interactions should focus on the client at all times
- ◉ Have a clear understanding of ethics and pay attention to professional boundaries
- ◉ Set clear expectations for interactions

# MINIMIZING BOUNDARY CROSSINGS

- ▶ Be self-aware of feelings & behaviors involved in working with each client & family
- ▶ Be observant of behavior of other helpers in the field & call them on it if they appear to be overstepping their boundaries with clients

# MINIMIZING BOUNDARY CROSSINGS

- ▶ Always act in best interest of clients & families
- ▶ Most importantly DO NO HARM to your clients

# QUESTIONS TO ASK IN DETERMINING BOUNDARY ISSUES WITH CLIENTS (1)

1. Is this in my client's best interest?
2. Whose needs are being served?
3. Will this have an impact on the service I am delivering?
4. Should I make a note of my concerns or consult with a colleague?
5. How would this be viewed by the client's family or significant other?
6. How would I feel telling a colleague about this?



# QUESTIONS TO ASK IN DETERMINING BOUNDARY ISSUES WITH CLIENTS (2)

7. Am I treating this client differently (e.g., appointment length, time of appointments, extent of personal disclosures)?
8. Does this client mean something *special* to me?
9. Am I taking advantage of the client?
10. Does this action benefit me rather than the client?
11. Am I comfortable in documenting this decision or behavior in the client file?

# SO WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED

- ◉ Let's see what you have learned
- ◉ Answer these questions as we go
- ◉ Select the correct answer for each question
- ◉ Share with your fellow participants as we proceed through these questions

# QUESTION #1

When referring to the relationship between the client and helper, boundaries are:

- A. Actions that are not appropriate in client care
- B. Whatever the client feels is appropriate
- C. Whatever the helper feels is appropriate
- D. The limits that define the helper-client relationship

# ANSWER QUESTION #1

D. The limits that define the helper-client relationship

## QUESTION #2

Boundaries are essential to protect clients from the helper's

- A. Power
- B. Anger
- C. Poor services
- D. Lack of knowledge

# ANSWER QUESTION #2

A. Power

## QUESTION #3

Which is one of the clearest signs that a boundary violation has occurred in the helper-client relationship?

- A. The client is not happy with his or her care
- B. The helper hugs the client
- C. The helper asks for a change of assignment
- D. The needs of the helper are being met

## ANSWER QUESTION #3

D. The needs of the helper are being met



## QUESTION #4

Gerald, the helper assigned to George, regularly talks about his personal problems with George. George is happy to listen to his helper Gerald's personal problems and never complains about it. Since this relationship seems to benefit both parties it does not appear to be a violation of boundaries.

- A. True
- B. False

# ANSWER QUESTION #4

**B. False**

## QUESTION #5

If there are things in the helper-client relationship which the helper would not want to record in the record of the client then a boundary violation is likely.

- A. True
- B. False

# ANSWER QUESTION #5

A. True

## QUESTION #6

Gill is a dad who has become very attracted to Suzette who works with his daughter. Suzette is equally attracted to Gill. Their personal relationship began when Gill shared his feelings of attraction to Suzette and she shared her similar feelings. Since Gill wants this relationship it is OK for Suzette to allow it to develop.

- A. True
- B. False

# ANSWER QUESTION #6

**B. False**

## QUESTION #7

Albert is an in home worker who has been working with Charles(parent) and his family for the past year. The school year is ending so Charles and his family will no longer be a client at Head Start. However on his last visit he finds out that Charles is lacking enough food supplies in his house to keep he and his family fed for the next week. Albert's best response is to:

- A. Call Salvation Army to request they drop off food from their food pantry for Charles and his family
- B. Bring groceries to Charles homes after he gets off from work that day
- C. Notify Head Start about Charles' circumstances
- D. Calls Charles' ex-wife to inform her of Charles pressing need for groceries in his house to feed himself and his family

# ANSWER QUESTION #7

C. Notify Head Start about Charles' circumstances



## QUESTION #8

Jackie is a “Mary Kay” distributor in the community. While Jackie is picking up her daughter, Maggie Jo, head start staff sees the logo on Jackie’s purse and thinks “I love those products and I sure could use some more...” Maggie Jo’s best action is to:

- A. Request a change of assignment away from Jackie so she can order products
- B. Ask Jackie for the name of another Mary Kay distributor in the community
- C. Tell Jackie that she cannot buy products from her but Jackie can sell it to her relatives or friends
- D. Buy the products she needs

## ANSWER QUESTION #8

B. Ask Jackie for the name of another Mary Kay distributor in the community

# EXERCISES

Client divorce

Client who does taxes

Artist bringing artwork in

Tailgating

Seeing a client at a game

Client is living in the same apartment building

# SO HOW DID IT GO?

- ◉ Have you a better idea as to what Maintaining Professional Boundaries with your clients and their families is all about?
- ◉ Can you now identify if you are a compulsive fixer or rescuer which could impact your maintaining healthy boundaries with your clients and their families?
- ◉ Can you now Identify steps you can take to maintain healthy boundaries in your professional work?