

Managing Professional Boundaries



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Overview

- What is a Boundary and Why Have Them?
- Boundaries & Ethics
- Basic Ethical Standards as it relates to Boundaries
- What Do I Do? - Building Healthy Boundaries
- Protecting Client's Welfare
- Other considerations

What is a Boundary?

- A border/frame around the professional relationship
- Defines roles & responsibilities of both staff & client
- The imaginary line that divides you and me



Boundaries from Provider Perspective

- Line that separates me from client, dictating our interaction
- Limits that control my power so I don't hurt the client
- Emotional & physical space I create so client can focus on their own healing, not mine
- Allows me to remain objective to ensure you are making sound judgments

Boundaries from Client Perspective

- Line that separates me from the professional, dictating our interaction
- The emotional & physical space that allows me to focus on my own healing
- Allows for me to work through the power differential between myself and the professional

Why Have Boundaries?

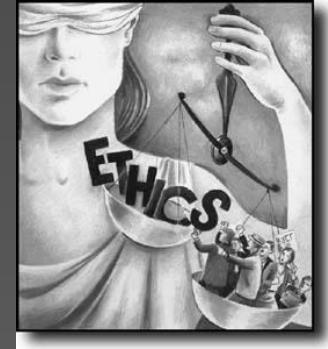
- Exists for our protection
- Protects the client from harm



Boundaries & Ethics Go Hand-in-Hand

- **Ethics are:**

- A system of moral principles
- Rules of conduct recognized in respect to a particular class of human actions or a particular group/culture
- Necessary for our work with clients
- Simply doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do



Ethical Standards....

- Protect the client by:



1. Not exploiting the client for our personal advantage
2. Not engaging in sexual activity with the client
3. Avoiding relationships that conflict with the client's interests....aka DUAL RELATIONSHIP

Basic Ethical Standards



- **Dual/Multiple Relationships:**

- When professional takes on 2+ roles, simultaneously or sequentially with client
- 2 things that make dual relationships dangerous:
 1. They are not always harmful
 2. They are not always avoidable
- Problems that may arise from dual relationships:
 1. Power differential b/w client and staff
 2. May carry conflicting responsibilities for professional involved
 3. Client's expectations will differ according to the role the professional is playing at a given time

Basic Ethical Standards

- **Self-Disclosure:**

- A boundary issue when it is done to meet a professional's own needs for understanding, approval, intimacy, or other personal needs
- Role reversal takes place where the client becomes the professional's emotional caretaker instead of the reverse
- When done inappropriately, often precedes sexual intimacies



Basic Ethical Standards



- **Accepting/Refusing Gifts:**

- › Changes the dynamic of the therapeutic relationship between professional and client
- › Things to consider when making a decision about accepting/refusing a gift:
 - Monetary value of the gift
 - Client's motivation for offering it
 - Professional's motivation for accepting/refusing it
 - Stage of the therapeutic alliance/relationship
 - The cultural meaning to the client of giving gifts
 - Implicit message the professional sends in an acceptance or refusal

What Do I Do?

**Healthy boundaries occur
when boundary crossing
does not take place**

1. Open discussion about boundaries on an ongoing basis or as necessary
2. Seek consultation or supervision
3. Documenting decisions and rationale for those decisions
4. Self-monitoring against loss of objectivity
5. Use Herlihy & Corey's decision making model



Herlihy & Corey's Decision Making Model

1. Determine whether the potential dual relationship/boundary crossing is avoidable or unavoidable
2. If it is avoidable, the potential risks & benefits should be assessed
3. Discuss the potential problems & benefits with the client
4. Decide



Protecting Client Welfare

1. Determining beforehand where you want to draw your professional boundary with the client
2. Work to ensure client understands the limits of the relationship
3. Be consistent, yet flexible and have a clear rationale for any exceptions made
4. Take proactive steps to protect client when exceptions are made
5. Self-monitoring for any patterns that may develop
6. Keep up to date on revisions of code of ethics (i.e., attend trainings) – *Ethical Standards at USVI transformed from Clinical Norms*

Other Considerations

- Your own distress
- Exceeding areas of competence
- Staff splitting
- Routine/common socializing with client
- Excessive self-disclosure
- Direct intervention in the client's life
- Becoming enmeshed in client's life

QUESTIONS?

