

Peer delivered services are still seen as relatively new concepts in formal systems of behavioral health care. Subsequently, concern has been voiced about: dual relationships, professional ethics and boundaries and peers being viewed as a “friend” rather than as a provider.

Session 21

Clarifying & Establishing Boundaries

clarifies different types of boundaries,
discusses how violations are harmful & how to recognize boundary violation
patterns, and develops a framework for making better ethical decisions at work.

The following information was adapted from the South Carolina Department of Mental Health.

Dual Relationships

A dual relationship is one in which roles are or could be mixed. For example:

- A peer support specialist is providing services to a peer with whom they also have a friendship.
- A peer support specialist supervisor and case manager is the same person.

Boundaries

Boundaries are more ambiguous. They are:

- The unseen lines that you won't cross
- Undefined physical and emotional distances
- Parameters that make you unique
- Self-imposed and self-defined

❖ *Boundaries require the use of good judgment.*

Why all the Concern?

All of the helping professions (medicine, nursing, psychology etc.) have established codes of conduct.

This is because there exists an accepted inherent belief that not addressing these issues unacceptably increases the chances of harm and/or exploitation for a person (peer) seeking services.

In as much as peer support specialists are employees they should not be treated differently or have additional rules created to enhance or excuse them from standards of conduct that is expected of all employees or contracted affiliates.

When acting within one's role as a professional, a peer must be able to recognize, maintain and balance boundaries that establish appropriate limits to relationships.

❖ *If we lose our ability to be objective, we tend to become too involved in a person or situation.*

Good, healthy, and appropriate boundaries are the distance and emotional detachment that need to be maintained to ensure an effective perspective on a situation.

❖ *Maintaining personal boundaries is indicative of a well-trained, experienced peer specialist.*

Establishing Professional Boundaries

What are Professional Boundaries?

Professional boundaries define effective and appropriate interaction between professionals and the public they serve.

- They are the space between the professional's power and the peer's vulnerability.
- They exist to protect both the professional and the peer.

When we talk about interpersonal or workplace boundaries, it can sometimes be a difficult concept to grasp because it isn't something that we can see.

But just because we can't see a boundary doesn't mean that it isn't there or that it isn't important.

The definition of a boundary is the ability to know where you end and where another person begins.

Boundaries are an Important Issue

The amount & type of boundary responsibility you have with a person differs according to the type of relationship:

- Friendship
- Colleague
- Peer

Friendship Boundaries

This is a person that you know, like, and trust and one with whom you have a close personal connection. It can be a person with whom you are allied in a struggle or cause. The difference between this person and a peer you work with is in the equitability of the relationship.

No One has Power or Authority Over the Other

Colleague Boundaries

A colleague is a fellow member of a profession. That person may have power and authority over you, be equal in power and authority to you or have less power and authority than you.

Like the relationship with clients, professional or business relationships can become sticky because of the types of power and authority and who has the ability to enforce them.

Power and Authority Are Not Always Equal

Peer Boundaries

With respect to the Missouri Department of Mental Health the term client is used briefly here to describe a person who is seeking professional behavioral health services. Depending on their circumstances each individual may hold different types of power and authority. It is important to remember that while the term client is being used in this section; the individuals being referred to you are your peers and should be referenced as such.

Power and Authority Varies

The following information was adapted from Minnesota Board of Nursing (January 2000).

What are Boundary Violations?

- They are any behavior or interaction which damages a client, a professional, and/or the professional interaction.
- The victimization and/or exploitation of a client by a professional.
- A betrayal of the sacred covenant of trust.

How do Violations Occur?

A boundary violation occurs when a professional, consciously or unconsciously, uses the professional-

client relationship to meet personal needs rather than client needs.

Who can be Harmed?

Boundary violations can harm both the client and the professional. The ramifications can be widespread. Damage can extend to marriages, families, other clients communities, clinics, institutions, and the profession in general.

How Do Boundaries Help?

Preservation of boundaries need not be seen as a barrier to the professional relationship, but rather as a way to facilitate it.

Maintaining boundaries protects the safe space in the relationship thereby enhancing the building of the trust which is essential to enable clients to reveal their needs.

Boundary Violations: Four Common Elements

Four elements characteristically appear in boundary violations:

- Secrecy
- Role Reversal
- Double Bind
- Indulgence of Professional Privilege

Secrecy

Secrecy involves the professional keeping critical knowledge or behavior from the peer and/or others or selectively sharing information.

Example: A peer specialist takes a peer into their home and tells the peer that the peer specialist's

employer cannot know about this or they will lose their job.

Role Reversal

Role reversal occurs when the peer takes care of the professional. They look to the peer for satisfaction and gratification, rather than placing peer needs first. They may not be consciously aware of this role reversal or may attempt to justify it by contending his or her actions are for the peer's benefit.

Example: A client/peer becomes a peer specialist's A.A. or N.A. sponsor.

Indulgence of Professional Privilege

Indulgence of professional privilege involves using information obtained in the relationship with a peer for the benefit of the professional. Because professionals can have or exert authority over a peer's situation, they can be at risk to extending that authority to intrude on the client.

Having access to information does not constitute a right to it. Access is a professional privilege; it is not a professional's right to use the information for one's own benefit.

Example: A peer specialist has been helping a peer with severe financial problems develop a budget. The peer specialist uses that information to try to purchase the peer's car below market value.

Double Bind

A double-bind consists of messages that contradict each other while discouraging the receiver of the messages from noticing the difference. The peer is left feeling caught in a conflict of interest and any attempt at resolution places the peer at risk of loss. The peer is torn between the desire to end the

relationship and the realization that this may also end any form of help from the professional.

The double-bind contains an implied threat. A sense of guilt and fear of possible abandonment by the professional blocks the peer from taking action. The double-bind constricts the peer from using all available options and thus limits growth.

Examples: (1) A peer specialist makes negative comments about other peer specialist's caring for a peer who has development of trust as a therapeutic goal. (2) A peer specialist tells a peer that they may begin a personal relationship when the peer is no longer receiving services.

Boundaries: Are You Helping or Are You Hurting?

There are more gray areas than black and white ones when thinking about boundaries. Peer specialists can make more considerate decisions if they will take time to think about some of the basics of boundaries.

Some Warning Signs of Boundary Violations

Although not an exhaustive list, the following are helpful “cues” when setting professional boundaries:

- ✓ Choosing sides
- ✓ Making exceptions
- ✓ Keeping secrets
- ✓ Giving or receiving gifts
- ✓ Borrowing or lending money
- ✓ Feeling as if no one but you has interest in the peer
- ✓ Feeling no one but you will be able to assist the peer

- ✓ Feeling responsible for a peer's progress or failure
- ✓ “Owning” a peer's success's or failure's
- ✓ Confiding personal or professional issues or troubles

Think about what boundaries issues you might have in your work situation and relationships.

Developing A Framework: How Do You Make Better Ethical Decisions at Work

The “Yes's” and the “No's”

If you are unsure about your interactions try asking yourself the following questions:

If you answer “No” to 1 - 2 or “Yes” to 3 - 4 you need to stop and evaluate your interaction.

1. Is the relationship in the peer's best interest?
2. Is this something that other peer specialists would do?
3. Can this affect my objectivity in providing care?
4. Will this cause confusion in my role?

Still Unsure?

If you are still unsure try asking:

1. How would this appear to others (peers, family, colleagues and/or supervisor)?
2. How does this appear to the peer?
3. Is this decision making me uncomfortable?

Trouble Shooting Problem Spots: Time

When, where, and how often you meet with a peer can be a troublesome issue. If it feels wrong it probably is, but ask yourself the following questions to help clarify the situation:

1. How much time am I spending with a peer?
2. Does it vary from that spent with other peers?
3. Am I spending "off duty" time with the peer?

Trouble Shooting Problem Spots: Location

If a peer wants to talk or meet somewhere other than a center approved location you're beginning to slide toward a questionable boundary as well as possible policy violation. Try asking:

1. Is the location of the interaction appropriate to the relationship?
2. Would you provide peer services to other peers at this location?
3. Is there is a legitimate need to meet?
4. Have I made the meeting known to others and documented it?

Trouble Shooting Problem Spots: Gifts

Accepting or giving a gift can get tricky. If you are unsure ask:

1. Does the gift giving create a sense of obligation on the part of you or the recipient?
2. Do you do this routinely as part of your job, regardless of the age or gender of the peer?
3. Is the gift of a personal nature that would only be to or from a specific person?

4. Is there a department or center policy regarding gifts?

Asking For Help

At all times, if you are unsure about a situation or confused about whether an interaction could be interpreted as a boundary violation you always should:

1. Consult your supervisor
2. Refer to the Certified Peer Specialist Code of Ethics
3. Consult other clinical colleagues

Session 21 – Review Questions – Clarifying and Establishing Boundaries

- 1) Why are boundaries important in relationships?
- 2) What are some warning signs of boundary violations?
- 3) What should you do if you have questions about boundaries?
- 4) What are the four common boundary violations?