



Training Your Caregiver: Professional Caregiver Boundaries

An important part of maintaining a positive and helpful relationship between a veteran and a paid caregiver is to follow guidelines of behavior often called professional boundaries. Maintaining professional boundaries helps the caregiver maintain a helpful or "therapeutic" relationship with the client. A good question to ask oneself is, "Are my actions more about my needs than about the needs of my client?" If so, you may be crossing a professional boundary.

Professional Boundaries for Veterans-Directed Caregivers

Sharing Personal Information

It may be tempting to talk to your client about your personal life or problems. Doing so may cause the client to see you as a friend instead of seeing you as a healthcare professional. As a result, the client may adopt your worries as well as their own.

- Use caution when talking to a client about your personal life.
- Do not share information because you need to talk, or to help you feel better.
- Remember that your relationship with your client must be therapeutic, not social.

Not Seeing Veteran Behavior as Symptomatic

Sometimes caregivers react emotionally to the actions of a client and forget that those actions are caused by a disorder or disease (symptomatic). Personal emotional responses can cause a caregiver to lose sight of his/her role or miss important information from a client, and can lead to abuse or neglect of a client.

- Be aware that a client's behavior is the result of a disease or disorder.
- Know the client's care plan!
- If you are about to respond emotionally or reflexively to the negative behavior of a client, step back and re-approach the client later.
- Note that the client may think their action is the best way to solve a problem or fill a need.

- Ask yourself if there is a way to problem solve and help the client communicate or react differently.

Nicknames/Endearments

Calling a client “sweetie” or “honey” may be comforting to that client, or it might suggest a more personal interest than you intend. It might also point out that you favor one client over another. Some clients may find the use of nicknames or endearments offensive.

- Avoid using terms like honey and sweetie.
- Ask your client how they would like to be addressed. Some may allow you to use their first name. Others might prefer a more formal approach: Mr., Mrs., Ms., or Miss.
- Remember that the way you address a client indicates your level of professionalism.

Touch

Touch is a powerful tool. It can be healing and comforting or it can be confusing, hurtful, or simply unwelcome. Touch should be used sparingly and thoughtfully.

- Use touch only when it will serve a good purpose for the client.
- Ask your client if he/she is comfortable with your touch.
- Be aware that a client may react differently to touch than you intend.
- When using touch, be sure it is serving the client's needs and not your own.

Unprofessional Demeanor

Demeanor includes appearance, tone and volume of voice, speech patterns, body language, etc. Your professional demeanor affects how others perceive you. Personal and professional demeanor may be different.

- Clients may be frightened or confused by loud voices or fast talk.
- Good personal hygiene is a top priority due to close proximity to clients.
- Professional attire sends the message that you are serious about your job.
- Off-color jokes, racial slurs, profanity are never appropriate.
- Body language and facial expressions speak volumes to clients.

Gifts/Tips/Favors

In the VDHCBS it is not acceptable to give or receive gifts, or do special favors, that can blur the line between a personal relationship and a professional one. Accepting a gift from a client might be taken as fraud or theft by another person or family member.

- Follow the VDHCBS “no gifts” policy.
- Practice saying “no” graciously to a client who offers gifts that is outside your guidelines.
- It is okay to tell clients that you are not allowed to accept gifts/tips/favors.
- To protect yourself, report offers of unusual or large gifts to the VDHCBS Options Counselor.

Scheduled Time

A caregiver relationship is different than a personal relationship. Personal relationships involve two-way helping. A friend or family member is often expected to be available when needed. But a paid helper is scheduled for particular times.

- Be aware that spending unscheduled time with a patient may indicate that boundaries are becoming blurred.
- If you spend significant personal time thinking about a particular patient, you may be crossing professional boundaries
- If you recognize any of these warning signs, talk it over with your Options Counselor or other trusted professional.

Over-involvement

Signs of over-involvement may include spending inappropriate amounts of time with a particular client, visiting the client when off duty, trading assignments to be with a particular client, or thinking that you are the only caregiver who can meet the client's needs. Under-involvement is the opposite of over-involvement and may include disinterest and neglect.

- Focus on the needs of those in your care, rather than personalities.
- Don't confuse the needs of the client with your own needs.
- Maintain a helpful relationship, treating each client with the same quality of care and attention, regardless of your emotional reaction to the client.

- Ask yourself if you are becoming overly involved with the client's personal life. If so, contact the VDHCB Options Counselor to discuss this issue.

Clothing

Clothes help to define the boundaries of your role as a caregiver. Clothes send messages about how you feel about yourself and your role. Clothing choices can support your professional caregiving role or undermine it.

- Think about what message you are communicating with your choice of clothing.
- Outside of work you are free to dress in whatever style you choose.
- At work, your choice of clothing should reflect that you are a professional caregiver and sincere about your job.

Romantic or Sexual Relationships

A caregiver is ***NEVER*** permitted to have a romantic or sexual relationship with a client. Except in the case of a worker being a fiancé or a spouse, **sexual contact with a client is a crime in Texas.**

- While it may be normal to be attracted to someone in your care, know that it is never appropriate to act on that attraction.
- Do not tell sexually-oriented jokes or stories. It may send the wrong message to your client.
- Discourage flirting or suggestive behavior by your client.
- If you feel that you are becoming attracted to someone in your care, immediately seek help from your VDHCB Options Counselor or other trusted professional.

Secrets

Secrets between you and a client are different than client confidentiality. Confidential information is shared with a few others members of a team providing care to a resident. Personal secrets compromise role boundaries and can result in abuse or neglect of a client.

- Do not keep personal or health-related secrets with a client.
- Remember that your role is to accurately report any changes in your client's condition to family or physician, and notate that report via your daily notes on your time sheet.

In Conclusion

Being a professional caregiver means having a positive attitude. A person's attitude is apparent from things he/she says, the manner in which he/she says them, the way he/she behaves, and the way he/she looks.

Having a professional, positive attitude means that you are caring and compassionate toward your veteran employer and their family, and that you are committed to doing your job to the best of your ability at all times.

Professional boundaries are guidelines for caregivers that work. Staying within those boundaries will result in a better outcome for you and those you care for.

Resources

1. Compassionate Community Care Employee Handbook
2. Delbert Plummer "Boundaries "
3. DHS Wisconsin Caregiver Boundary Training
4. VDHCBS Employee Handbook

Exam Follows on Next Page



Training Your Caregiver: Professional Caregiver Boundaries

Employee Name: _____

Date: _____

Circle the correct answer.

1. An important part of maintaining a positive and helpful relationship between a veteran and a paid caregiver is to follow guidelines of behavior called professional boundaries.
 - a. True.
 - b. False.

2. A worker should talk with the veteran about personal things in the worker's life or family so the veteran feels closer and bonds with the worker.
 - a. True.
 - b. False.

3. Clothes help to define the boundaries of your role as a caregiver. Clothes send messages about how you feel about yourself and your role. In your own words describe what are appropriate clothes to wear as a professional caregiver:

4. You are short of cash, your electric bill is overdue, and your electricity is about to be disconnected. Is it professional for you to ask for an advance in salary or a loan from your veteran to help you pay your electric bill?
 - a. Yes.
 - b. No.
 - c. Maybe.

5. Circle the appropriate behavior for a professional caregiver:
 - a. Keep personal or health-related secrets with a client.
 - b. Discourage flirting or suggestive behavior by your client.
 - c. Do not tell sexually-oriented jokes or stories.
 - d. Courteously say no to offers of large gifts or sums of money offered by your veteran.
 - e. Work more hours than you are paid for at no extra charge to the veteran.
 - f. Become very involved in your veteran's life.

6. In your own words, state what is acceptable professional clothing for a professional caregiver to wear at work:

7. Touch is a powerful tool. It can be healing and comforting or it can be confusing, hurtful, or simply unwelcome. Touch should be used sparingly and thoughtfully. Which of these is **NOT** a proper use of touch with the veteran client?
 - a. Use touch only when it will serve a good purpose for the client.
 - b. Ask your client if he/she is comfortable with your touch.
 - c. You hug your veteran because you are having a bad day and you just need a hug.

8. What should you do if you feel you are becoming attracted to someone for whom you are providing care?
- a. Nothing, it is okay to have feelings of love or attraction to the person for whom you are caring.
 - b. You should discuss your feelings with the veteran or the veteran's designated representative.
 - c. You should seek immediate help from your VDHCBS Options Counselor or other trusted professional.
9. A caregiver relationship is different than a personal relationship. Personal relationships involve two-way helping. A friend or family member is often expected to be available when needed. However, a paid caregiver is scheduled for specific times. What are the warning signs that you may be breaching the boundaries of professional behavior?
- _____
- _____
- _____
10. Whenever you find yourself in danger of crossing the boundaries of professional behavior with the veteran or the veteran's family members, you should talk it over with your veteran's options counselor.
- a. True.
 - b. False.

In order to receive your state-required home caregiver CEUs, you must mail this test along with your signed FORM 1732 Management and Training of Service Provider (on the next page) to:

**CTADVRC – VDHCBS
PO Box 729
Belton TX 76513**

Score: _____ of 10

Pass – Fail



Consumer Directed Services
Management and Training of Service Provider

| | | |
|---|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Service Provider Name (Employee) | First Day of Work | Annual Evaluation Due Date |
| Name of Individual Receiving Services | Program | Services Delivered |
| Name of Consumer Directed Services Employer | | |

I. Purpose

Initial Orientation Ongoing Training

Evaluation
 30-Day 3-Month 6-Month Annual Other _____

Supervision
 Verbal Warning: First Second Third Other _____
 Written Warning: First Second Third Other _____

Conflict Resolution Other _____

II. Documentation of Topics Covered at Initial Orientation or Ongoing Training: *(Initial orientation must include training related to the individual's condition and the tasks the service provider will perform as well as any required training described in an applicable addendum to Form 1735, Employer and Financial Management Services Agency Service Agreement.)*

Training Your Caregiver: Professional Caregiver Boundaries from the VDHCB website (ctadvrc.org) with test attached.

III. Documentation of Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation Training: *(Initial orientation must include training on acts that constitute abuse, neglect or exploitation of an individual.)*

IV. Evaluation/Performance Review:

V. Corrective Action Plan (if applicable):

Date for follow-up on corrective action plan: _____

VI. Service Provider Comments:

Signature of Service Provider Date

This document has been reviewed with the service provider listed above.

Signature of Employer Date Signature of Witness Date

Date sent to FMSA: _____

Date received by FMSA: _____