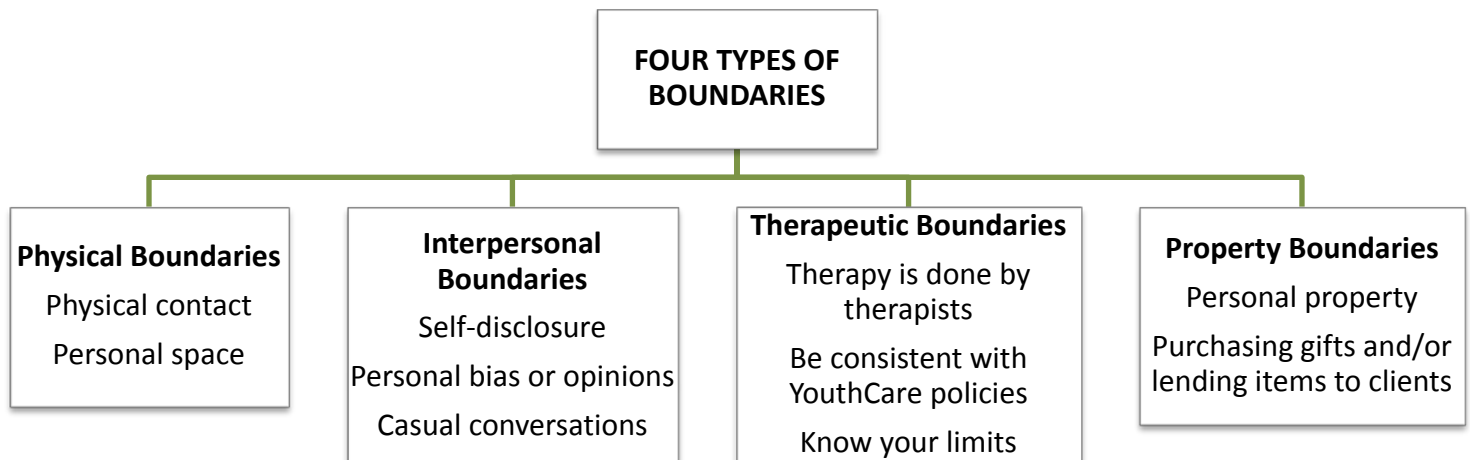


BOUNDARIES

This document contains knowledge, best practices, and rules that are essential to volunteering at YouthCare. Be sure that you are well versed in this information before you volunteer at YouthCare. A violation of YouthCare boundaries and expectations may result in your volunteer time being terminated for a period of time or permanently.

WHAT ARE BOUNDARIES?

Boundaries are limits in a relationship that the provider (YouthCare) is responsible for establishing and maintaining. Maintaining appropriate boundaries with youth (or clients) is an important part of youth work. Volunteers must understand what boundaries are and take steps to create healthy boundaries from the very beginning of any relationship with a YouthCare client. As an adult, you are automatically the person with more power in your relationships with youth. **The one with more power has the most responsibility to maintain appropriate boundaries.**



Important: Interpersonal boundary maintenance is important because if you disclose too much personal information to a YouthCare client...

- clients may feel a need to protect you, and avoid disclosing their own issues or problems in fear of burdening or overwhelming you;
- you may overwhelm or burden them and, thus increase their anxiety;
- clients may share the information further than you intended or feel comfortable with.

Lack of or loose emotional and/or physical boundaries feel unsafe to a client. It is intrusive and may be reminiscent of past traumas, overwhelming situations, or violations.

Always ask yourself:

- Are you sharing a piece of personal information out of your own need to process or to be “cool”?
- Is this something you feel compelled to talk about?
- How would this information be helpful to the client you are working with?

BOUNDARIES

BASIC BOUNDARY GUIDELINES:

- **Avoid even the appearance of an inappropriate relationship.**
- Safety – emotional, mental, physical, etc. – is our number one priority.
- Describe yourself to clients as a volunteer, not as a friend. Remember your role (professional vs. personal), and your purpose is to be helpful and safe.
- Be aware of side conversations, and be sure clients are not able to hear anything that might breach the boundaries expectations of YouthCare.
- Never be alone with clients in a closed-door setting. There must always be a paid YouthCare staff member present with you and YouthCare clients.
- *If any situation feels uncomfortable or causes concern, discuss it with on-site YouthCare staff.*

HOW TO APPROPRIATELY SHARE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES:

- Ask questions so a client can develop their own answers rather than solving their problems for them.
- Share your individual opinions/experiences by using general pronouns or third party references (i.e. “many people say...” or “some people have...”)
- If a client asks about your personal business, you might inquire, “why do you ask?” which may redirect the conversation back to the client.

RED FLAGS: Review these warning signs; they may imply that you are becoming overly involved with a client.

- Inappropriate physical touching or self-disclosures.
- Expectation that the relationship is “special,” such as keeping secrets.
- Feeling responsible to “save” the client or that you are not “doing enough” to help the client.
- Wanting the client to “like” you, approve of you, or be a “buddy.”
- Fearing or avoiding conflict with a client.
- Buying into the client’s perspective and losing objectivity.
- Feeling possessive of a client.
- Feeling that you are the one best suited to deal with a client’s issues.
- Feeling an urgency to get at the client’s mental health or other issues.
- Feeling that a client is becoming successful at pushing your buttons.
- Feeling guilty about a client’s choices, and that you did not do enough.
- Spending more time with one client than others.
- Doing things for a client that are not clinically sound and cannot be maintained over time or provided to all clients at YouthCare.

BOUNDARIES

VOLUNTEER BOUNDARY RULES

- It is **not appropriate, ever, to have sexual relations with current or former YouthCare clients. This activity is grounds for criminal prosecution and/or disciplinary action.**
- YouthCare has a “No Touch” Policy. Volunteer/client relationships are equivalent to adult/child relationships with all the responsibilities they encompass.
- A client’s connection to YouthCare is confidential for their *entire* lives. Do not talk about clients outside of YouthCare or beyond professional conversations with YouthCare staff.
- If you see clients out in public, do not acknowledge or approach them. If they address you, you can reciprocate.
- Do not give clients rides or meet with them off-site. Socializing with current or former clients outside of YouthCare is never appropriate.
- Do not confide in or disclose personal information or stories to clients. They are not there to meet your needs. Use self-disclosure *only* when it is clearly related to therapeutic interest of clients. When in doubt, don’t self-disclose.
- Do not give clients your phone number, address, or other contact information. Communicate with a client only through staff. Do not give clients the contact/personal information of anyone else.
- YouthCare is a non-faith based agency dedicated to ensuring an environment of inclusiveness for people of all religious backgrounds. When interacting with clients, refrain from proselytizing in any way, including but not limited to comments, written notes on anything, t-shirts, etc.
- Do not become Facebook friends or be linked on any other social media platforms.
- Do not use your cell phone, have personal conversations, or check personal email in the presence of youth.
- Do not take any photos with or of YouthCare clients or of any identifying information (names, etc.).
- In the presence of clients, do not talk about your social life, especially the use of substances, the implication of the use of substances, or the glorification of the use of substances, including tobacco products, alcohol, or marijuana. No smoking in the presence of youth.
- Do not tell one client information about another client such as “they’re not here” or “they went to the library.”
- Do not comment on the way a client looks, for example: “I like your finger nails” or “you look nice today.”
- Do not include any conversation that may imply the glorification of prostitution, sex, or sexual references, even if it is about media, songs, or mainstream culture.
- Be aware of pronoun use when referring to clients or staff. Default to utilizing “they” or “them” if you do not definitively know the pronouns a person uses.
- Do not give clients money, gifts, or items, or accept money, gifts, or items from youth. Avoid any type of transaction, bargaining, or deal.
- Dress appropriately to be in youth programming, including but not limited to avoiding clothing that is too revealing, that portrays or glorifies any substance use, sexualization or religion, or any other staff interpretation of what might be inappropriate.
- Do not store personal property for a client, and be sure to put your personal property in a secure place while volunteering.
- Know your volunteer commitment, and follow through with what you have agreed. Notify staff if you can’t make a volunteer shift. Notify your volunteer contact when you are unable to continue volunteering.