

The Alice Cross Centre

**PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES POLICY**

Version 1.2

September 2023

**Policy Revisions Record**

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**Maintaining Professional Boundaries**

**1.0 Introduction**

1.1 We recognise the importance of maintaining professional boundaries with our users. Whilst it is expected that employees and volunteers establish a rapport with users and provide friendly and accessible services, they are also responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries between themselves and users.

1.2 Boundaries are about establishing what is considered to be appropriate staff/ volunteer behaviour. They allow a user and an employee and volunteer to engage in a supportive relationship and are based on trust, respect and the appropriate use of power.

1.3 The priority in establishing appropriate boundaries should be the user’s needs. The motive behind all employee & volunteer behaviour should be to assist the users rather than to benefit themselves. Users should be at the centre of all our work and anything which is not in line with this should be questioned.

1.4 Boundaries protect and inform both employees/volunteers and users by clarifying what types of employee behaviour are appropriate. They also protect staff from the risk of false allegations of unprofessional conduct.  Clear boundaries help to develop trusting relationships with users who know what to expect from employees and help develop professionalism by encouraging high standards of work and consistency.

**2.0    Statement of Intent**

2.1 The Maintaining Professional Boundaries Policy is intended to define appropriate practice and interaction between employees and users, protecting both parties.

2.2 All employees have a responsibility to apply this policy and maintain professional boundaries with users; this is explained in the induction and will be reinforced with guidance and training.

2.3 Managers will be responsible for monitoring practice on professional boundaries and challenging staff when standards are not being upheld. Breaches will be addressed at the earliest opportunity.

2.4 The policy and procedures apply to all employees, which in the context of this policy includes all permanent, temporary and part-time staff, agency employees and volunteers.

**3.0    Policy Definitions**

3.1 For the purpose of this policy a user is defined as any individual receiving or using the services of The Alice Cross Centre.

3.2 There is no single all-encompassing definition of what constitutes professional boundaries. Rather a boundary is the limit of behaviour which allows an employee to have a professional relationship with a user.  These boundaries are based on trust, respect and appropriate use of power.

3.3 A boundary is crossed when an employee initiates behaviour or allows behaviour to persist in a relationship that compromises or sets a future course that compromises the professional relationship with the user. The potential for boundary crossings relates directly to the client’s position of vulnerability in the relationship. Our intention is to achieve a shared understanding of acceptable and unacceptable practice.

3.4 A boundary is violated when the nature of the relationship moves from being a professional relationship to also being a personal one.

**4.0      Policy Principles**

4.1 This section sets out the professional context for working with customers by describing the basic values and principles that govern professional practice.

4.2 All employees will foster a relationship with customers in a transparent, ethical, user-focused manner with respect for diversity of beliefs, uniqueness, values and interests. Employees’ will:

A. Recognise the position of power they have over the user;

B. Assume responsibility for anticipating, establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries with users, regardless of the user’s actions, consent or participation;

C. Show awareness of the potential risks within his or her practice in relation to professional boundaries;

D. Not exploit these relationships for any form of personal gain or benefit;

E. Respect the diversity of each user, taking into account such things as user’s capacity, beliefs, values, choices, lifestyle, socioeconomic status, culture and protected characteristics;

F. Not allow his or her own values or beliefs to adversely affect the professional relationship;

G. Demonstrate appropriate understanding of relevant policies in their day to day work. These policies are listed in section 6;

H. Demonstrate that practices and procedures have been established in his or her practice regarding attempts to solicit, encourage, or the receipt/exchange of the following which include but are not limited to:

* Gift-giving by users;
* Social invitations from users;
* Financial connections with users;

I. Be alert to, and effectively manage, behavioural changes or other indicators in a user that may signal a boundary crossing or violation;

J. Be alert to, and effectively manage his or her own emotional reactions to a user and ensure that they do not interfere with the professional relationship;

K. Avoid inappropriate disclosure of their own personal information or emotional concerns to the user;

L. Not engage in practice that provides special privileges as compared to other users;

M. Not enter into a professional relationship with a user with whom they already have a personal relationship and where professional boundaries may not be sustainable;

N. Inform their manager if a new user is already known to them;

O. Immediately take steps to address and rectify a boundary violation when it occurs and inform their manager or seek their advice;

P. End the professional relationship when indicated and arrange for referral to another employee;

Q. When required, clearly, sensitively and consistently explain, to users why professional boundaries must be maintained;

R. Inform their line manager if they think they are at risk of violating professional boundaries.

**5.0    Dual Relationships**

5.1 There will be occasions when an employee or volunteer and a user know each other in a personal context; it is the employee’s & volunteer’s responsibility to declare this to their manager in the first instance.  Failure to do so may be regarded as misconduct and dealt with under the disciplinary policy and procedures.

5.2 The manager will make a judgement as to whether or not another employee or volunteer should deal with that user.  Such situations are assessed on a case-by-case basis with due regard to the Code of Conduct.

5.3 Where an employee feel a colleague is at risk of potential breakdown of professional boundaries or where there is a conflict of interest then they too have a duty to protect both resident and other staff and should bring this to the attention of the line manager.

5.4 In summary, employees must take all reasonable steps to ensure that no undeclared conflict arises or could reasonably be perceived to arise.

5.5 Employees should refer to the Code of Conduct for further information.

**6.0      Policy Framework**

6.1 To ensure professional boundaries are maintained, this policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies and procedures:

* Code of Conduct;
* Declaration of Interest Procedures (indicating a potential conflict of interest);
* Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults and Children Policy;
* Data Protection Policy;
* Whistleblowing Policy;
* Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures (various).

**7.0    Roles and Responsibilities All Employees**

7.1 It is the responsibility of all employees to apply the principles outlined in this policy in their day-to-day work.  If employees are unsure about a situation, incident or relationship which may be covered by this policy they are strongly advised to seek advice from their line manager, union representative or the Human Resources Department.  It is also their responsibility to raise with their manager any issues or training needs they may have.

7.2 Appropriate action may be taken against any employee who contravenes this policy. Dependent on the circumstances this could be seen as gross misconduct which may be subject to action under the disciplinary policy and could result in dismissal. Where applicable workers will also be reported to their professional body and/or the safeguarding authorities and a referral made for investigation under safeguarding procedures.

**Managers**

7.3 It is managers’ responsibility to monitor implementation of and adherence to the policy and where deficiencies occur or difficulties arise, to provide supervision, support and guidance. Professional boundaries should be discussed during the induction process to ensure employees are fully aware of the implications of failing to meet expected standards.

**Board Members**

7.6 As the responsible body for the organisation, the Board oversee this policy and ensure that appropriate processes and actions are in place to prevent and address any breaches of professional boundaries which may compromise the integrity of the group and the support/services provided to users.

**8.0    Training**

8.1 All staff & volunteers will receive guidance on their responsibilities in their induction into the organisation.

8.2 Update and refresher training will be provided regularly. It is the responsibility of all employees & volunteers to ensure that they access training events.

**9.0      Review**

9.1      This policy will be reviewed every two years.

In case of any queries or questions in relation to this policy please contact Centre Manager or Board of Trustees

Signed on behalf of the Board of Trustees by

Name: Sue Halfyard Date: 11 September 2023

Appendix 1: the principles in detail

**Contact Outside of the Workplace**

A. Employees should never give out their personal contact details, or those of colleagues, to users.

B. Employees should not allow users to visit their homes.

C. Employees should not invite users to become online friends or otherwise participate in online social networking with users.

D. Employees who encounter users in a social situation outside of work should be pleasant and polite if approached by a user but should not encourage prolonged social contact.

E. Pertinent information is also set out in the ICT Code of Conduct.

**Confidentiality and inappropriate disclosure**

A. All employees must respect the users’ right to privacy and respect the confidentiality of information. In summary:

Where confidential information is about a person and is recorded in a computer or filing system it will be subject to the Data Protection principles;

Where it is not held in a system, it is not covered by Data Protection principles but a duty of confidentiality may still arise.

B. A duty of confidentiality can arise in a number of ways:

Where information is provided on the explicit basis that it must not be disclosed;

Where it is obvious from the relationship between the person giving and the person receiving the information that it should not be disclosed;

Where the nature of information is of such a personal or sensitive nature that it was clearly intended that it should be viewed as confidential

C. Examples of information which are likely to be confidential include sensitive or personal information about users.

D. Employees should not disclose inappropriate personal information about themselves or other employees.

E. ‘Gossip’ or hearsay should be actively discouraged among both employees and users.

F. If data is disclosed inappropriately or confidentiality is breached this must be brought to the immediate attention of the relevant manager. If an employee does not comply with relevant company policies they may be subject to grievance.

**Benefits In Kind**

A. With the exception of gifts of a nominal value, employees should not accept any personal gifts from users; this could be misconstrued as being given by the user in return for preferential treatment.

B. Employees should not accept gifts of cash under any circumstances.

C. Employees should never ask for or solicit hospitality under any circumstances. However there will be instances where accepting the offer of a meal, or other modest event as appropriate is acceptable. In particular lavish hospitality should be avoided. Examples of lavish hospitality includes free travel, free hotel accommodation, subsidised holidays etc.

D. When such offers are made, a firm but polite refusal should result, along with a clear explanation that accepting such things (no matter how genuinely offered) would place the individual and the organisation in a potentially embarrassing position.  If the employee feels that this would irreparably damage the professional relationship they should discuss this with their manager.

E. This is detailed in full in the Code of Conduct (Gifts and Hospitality Protocols), and includes instruction on how to deal with gifts of a nominal value.

**Financial relationships**

A. Employees must not enter into any financial transactions with users including buying, selling, exchanging or bartering goods and services.

B. Employees must not give/lend money or possessions to users; neither should they borrow/accept money or possessions from users.

C. Employees should not solicit or accept monetary charitable donations.

D. Employee should not normally handle money on behalf of users except on clearly defined local work instructions.

E. Employees should not agree to become trustees, beneficiaries or executors in relation to the wills of service users.

F. Information pertinent to improper financial relationships is set out in the Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults and Children Policy; the Whistleblowing Policy; the Code of Conduct.

**Physical and Sexual Contact**

A. Physical touching between employees and users is discouraged.  All staff should be aware that physical contact risks being misunderstood and it may result in staff being vulnerable to allegations of inappropriate professional behaviour.

B. In specific situations, such as when a user is emotionally distressed, an arm round the shoulder or holding a person’s hand for example, may be appropriate. The limits and boundaries for touch between employees and customers should be fully described and documented.

C. An employee should not engage in sexual activity with a user.  A sexual boundary has been breached when an employee uses words or actions of a sexual nature with a user. Ideas about what is intimate or appropriate may differ across society and the employee must treat people as individuals with sensitivity to, and respect for cultural and other differences. Cultural differences can affect individual’s ideas about their personal boundaries. Employees should therefore be sensitive to this and treat people in a way that reflects their views and wishes and preserves their dignity.

D. Information pertinent to improper physical or sexual contact is set out in the Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults and Children Policy; the Whistleblowing Policy; the Code of Conduct.

**Befriending, Counselling and Advice**

A. Employees should not confuse befriending with friendship. All employees should be aware of the difference between:

Befriending a user – which is a professional relationship, made to meet users needs, and

Becoming a user’s friend – which is a relationship that focuses on the needs of both people.

B. Befriending is an appropriate relationship for employees, and part if building the necessary trust to work with users. Becoming a friend is inappropriate.

C. Similarly, employees must be aware of the difference between being a counsellor and using counselling skills (such as active listening with a non-judgemental approach) that are appropriate for the delivery of support.  Counselling is not an appropriate role for employees unless they have been employed specifically for that purpose.

D. Where a user may be in need of counselling, they should be given support to access the appropriate agencies.

E. In general, advice should normally only be offered to users when they request it, unless there are good reasons to be more directive.

F. Employees must be aware of the areas where they are not qualified or knowledgeable enough to provide a user with advice and give users support to access the appropriate agencies.

G. Employees must be careful not to influence users with their own beliefs and personal values.  Employees should also be aware of their potential to influence vulnerable and/or impressionable users.

H. Although morality, religion and politics are common areas of conversation and users may wish to discuss their views, employees should not promote or impose their own views.