



Professional Boundaries Procedure

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1.0 Introduction

It is essential that all interactions between employees and customers, their relatives and carers are viewed and maintained as a professional relationship. It is the responsibility of employees to understand, develop and maintain a professional boundary while still establishing rapport and a good working relationship.

Behaviour that breaches that professional boundary may be regarded as abusive and a cause for disciplinary action. We recognise that it is often difficult to draw precise lines defining appropriate behaviour and this can differ depending on the customer's needs and abilities. Therefore, employees are encouraged to be transparent in their dealings with customers, their relatives and carers, and to discuss any ambiguities with their line manager.

1.1 Relevant Policies and Procedures

This procedure is aligned with **G36 Keeping People Safe**

It should be read and understood in conjunction with:

- CS02 Personal Planning
- CS04 Risk & Vulnerability
- HR14 Personal Relationships at Work
- HR18 Disciplinary

2.0 Defining professional boundaries

2.1 Professional boundaries

A professional boundary is “the boundary between what is acceptable and unacceptable for a professional both at work and outside work” (GSCC, 2009). It sets limits for safe, acceptable and effective behaviour by workers towards customers and others.

The only appropriate relationship between an employee and customer is one that is focused on the assessed needs of the individual. Employees must be aware of the power imbalance in this relationship due to their position of authority.

2.2 ARK professional boundaries definition

Recognising areas of own responsibility, accountability and discretion within your role. Demonstrating an awareness of the issues of power and authority within ARK's organisational environment and the context within which it operates. (Priory / Care & Support)

Appreciating the significance of safe care and interpreting this accurately for staff members. Recognising areas of own responsibility, accountability and discretion within the role while understanding the nature of the social work / care task. Demonstrating an awareness of the purpose of the organisation and context in which it operates. (Care & Support Managers)

Taking action to ensure that there is a culture of rigorous professional accountability and that staff are encouraged to monitor and challenge the professional practice of others. (Executive Team / Senior Leadership Team)

3.0 Professional boundaries between employees and our customers

Helping and supporting others can be both physically and emotionally demanding. Appropriate boundaries are therefore required in order to allow a worker and customer to engage safely in a professional caring relationship.

All professional relationships have the potential for conflicts of interest. Staff may, on occasions, develop strong feelings for a particular person, family member(s) or carers. These feelings in themselves are neither abnormal nor wrong but will compromise the professional relationship if they are acted upon improperly. If staff feel that they are developing an attraction or an overly familiar relationship with a customer they **must** disclose such feelings at the earliest stage possible to their line manager.

Intense feelings about and towards customers should be the subject of supervision as they have the capacity to unbalance the working relationship and can result in harm if they are not recognised or dealt with appropriately. Members of teams have a duty to maintain the boundaries of each person within the team by not gossiping and also by reflecting on behaviours and patterns of interaction in the interests of care.

There may be situations where the 'appearance' of a possible relationship between a staff member and a customer is open to being misconstrued. Staff finding themselves in such a situation **must** report the matter to their Line Manager as soon as they become aware of this. Line Managers will ensure that this information is recorded and guidance given to the worker as appropriate. Staff members can also seek advice from their line manager or any other ARK manager on how to manage approaches by customers or their family members who are trying to initiate relationships which would breach professional boundaries.

Under no circumstances should staff form intimate personal or sexual relationships with customers.

If a close friend, partner or family member of a staff member accesses services provided by ARK it is the responsibility of that staff member to maintain each relationship within its own appropriate boundary. Where personal or business relationships precede the professional relationship, or where dual relationships exist, workers **must** inform their line manager at the earliest opportunity; see **HR14 Personal Relationships at Work**. All such instances will

be handled in a sensitive manner and the staff member given the opportunity to discuss and explore potential boundary conflicts. It may be necessary for the individual to be supported by another team/colleague within the team, or for the staff member to be moved to another service. Where necessary an Extra Duty of Care Risk Assessment will be put in place.

Care & Support staff should not behave in a way either inside or outside of the workplace which may call into question their professional conduct or endanger the confidence supported people, relatives and carers place in ARK to deliver care; see SSSC Codes of Practice.

Some supported people communicate in a way which could be deemed to breach this policy, through touch or language. Where these language or behaviours are identified, staff members' interactions, actions and responses would be agreed as part of multi-disciplinary engagement and recorded in detail through Risk & Vulnerability and Good Life documentation; see **CS02 Personal Planning** and **CS04 Risk & Vulnerability**

3.1 Maintaining the professional boundary

ARK staff must **not**:

- Breach sexual boundaries including acts, words or behaviours of a sexual nature; these could constitute offences under Sexual Offences Act 2003 and will be reported immediately via **G57a Adult Support & Protection** procedure where this involves an adult at-risk
- Form friendships with customers or their family members, this includes friendships via texting and the internet. Do not accept friendship/follow requests from customers or their family on social networking sites. If you only know someone because they are a customer or are a relative of a customer, you should not become friends with them
- Use social media to post information on, photos of or discuss people who use ARK services, with them or anyone else
- Divulge personal details about themselves or colleagues, to customers or their family including personal contact details (this includes via the use of internet social networking sites)
- Accept significant gifts or favours; see **G11 Entitlements, Payments and Benefits**
- Enter into a financial relationship that is not covered by legal arrangements and/or Risk & Vulnerability and Good Life documents and procedures. This includes lending or borrowing money and the setting up of business/organisations, etc.; see **CS05 Supporting Service Users in Managing Money**
- Engage in 'banter', which is insulting or hurtful. This sometimes occurs in longer-term supporting relationships where familiarity can become excessive and inappropriate
- Engage in physical 'play-fighting', which has sometimes occurred in longer-term supporting relationships where familiarity has become excessive and inappropriate

- Develop inappropriate personal relationships with family members of a supported person visited during accompanied visits or assessments made at home
- Use social networking websites in breach of **HR40 Social Media**. See also **G15 Computer System Security, Email and Internet**
- Conceal any interaction between a staff member and customer from other colleagues that does not form part of the agreed care/support plan, or any other business task.

Please note this list is not exhaustive

4.0 Breach of professional boundaries

Should staff, volunteers, students, relief workers, contractors or agency workers become aware that the professional relationship with a customer has been compromised they **must** report this to the manager of the service in the first instance, this might be their line manager. External workers, e.g. Agency staff, contractors, may report to their own line manager who will in turn report to the ARK manager of the service.

Line managers will take action to prevent further development of a non-professional behaviour or relationship. This can include, and is not limited to support, supervision, guidance and/or action and investigation under **HR18 Disciplinary**, depending on the nature of the concern raised.

Immediate action must be taken to safeguard the customer. Appropriate action must be taken to ensure any issues are reported and investigated as per **HR18 Disciplinary, G36 Keeping People Safe** and **G57a Adult Support & Protection**. In line with legislative requirements, this may include an Adult Support & Protection (ASP) referral, Incident Report, Care Inspectorate Notification and advising the individual's Welfare Guardian.

Appropriate action will be taken against any staff member who breaches this policy. Dependent on the circumstances this could be considered gross-misconduct which may be subject to disciplinary procedures. Where applicable, staff will also be reported to their professional body and/or Disclosure Scotland and a referral made for investigation under **G57a Adult Support & Protection**. Where a concern has been raised about a student's or volunteer's boundaries or practice this will be reported to their line manager, tutor or appropriate governing body.

ARK regards the development of any intimate personal or sexual relationship between a staff member and a person they meet as a result of their employment as unacceptable. If this type of relationship exists/develops, the situation can be regarded as:

- An abuse of the employee's position of trust
- A breach of the standards of propriety expected in the post
- A compromise of professional standards/code of conduct
- A breach of the Scottish Social Services (SSSC) Code of Practice

This type of relationship will be treated as potential gross misconduct and **HR18 Disciplinary** will be invoked without delay.

5.0 Training

When a staff member starts with the organisation they will receive an induction specific to their department and role. This will introduce the ARK Behavioural Competencies Assessment Framework and what professional boundaries are expected in the role. Staff will have an opportunity to reflect on this as part of their development in their role through their probation period and into their supervision and appraisal processes.

6.0 Implementation and Review

6.1 Implementation

All ARK employees are responsible for this procedure's day-to-day implementation. A copy of this procedure will be displayed on the ARK website and in ARK's offices.

All ARK employees have a responsibility to be alert to discriminatory behaviours and practices when they occur, and to report these.

6.2 Review

ARK Area Managers' group is responsible for the review of these procedures, at least every 3 years. Any changes to the associated policy as a result must be submitted to the Board of Management for approval.