

Maintaining personal and professional boundaries



TIP SHEET

What are personal boundaries?

Personal boundaries are the physical, emotional and mental limits people use to protect themselves from being drawn too much into their clients' lives and from being manipulated or violated by others.

They allow professionals to maintain psychological safety for themselves and their clients, and make objective decisions about the therapeutic process to most effectively assist clients to achieve their goals.

Without these personal boundaries, professionals can run the risk of getting too involved in clients' issues and wanting to 'rescue' their client from their situation. While workers cannot rescue their clients, they can work with clients to help them achieve their goals, which may include supporting them to change their situation.

What are professional boundaries?

Professional boundaries are the legal, ethical and organisational frameworks that protect both clients and employees, or workers, from physical and emotional harm, and help to maintain a safe working environment.

Sometimes we encounter challenging situations in our therapeutic work which can make maintaining these boundaries difficult. For example, if a client:

- offers you gifts
- invites you to a social function
- wants to extend your relationship beyond the service provided, e.g. be your friend
- divulges information which is not relevant to the therapeutic goals.

Situations such as these require workers to have a clear understanding of their role and ethical principles, and the organisation's policies and code of conduct.

It is also important for workers to be clear and assertive with clients about the boundaries of their role and what is appropriate behaviour for the therapeutic process.



Ten tips for maintaining personal and professional boundaries

1. Expectations

Set clear expectations with clients at the beginning of the process about:

- what they can expect from you, as the professional
- what you expect from them, as the client.

This includes acceptable behaviours, mutual respect and a commitment to the therapeutic process.

2. Your role

Be clear about your role and its limits.

3. Assertiveness

Be assertive and let clients know if they are behaving inappropriately.

4. Clear relationship

Keep your relationship professional.

Having both a professional relationship and a personal friendship with a client at the same time can make it difficult to maintain boundaries and a safe and appropriate working environment.

5. Personal information

Avoid disclosing your personal information to a client.

6. Unnecessary information

Do not seek unnecessary information from the client that is not relevant to the therapeutic process.

7. Objectivity

Maintain your objectivity with clients.

8. Triggers

Understand how to recognise and manage your own triggers.

9. Privacy and confidentiality

Maintain your clients' privacy and confidentiality.

10. Critical reflection

Engage in regular critical reflection of your work.

Need more information?

We offer professional development workshops on a wide range of topics including *Professional Boundaries in Therapeutic Work*.

Visit www.rav.org.au/training-workshops for more information and to register for a workshop.

We can also deliver this workshop and other training to organisations and workplaces on request, through our [customised training program](#). To make an enquiry, email our Training and Development team at ravtraining@rav.org.au or call (03) 8573 2222.

About us

Relationships Australia Victoria has over 70 years' experience providing family and relationship support services across Melbourne and Victoria.

We are committed to providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people.



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways of Australia and we support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination and culturally safe services.

We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma.

We recognise those who had children taken away from them.