Observing Professional Boundaries for Caregivers

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Learning Points
- Identify professional boundaries for caregivers
- Maintain a helpful relationship with clients
- Learn how to stay in bounds
- Understand why professional boundaries are important
- Apply to case examples, practice problem-solving

What are Boundaries?
Boundaries are guidelines, or limits, that a person or a system establishes that gives direction as to what is acceptable regarding behavior or a task.

It includes “both sides” understanding the expectations
Basic components involve clear communication, limit setting, and consistency of response

Types of Boundaries
- Role Boundaries – Professional vs. Personal
- Social Boundaries – Socializing with clients/patients outside of work
- Time Boundaries – spending large amount of time with one client/patient
- Gift/Services – Places undue obligations on people and sets expectations
- Self-Disclosure – Disclosing personal information to client when it is of limited or no value

Importance of Boundaries in Caregiving
- Provides structure for maintaining a positive and helpful relationship with clients or residents
- Tools for building cooperation in relationships and providing structure
- Help caregivers avoid stress and misconduct, recognize boundary crossings and provide the best possible care

Importance of Boundaries in Caregiving
- Clearly established limits that allow for safe connections between caregivers and clients
- “Being with” the client, not becoming the client
- Being Friendly, not Friends
- The ability to know where you end and the client/patient begins
- A clear understanding of the limits and responsibilities of your role as a caregiver
Importance of Boundaries in Caregiving

• Role modeling to the client healthy communication and professional relationship
• Avoiding the "rescuer" role
• Staying focused on responsibilities to the client/patient
• Avoiding "burn-out" or compassion fatigue
• Maintaining a healthy, open, and functioning team of providers
• Maintaining one’s physical and emotional safety

Continuum of Professional Behavior

Boundaries are guidelines to assure that caregiver’s role is helpful (therapeutic) to client.

Caregiver/Client Relationship

• Zone of Helpfulness in the Center
• Over-Involved = boundary crossings and violations
• Under-involved = neglect, disinterest

Importance of Healthy Boundaries

• Having healthy boundaries means "knowing and understanding" what your limits are in a day-to-day environment.
• Both parties must be able to effectively communicate an understanding
• Importance of health boundaries – many people will push or ask for more then is comfortable or feasible to provide

Characteristics of Good Boundaries

• Clarity – Clear, specific, well-communicated
• Win/win – Respect and consider needs of everyone involved
• Proactive – Prevent problems before they arise
• Positive – Focus on positive outcomes, not punitive in nature
• Follow-through – Be consistent and uphold your end of the bargain

Consequences of Loose/Poor Boundaries

• Potential for “splitting” on teams of caregivers
• Patient/client may not be given appropriate level of care
• Care that is provided may not be helpful
• Client/patient may feel betrayed, abandoned, and/or poorly served
• Caregiver may act in an unethical fashion
• Caregiver and/or patient may be emotionally traumatized or put in physical danger
Why do Boundaries get Stretched?

- We want to get along with people….
- We don’t want to “make waves”…
- We take pride in our work….
- We go “above and beyond” what the job requires
- People try to make us feel guilty…
- We are afraid of a complaint or grievance being filed
- It is easier to give in…and not argue with people

Examples where this occurs

Direct Care tasks –
- Being asked to perform duties not on the care plan or not assigned

Foster Home Provider -
- Being asked to buy specific grocery items or personal items such as cigarettes, books

Case Manager, Nursing Assistant, Med Aide -
- Asked to spend personal time (outside of work) to stop and visit, want to meet family members

Potential Boundary Issues

- Patient and Caregiver referring to each other as “friends”
- Receiving gifts for birthday, new baby, etc.
- Client/patient asks or expects caregiver home number or other personal contact information
- Expectations of socializing outside of work
- Caregiver anxiety over patient effects sleep
- Caregiver offers to provide assistance outside of work role
- Caregiver finds themselves “venting” with patient/client about co-workers

Crossing the Boundaries

- Sharing of Personal Information
- Not Seeing Behavior as Symptomatic
- Using Nicknames/Endearments
- Touch – how, when, where
- Unprofessional Demeanor
- Accepting Gifts/Favors/Tips
- Over-involvement
- Developing Relationships (outside of work role)
- Keeping Secrets

What can make it so Difficult?

- The Caregiver and patient/client may know each other in a personal context from another setting
- Values Conflict – patient/client and caregiver may have conflicting values, lifestyle, etc.
- Vicarious Trauma – The caregiver may experience trauma symptoms from listening to client’s life story, experiences.
- Feeling the need to “rescue” the patient/client
- Poor team work – Caregiver may feel that the patient/client only gets good care from them

Empathy vs. Sympathy

Empathy – Defined as putting oneself in the place of another in order to understand the person better – i.e., putting yourself in another’s shoes
Sympathy – The act or capacity of being able to enter into shared feelings or interests

We feel “Empathy” when we have experienced or been where someone else is….we know what it is like
How Empathy can help with Boundaries

Empathy can help with limit setting
- Use empathy to let client/patient know you are listening to them
- Identify the problem you can address
- Set the limit on what you can feasibly do (instead of what they are asking that may be inappropriate)

End the conversation on a positive note by emphasizing your empathy for their circumstances and what you can do.

Techniques to Maintain Boundaries

- At initial meeting with client/patient, establish clear agreements
- When warning signs appear, address these issues with the client/patient quickly
- If you decide to practice self-disclosure, make sure it is related to the client/patient’s goals
- Realize that patient/client can misinterpret words and actions – clarify regularly with people

Techniques Cont’d

- Dual relationships – make sure you have good judgment and clear separation from personal vs. professional
- If you work with a team of care providers, keep communication and expectations open and clear to avoid patient splitting staff
- Go to supervisor or more experienced staff for help when you are uncertain or need to talk about concerns. Do not voice problems to patients/clients.

Communication Example and Basics

“I can see that this is important to you, so I will bring it to your care team and we will address your concerns about what you feel you need.”

“Please understand that I am following exactly what I am supposed to do right now. I will take care of what I can on my end.”
- Get back to people in timely fashion
- Be polite, be clear
- Don’t need to argue or negotiate

Getting back “In-Bounds”

- Know the person’s care plan
- Understand that the person you are caring for has illnesses that can impact their mood, thoughts, and behavior
- Avoid sharing any personal contact information
- Be aware of your own vulnerabilities
- Review any concerns with supervisor/document actions

Activity: Explore Boundary Crossings

- What observations can you make about each situation?
- How could the caregiver’s actions affect the client?
- How could the situation affect the caregiver?
**Case Examples**

**Case Study 1**
- Polly is a 28-yr-old home health aide with 2 young kids. Bess is a 90-yr-old widow at the care home where Polly works. Polly is going through many personal issues, including divorce from her spouse, needing to move, and financial difficulties. Bess is a good listener and feels bad for Polly, offering both support with listening and also financial help with her kids.
- What are areas of concern? Type of boundary crossing?

**Case Study 2**
- Carlos is a 30-yr-old CNA in a nursing home, often provides care for Jerry, a 72-yr-old resident with Alzheimer's Disease. Carlos went into Jerry's room to help him to dinner but Jerry continues to watch TV. Carlos asks Jerry if he is ready and Jerry states “Ready”. Jerry makes no move to get up. After several attempts to get Jerry up, Carlos gives up. He states “I hate it when he ignores me. He knows what he is doing, he is just trying to annoy me!”

**Case Study 3**
- Kira is a 25-yr-old hospice aid. She cares for Harry who is terminally ill. She has met Harry's family and talks with them often when they visit with Harry. This family has insisted on inviting Kira to family birthday parties and celebrations. She has gone over to their house to help clean and prepare meals prior to family get-togethers.
- Now Harry has taken a turn for the worse and only has weeks left to live. Kira is grieving and very depressed about his imminent death.

**Learning Points Review**
- Identify professional boundaries for caregivers
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- Understand why professional boundaries are important

**Important Reminders**
You cannot control another person's behavior – You can only manage your own response
Be aware of your own "stuff" – what do you bring to work?
Practice good self-care – give yourself time to relax, practice stress-relieving activities

**Questions? Answers/Discussion**