LEARNING POINTS

The main 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
PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

Professional boundaries are guidelines for maintaining a positive and helpful relationship with your clients or residents.

Understanding boundaries helps caregivers avoid stress and misconduct, recognize boundary crossings and provide the best possible care.
THE CAREGIVER-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP

The caregiver has a powerful role in the relationship between caregiver and client. This power comes from:

1. Control over the services provided to the client.
2. Access to private knowledge about the client

It is important not to let the balance of power slide heavily onto the caregiver’s side of the relationship. Maintaining professional boundaries helps the caregiver maintain a helpful or “therapeutic” relationship with the client.

A good question to ask yourself. Are my actions more about my needs than about the needs of the client? If so, you may be crossing a professional boundary.
This graphic depicts the idea of maintaining a therapeutic or helpful relationship with your client, neither over-involved nor under-involved. Staying within the zone helps you stay “in bounds.”
Boundary Crossing

Sharing Personal Information:

It may be tempting to talk to your client about your personal life or problems. Doing so may cause the client to see you as a friend instead of seeing you as a health care professional. As a result, the client may take on your worries as well as their own.

Staying in bounds:

Use caution when talking to a client about your personal life. Do not share information because you need to talk, or to help you feel better. Remember that your relationship with your client must be therapeutic, not social.
Boundary Crossing
Not seeing behavior as symptomatic:
Sometimes caregivers react emotionally to the actions of a client and forget that those actions are caused by a disorder or disease. Personal emotional responses can cause a caregiver to lose sight of her role and miss important information from a client. In a worst case, it can lead to abuse or neglect of a client.

Staying in Bounds
Be aware that a client’s behavior is the result of a disorder or disease
Know the client’s care plan
If you are about to respond emotionally to a negative behavior of a client, step back and reapproach the client later.
Note the client may think their action is the best way to solve a problem
Problem solve and help the client communicate and react differently
CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Boundary Crossing

Calling a client “sweetie” or “honey” may be comforting to that client, or it might suggest a more personal interest than you intend. It might also point out that you favor one client over another. Some clients may find the use of nicknames or endearments offensive.

Staying in Bounds

Avoid using terms like honey and sweetie

Ask your client how they would like to be addressed.

Remember that the way you address a client indicateds your level of professionalism
CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Boundary Crossing

Touch:

Touch is a powerful tool. It can be healing and comforting or it can be confusing, hurtful, or simply unwelcome. Touch should be used sparingly and thoughtfully.

Staying in Bounds

Use touch only when it will serve a good purpose for the client

Ask your client if she is comfortable with your touch

Be aware that a client may react differently to touch than you intend

When using touch, be sure it is serving the client’s needs and not your own
CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Boundary Crossing

Unprofessional Demeanor

Demeanor includes appearance, tone and volume of voice, speech patterns, body language, etc. Your professional demeanor affects how others perceive you. Personal and professional demeanor may be different.

Staying in Bounds

Clients may be frightened or confused by loud voices or fast talk
Good personal hygiene is a top priority due to close proximity to clients
Professional attire sends the message that you are serious about your job
Off color jokes, racial slurs, profanity are never appropriate
Body language and facial expressions speak volumes to clients
CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Boundary Crossing

Gifts/Tips/Favors:

Giving or receiving gifts, or doing special favors, can blur the line between a personal relationship and a professional one. Accepting a gift from a client might be taken as fraud or theft by another person or family member.

Staying in Bounds

Follow the facility’s policy on gifts

Practice saying no graciously to a resident who offers a gift that is outside your facility’s boundaries

It is okay to tell clients that you are not allowed to accept gifts, tips

To protect yourself, report offers of unusual or large gifts to your supervisor
CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Over-involvement:

Signs may include spending inappropriate amounts of time with a particular client, visiting the client when off duty, trading assignments to be with the client, thinking that you are the only caregiver who can meet the client’s needs. Under-involvement is the opposite of over-involvement and may include disinterest and neglect.

Staying in Bounds

Focus on the needs of those in your care, rather than personalities

Don’t confuse the needs of the client with your own needs

Maintain a helpful relationship, treating each client with the same quality of care and attention

Ask yourself: Are you becoming overly involved with the client’s personal life? If so, discuss your feelings with your supervisor
CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Boundary Crossing

Romantic or Sexual Relationships:
A caregiver is never permitted to have a romantic or sexual relationship with a client.

Staying in Bounds

It may be normal to be attracted to someone in your care; it is never appropriate to act on that attraction.

Do not tell sexually oriented jokes or stories. It may send the wrong message to your client.

Discourage flirting or suggestive behavior by your client.

Should you have any concerns in this area, speak with your supervisor.
CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Boundary Crossing

Secrets:

Secrets between you and a client are different than client confidentiality, Confidential information is shared with a few other members of a team providing care to a resident. Personal secrets compromise role boundaries and can result in abuse or neglect of a client.

Staying in Bounds

Do not keep personal or health related secrets with a client

Remember that your role is to accurately report any changes in your client’s condition
GETTING BACK IN BOUNDS

Have you ever crossed or thought about crossing any professional boundaries?
Have you observed others step over that line?
What should you do if you believe a coworker is stepping over a boundary?

Talk to a trusted colleague
Talk to your supervisor
Explain to clients that you are unable to behave in certain ways due to professional guidelines
To protect yourself, draw a line between your work life and your private life
WHY PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES ARE IMPORTANT

Can you think of some reasons why maintaining professional boundaries is important for caregivers?
ACTIVITY: EXPLORE BOUNDARY CROSSINGS

Using what you’ve learned, take ten minutes to discuss the following scenarios and prepare to share with the group:

What observations can you make about this situation?

How would the caregiver’s actions affect the client?

How could the situation affect the caregiver?
WRAP UP

Let’s review the main learning points:

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- Understand why professional boundaries are important
REFERENCES

Caregivers Participant Guide
Developed by:

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Center for Career Development (CCDET)

Wisconsin Department of Health Services
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www.uwosh.edu/ccdet/caregiver