



## **Professional Boundaries Policy and Procedure**

**Approved by the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW on 8 March 2018**

### **Version Control**

Contact names	Role / position	Version number	Date	Review date
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## 1. Policy Statement

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW (the Society) is committed to setting and maintaining high standards of professional conduct at all times for its staff, members and volunteers. The Society strives to create a safe and supportive environment for all people who access support from the Society. In the process of providing support services, the Society recognises the value and importance of staff, members and volunteers building rapport and appropriate working relationships with the people we assist, their relatives, carers and visitors.

Accordingly, the Society will provide the following guidelines with the aim of assisting staff, members and volunteers to develop and maintain professional relationships with the people we assist and visitors that is consistent with the principles of person-centred and trauma-informed practice.

## 2. Scope

This Professional Boundaries Policy and Procedure applies to all staff, members and volunteers at the Society's Good Works and related services and programs.

## 3. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set guidelines for establishing and maintaining effective and appropriate professional boundaries with the people we assist. It recommends adopting a course of acceptable behaviour when working with the people we assist that has their best interests in mind.

## 4. Definitions

Concept	Meaning
<b><i>Boundaries</i></b>	The line that separates the professional from non-professional relationship.
<b><i>Conflict of interest</i></b>	In the context of this policy, conflicts of interest occur where personal interests or values may compromise the professional relationship and prevent people from accessing support they need. E.g. Financial or personal gain, personal values or emotions clouding judgement on serving the best interests of the people we assist.
<b><i>Dual relationships</i></b>	When there is a second dimension to the professional relationship between

	a worker and the people we assist which may cause a conflict of interest. E.g. Volunteer and the person they assist are also friends.
<b><i>Power imbalance</i></b>	The difference in power relations between a worker and the people we assist. This can be due to the vulnerability of the person, the sensitive information workers have access to, or the role of workers (gatekeeper) in providing or giving access to support services the person (seeker) needs.
<b><i>Therapeutic relationships</i></b>	Relationship between a worker and the people we assist that promotes the latter's safety, wellbeing, independence and resilience, and prioritises their interests above those of the worker.
<b><i>The people we assist</i></b>	The people who seek access to and/or receive the Society's support services. Can be expanded to include their relatives and carers where appropriate in this policy.
<b><i>Workers</i></b>	Employed staff, members and volunteers of the Society.

## 5. Policy Framework

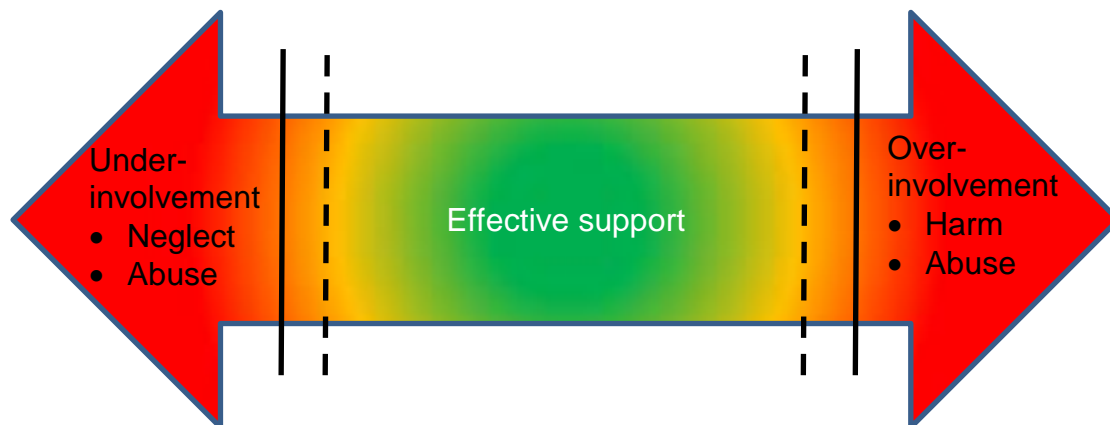
This policy provides guidelines on appropriate behaviour for maintaining professional relationships between workers and the people we assist and visitors. The policy focuses on maintaining a professional, therapeutic relationship at all times in the process of offering support services.

Due to the limitations of the policy to provide recommended behaviour that covers all and duty-specific scenarios, the Code of Conduct should always be consulted together with this policy when questions arise. Managers and workers should also hold consultations or staff meetings, to discuss appropriate and agreed behaviour for situations encountered. It is expected that everyone who falls under the scope of this policy will always exercise good professional judgement and ask for assistance when unsure.

### 5.1 Professional Boundaries

Professional boundaries can be hard to establish because it is values-driven and boundaries separating the professional from non-professional are often blurred. Boundaries are also often influenced by cultural contexts and

expectations. As such, people may have different ideas about what is acceptable behaviour within a professional boundaries setting. While there are no definite right or wrong approaches (except for cases of an obvious boundary breach such as physical abuse, inappropriate touching, neglect, etc.) studies show support is most effective when the right level of boundaries are maintained. In community service settings, under-involvement can lead to neglect and abuse where less than the required support is given, while over-involvement can lead to harm where more than the required support is given.



Society workers have a duty of care to treat people with respect and provide person-centred support that meets needs without judgment or bias. Workers must always remember that they play a facilitating role where they assist people to meet their needs (empowering), and not assume the role of a 'helper' who does everything for them (disempowering). While workers can be friendly and supportive, they should remember they are not the person's friend and should not seek any form of personal relationship or try to fulfil a personal need from their work.<sup>1</sup>

Workers should always inform the people we assist early on about their role and what can be expected in the professional relationship to avoid misunderstandings.

Despite best efforts to maintain professional relationships, boundaries may be crossed and may lead to strains or a break down in relationships. In situations where the professional relationship has been compromised or ruptured, workers should work towards making repairs where possible and desired by the people we assist. For guidance in these situations, workers should consult their manager.

<sup>1</sup> Compeer staff and volunteers should refer to Compeer guidelines and direction from their manager as this program aims to build friendships. However, they will still be expected to follow this Policy where appropriate and abide by the Code of Conduct.

Some signs of compromised boundaries are:

- Having strong feelings towards a person (e.g. favouritism or resentment)
- Setting aside time outside of work to assist a person
- Possessive or secretive behaviour (e.g. becoming defensive in matters relating to the person or not sharing information with managers)
- Judgemental attitudes (leading to withholding of support, criticism or abuse towards the person)
- Encouraging dependence or exerting influence (making it harder of the person to achieve their goals or transition to a different service or program)

## **5.2 Therapeutic Relationships**

Workers should always be aware that they are responsible for providing therapeutic support that is goal-oriented and planned to meet specific needs. Workers should also be mindful of the power imbalance that exists which may make the person more vulnerable in the professional relationship. As such, support must always be person-centred, trauma-informed and inclusive. Accordingly, workers must always behave and make decisions with the best interests of the person in mind and refrain from crossing the boundaries of the professional relationship that can lead to potential harm. Please see the [Client-Centred Service Delivery Policy](#), [Trauma Informed Care Policy](#) and [Cultural Safety and Diversity Policy](#).

Workers should avoid having physical contact with the people we assist as the person may have a pre-existing history and many not welcome physical contact. However, in some limited contexts, supportive physical contact (e.g. a hug) may be appropriate. If unsure, workers should consult their managers for guidance on appropriate behaviour and ask the person for permission before engaging in any supportive physical contact.

It is always the responsibility of workers to act professionally and inform the people we assist about the professional nature of the relationship. Workers should not seek friendship, socialise or enter into any other relationship apart from a professional one, as to do so is to breach professional boundaries. In addition, workers must never give advice that is outside of their training and expertise, e.g. a non-health professional advising someone to stop taking medication. Workers should always remember their role is to build and strengthen the social, family and community network of the people we assist.

### **5.3 Request and Disclosure of Information**

Workers should avoid requesting for information that is not necessary for the purposes of providing support. An example would be asking a person to provide a detailed life history which may make them feel uncomfortable or find intrusive. Workers should also take care not to disclose any unnecessary personal information relating to themselves or others in the Society or in the Society's care. This is important, especially when the disclosed information has potential to affect the professional relationship. Before making any voluntary disclosures, workers should always question the motive behind the disclosure, whether the information would help the person and consider the unintended consequences that can arise from the disclosure.

### **5.4 Accepting and Giving of Gifts**

In general, gifts should not be exchanged between workers and the people we assist and this should be clearly communicated early on. However, it is understood that in certain situations, cultures and contexts, refusing of gifts could appear as rude and may damage the established good working relationship. In these cases, in accordance with the Code of Conduct, gifts may be accepted if it is estimated to be less than \$25 in value, not conditional upon any action or services being rendered, and nothing is expected in return. Gifts that are more than \$25 in value must be declared to the relevant Central Council President or Executive Officer. As some gifts may bear more meaning than its monetary value to the people we assist or their relatives, workers are encouraged to dissuade gift giving practice at all times. When it is necessary to accept gifts, workers should state they are accepting on behalf of the team to remove the personal element.

### **5.5 Dual Relationships**

Workers should avoid engaging in dual relationships with the people we assist as there may be a potential conflict of interest and may cause problems for the person to receive effective support. In situations where dual relationships seem likely, workers should inform their manager immediately and discuss possibilities of continuing or finding someone else to take their role of providing support. If the second option is difficult (for example where there are limited workers available or the case has progressed significantly where it would cause more harm to switch workers), workers should seek guidance from their manager and regularly consult and ask for supervision until it is safe and possible for another worker to take their place or for the relationship to naturally come to an end.

The Society acknowledges that in some cultural contexts, dual relationships may be unavoidable and in such cases professional boundaries will be

appropriately managed to still be effective and safe for both the people we assist and workers.

While workers should not socialise with the people we assist, their relatives or carers, the Society understands circumstances outside of work can be hard to control and that workers have personal lives. In situations where workers encounter the people we assist outside of work (e.g. as members of a same social club, etc.), they should be guided by the person to determine the level of interaction. If the encounter happens frequently or regularly workers should inform their managers of the situation.

## **5.6 Prohibited Relationships**

In the course of providing support, workers may develop strong feelings towards the people we assist, their relatives or carers and vice versa. Workers must remember it is their responsibility to conduct themselves professionally and maintain professional boundaries with the people we assist at all times. If workers notice a change in the relationship or signs they or the person seek a change in the relationship, they should inform their manager and discuss ways to continue to maintain the professional nature of the relationship.

Some examples of relationships that are prohibited are:

- Personal relationship (being friends, assuming the role of a parent/guardian)
- Sexual relationship (regardless of consent, especially with children and young persons)
- Financial or business relationship (entering into contracts, giving or lending money, etc.)

Workers should never seek out relationships with former or current clients. Workers should also show caution with exchanging messages and making connections on social networking sites and other electronic means with the people we assist as this can blur the safe zones of professional boundaries. If workers have concerns or questions about appropriate behaviour workers should always consult their manager.

## **5.7 Confidentiality**

Workers should be familiar with and strictly adhere to the Society's privacy and confidentiality principles and be vigilant in securing and protecting information obtained in the course of their work. This could include information relating to Society (e.g. HR matters), workers or the people we assist. Workers must never breach client confidentiality except in cases where it concerns the safety of the person or other(s) in their care. E.g. the person is having suicidal thoughts, child safety concerns, etc. In these cases, workers



should approach their manager for guidance and recommended course of action(s). For more information, please refer to the [Safeguarding Children and Young People policy](#).

## **5.8 Reporting**

Workers should always keep an accurate and detailed record of their meetings with the people we assist and report any concerns about possible breaches of professional boundaries relating to them or other workers to their manager. The manager should respond promptly to any concerns or breaches reported.

## **5.9 Support**

If workers have concerns or questions about professional boundaries they should seek guidance from their manager. If necessary, the manager should consider workers seeking professional support for any distress experienced in the course of providing support services. Staff are also encouraged to utilise the Employee Assistance Program (Access EAP) which offers confidential counselling services.

Managers should include concerns and questions on professional boundaries for reflection in staff meetings where appropriate, to explore best practices and effective ways to maintain professional boundaries. Managers and workers should also consult Learning and Development for relevant training and ensure they attend to be up to date and consistent with best practice.

## **5.10 Disciplinary Action**

Where there has been a report of a professional boundaries breach the matter should be appropriately and timely investigated and may result in sanctions being imposed. The severity of sanctions will depend on the seriousness of the breach. Worker(s) involved in the possible breach will be notified and be given the opportunity to respond and be informed about the decision at the earliest possible date. Please see the [Managing Misconduct Policy](#) for more information.

## **6. Related Policies, Procedures and Legislation**

Society policies relating to this policy include:

### **State Support Office**

- [Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy](#)
- [Code of Conduct for Members, Volunteers and Employees](#)
- [Complaint Handling Policy and Procedure](#)
- [Critical Incident Policy and Procedure](#)

- [Privacy Policy](#)
- [Risk Management Framework](#)
- [Risk Management Policy](#)
- [Stronger Together Policy](#)
- [The Ethos](#)
- [Work Health and Safety Policy Statement](#)
- [WHS Procedures](#)

### **Person Centred System and Frameworks**

- [Client Access and Eligibility Policy](#)
- [Client Assessment and Planning Policy](#)
- [Client-Centred Service Delivery Policy](#)
- [Client Charter Policy](#)
- [Client Transition and Exit Policy](#)
- [Client Referral Policy](#)
- [Client Review Policy](#)
- [Cultural Safety and Diversity Policy](#)
- [Medication Policy](#)
- [Partnerships Strategy Policy](#)
- [Possession of Substances Policy](#)
- [Quality Management Policy](#)
- [Reportable Incidents in Disability Supported Group Accommodation Policy](#)
- [Trauma Informed Care Policy](#)

Legislation relating to this policy includes:

- *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014 (NSW)*
- *Aged Care Act 1997 (Cth)*
- *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)*
- *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)*
- *Community Welfare Act 1987 (NSW)*
- *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2006 (NSW)*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*
- *Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW)*
- *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 (NSW)*
- *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986 (Cth)*
- *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*
- *Privacy Amendment (Enhancing Privacy Protection) Act 2012 (Cth)*
- *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW)*
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)*
- *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994 (Cth)*
- *Work, Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)*

## 7. Roles and Responsibilities

These policy requirements will be followed by all people included within the scope of this policy.

## 8. Effectiveness and review

This policy is scheduled for review yearly from its date of endorsement, and every two years thereafter, or on a needs basis as required to align with legislative or practice changes.

## 9. Further advice or assistance

Please speak with your Manager if you have any questions regarding this policy. You may also contact the Person-centred Policy Coordinator to provide feedback on this policy.

## 10. References

- Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) 2016, 'Ethics and Practice Guideline – Professional Boundaries and Dual Relationships', AASW, Melbourne
- Bray, J 2011, 'Maintaining Professional Boundaries in Community Care: Essential skills for Managers and Personal Care Workers', speech in Aged and Community Care Tri-state Conference, Albury 2011
- Care Council for Wales 2016, Professional boundaries: A resource for managers, Care Council for Wales, Cardiff
- General Social Care Council 2009, Professional Boundaries Guidance for social workers, GSCC, London
- NHS 2016, Professional Boundaries and Relationships at Work Policy
- Nurses and Midwives Board 1999, 'Boundaries of Professional Practice', The Centre for Nursing Research and Practice Development, Callaghan
- Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia 2010, 'A nurse's guide to professional boundaries', Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, Melbourne
- Vinnies' Professional Boundaries training manual

<b>Approval and Amendment History</b>	<b>Details</b>
Original Approval Authority	SVdP Society Support Services ED 08/03/2018

## Appendix 1. General Rules

**The following are some recommended general rules workers should adopt. When unsure, workers are encouraged to consult their manager to receive guidance about appropriate behaviour. When uncertain, workers should also consider what impact their actions can have to the people we assist, the Society and themselves before taking action.**

1. Do not pursue personal relationships with the people we assist, their relatives or carers. Once the boundaries are crossed it will be increasingly difficult to maintain a professional relationship. Remember the boundaries are there to protect both you and the people we assist.
2. Do not engage in intimate or sexual relationships with the people we assist, their relatives or carers regardless of whether consent is given. Breaching this rule will result in serious disciplinary action. Keep physical contact with the people we assist to a minimum.
3. Do not introduce the people we assist to your family or friends and limit sharing personal information about you, your family or friends or other workers.
4. Do not socialise with the people we assist outside of work. If you meet in a public space, act appropriately (acknowledge if the person initiates a greeting) but avoid engaging with the person and joining or inviting them.
5. Do not give advice outside of your skills and expertise – e.g. counselling, financial, medical, legal, etc. Refer them to appropriate professional services.
6. Do not discuss information about the people we assist with your family or friends. Talk to your manager or colleagues if you would like support or advice.
7. Do not enter into any financial arrangements with the people we assist or pursue business relations.
8. Do not use your personal vehicle to drive the people we assist.
9. Exercise caution when engaging in any form of electronic communication with the people we assist that is not work-related and consider the possible impact to your professional relationship. E.g. Requests and connecting via facebook, instagram, twitter; exchanging personal messages, emails, photos, etc.
10. Do not supply, use or share alcohol, drugs or tobacco with the people we assist.