



## PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES GUIDE

**KEY CONTACTS for first call in any situation:** Bob Malpiedi Studio manager  
Lynne Penman, User involvement Officer  
& Joanne Burke Arts Coordinator

The ethos of chilli studios is creative, inclusive, equality based, welcoming and open. Chilli studio provides a community and non clinical environment but there are practicalities, policies and safety that needs to be observed. We realise professional and personal boundaries can easily blur and it is best to be aware of how we are affected by these and put in place best practise in the work-place. Clear and healthy boundaries are critical to living your vision and creating a fulfilling life.

### How we manage boundaries

There are many different ways in which we have to manage boundaries in our work practice. The list below gives a general overview of areas to consider.

We manage boundaries by:

- treating members respectfully
- respecting and looking after ourselves and other team members
- keeping within our role
- managing interpersonal relationships
- managing our own emotions
- managing our own behaviour
- having clear and regular communication (with members/management/team)
- not colluding with members
- having consistent team boundaries
- enforcing rules
- maintaining safeguarding procedure and duty of care
- preventing discrimination
- maintaining paperwork
- having boundaries for accessing service (Code of conduct)

**Confidentiality:** This is the public face of professional boundaries. Almost everyone understands that working within the Mental Health service needs to provide a confidential service. Please refer back to the Confidentiality policy given to you when first starting. If people are going to tell us a sensitive personal information they need to trust that it will be kept securely and that the staff and volunteer will divulge it when necessary to Management staff first and secondly to emergency services. This in order to support the member further or in case of safety for the person and people involved. However, members do not always understand what confidentiality really means in practice and so you should always explain your confidentiality boundaries carefully.

### Key things to remember:

- We are not a Mental Health care specialist but provide an Artistic resource. Steer the conversation safely, if possible, back to the Artistic focus.
- Be aware personal information may affect you adversely and emotionally. Please debrief with management staff if this arises.
- Peer support and a listening ear can be a wonderful thing but be mindful of any advice given. We are not specialists and advice can be harmful. If you have counselling based qualification and skills please discuss with key staff before starting your post, or voluntary work, in how best to utilise your skill in this environment.
- Signpost members to drop in sessions with our User Involvement Worker (Lynne) to provide pathways to specialist advice.
- Do not give out personal information and be aware of self-disclosure (see below)
- If you are made aware of any information that would effect the personal safety of the member or anyone involved this information must be transferred to key management staff ASAP.

**Duty of care:** Chilli Studios and all staff and volunteers have a general duty of care to each other and members with whom you engage. This means that you are expected to pay attention to their



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well-being and address any issues that you are aware of to management staff. Even if the problem is well outside of your remit, if you can see that a problem exists for the member you should attempt to support in an initial comforting way and get support from key staff. Duty of care also means that you are expected to work/volunteer to the best of your professional ability, to ensure that you have done everything that could reasonably be expected of you.

**Physical contact:** The basic boundary is that you should keep physical contact to a minimum and to a level appropriate to your role and your relationship. The most common issue raised by this is the giving (or not) of hugs. If you have a vulnerable client, a hug may spark off all sorts of feelings that are deeper than you realise.

Physical contact can easily be misinterpreted as:

- a sign that your relationship is special or different
- a sexual advance (wanted or unwanted)
- a threatening gesture.

**Medication:** A number of our members due to mental and health conditions receive and administer their own medication on and off the premises. Chilli studios have a general record of this and anything outside the known use must be reported ASAP to management staff. No staff or volunteer can administer or give any medication to a member, staff or volunteer. This would put the safety of the member and staff/volunteer at risk and liability.

**Giving and receiving Gifts:** This is quite normal in the day to day and will happen but this can be problematic so we recommend not to accept or give gifts. Keep it studio and charity relevant. You must declare any gifts that they have received to management. Similar issues to Financial transactions can occur, see below.

**Financial transactions:** It is not appropriate or acceptable to give, receive, lend or borrow money from members in any way. It can:

- make it appear that a relationship is inappropriate
- leave the member with expectations of receiving more money
- generate resentment/guilt/ill feeling between worker/volunteer and member
- build dependence on the worker/volunteer or on the funds
- leave the worker/volunteer or member vulnerable to abuse.

**Personal details:** Do not give your personal address or phone number to members.

This applies to social media contacts also. The act of you giving the details to them automatically makes the relationship more personal and contains an implicit invitation to the member to phone, contact or visit you. If a member starts phoning you or visiting you outside of work hours it is very easy for many other boundaries to fall. It is important that you have time off outside of work to recharge your batteries and relax. There are also obvious health and safety concerns.

**Self-disclosure:** There are a number of possible problems that can be caused by disclosing too much information, including: Transference, the more a client knows about you the more likely they are to confuse their relationship with you with other significant relationships in their life; Shift of focus, encouraging clients to see you as a friend; and creating dependency.

**Personal relationships:** If a member needs to see you, it should be done in work hours within a work setting. Be very clear you have a professional friendship and we advise this is one not a personal friendship outside of the Studio. You may meet some lovely people, with whom you would become firm friends in another setting. But friends do all sorts of things that members and workers/volunteers don't do: bend the rules, keep secrets, lend money, socialise, do favours and all sorts of other unprofessional behaviour.

**Sexual relationships:** Very clearly it is totally unacceptable for a worker/volunteer to engage in a sexual relationship or sexual behaviour with a member and visa versa. Chilli Studios is a mental health charity working with vulnerable adults. It could be seen or become abusive, inappropriate, a



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misuse of power, can cause manipulation and abuse to either party and sends out entirely the wrong message. Chilli Studios have a duty of care to ensure a safe working place and the wellbeing of all our staff, volunteers and members. It should be noted that sexual behaviour extends to flirting or flirtatious behaviour, sexual jokes or innuendo and discussions about sexual issues that are not relevant to your role. It is very common for a member to form a romantic attachment to their worker and you must be very careful not to encourage this.

### Why should we be aware and improve boundaries?

- **To establish safe, supportive relationships:** Many of the boundaries that apply to workers/volunteers behaviour help to create a safe, open, stable, transparent relationship and space.
- **To ensure good practice**
- **To build and maintain members trust**
- **To ensure consistent service delivery**
- **To ensure team coherence:** Workers need to work together as a team and provide a united front, all working towards a common goal in a common direction
- **To set the limits between members and workers/volunteers:** Boundaries help both members and workers/volunteers understand their respective roles. Interpersonal relationships can get complicated in any setting and when you are working with vulnerable individuals especially so.
- **To keep the relationship on a professional level**
- **To ensure health, safety & safeguarding**
- **To prevent burnout:** Mental Health work can be very demanding for the workers – dealing with other people's emotions, crises and problems on a daily basis can be very draining.
- **To minimise misunderstanding**
- **To teach boundaries:** Many members suffer from a lack of boundaries.
- **To ensure equality of access:** Professional boundaries help ensure that we provide services that are safe and welcoming places for everyone.
- **To reduce the risk of member, staff and volunteer exploitation/abuse**
- **To prevent role confusion:** It is very easy for members to become confused about the nature of the relationship and, for example, to imagine that a worker is their friend, or to put them into a parental role in their life. Working within your boundaries minimises the chance of this happening.
- **To build independence**
- **To empower members:** Maintaining a compassionate, bounded approach ensures that we do not disempower our members by the very act of supporting them. It is very easy to support someone too much or to act in a way that undermines their self-esteem and motivation. By doing too much work for the member or making them feel better you can make them emotionally dependent on you.
- **To provide professional detachment/objectivity:** If you lose that focus, your judgement is clouded and you will be of less use to members.
- **To manage members' behaviour assertively:** It is important that this is done respectfully and without damaging the positive relationship that you need with members. It is important that workers/volunteers retain control of their emotions and behaviour, particularly when working with challenging members. Having professional boundaries helps us to manage this process and to ensure that it is done correctly. They provide a guideline for staff/volunteers and also help to remain professionally detached to remain calm and focused.
- **To minimise clients mirroring personal behaviour/feelings:** if the member is picking up too much of your personal feelings that are not related to the work, it can cause problems for them. Acting in a bounded way does not eliminate mirroring but it will minimise it, especially in relation to personal issues that are not relevant in a work setting.