

Title:	Professional and Personal Boundaries	Effective Date:	04/01/2014
Author:	Camille Tanner	Last Review Date:	06/23/2021
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Functional Area:	Human Resources		

POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to clarify the division of professional and personal relationships between the Persons we serve (hereinafter “Persons”) and Staff, therefore enabling consistent approaches to care and treatment. All Liberty Staff have a responsibility for providing safe, effective and compassionate clinical services to Persons. While it is recognized that Liberty Staff must establish a rapport with Persons and provide responsive and accessible services, they are concurrently responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries between themselves and Persons at all times. In addition, employees may develop friendships and relationships with other employees and boundaries must also be established and maintained.

The rights and privileges of Persons should be respected at all times. The very nature of the Person’s illness/disability and Staff’s legal and ethical responsibility renders the relationship between the Person and Staff to not be on par or one of equal balance. Staff is caregivers and legal custodians of Persons with a professional control and influence over Persons. To inappropriately befriend a Person, in any fashion, while he/she is receiving services or following services would be a serious breach of trust and an abuse of authority. This policy will provide specific guidelines and expectations.

Liberty Staff must recognize and understand that by the nature of the Staff/Person relationship they are placed in a position of power. This power is both real and perceived by Persons who look to Staff to protect them from harm and keep them safe. It is essential therefore, that all interactions between Persons and Staff must be seen in terms of a professional relationship. Staff will be given a clear framework/role description within which to carry out interactions with Persons. Because there is a potential for positions of power to be abused and professional boundaries crossed, Liberty must ensure that the responsibility to maintain such boundaries rests primarily with individual Staff, but also with the individual’s supervisor. Failure to meet this responsibility could lead to formal disciplinary action.

PROCEDURE

Staff must ensure that working relationships are not misread or confused by Persons thinking/believing there may be a friendship, romantic interest or other close personal relationship. This is essential in order to protect Persons during a time when they may be vulnerable to unclear thinking and misinterpretation. Treating Persons while employing responsible professional boundaries serves to protect Staff from any risk of potential false allegations.

Unacceptable practices are those which put the professional/personal relationship in danger of crossing the professional “boundary”. The following is not an exhaustive list of unacceptable practices so if Staff is in any doubt, they should consult the appropriate member of the Liberty management team.

1. Sexual Contact

- Sexual acts between Staff and Persons, regardless of gender.
- Requests, suggestions or intimidation for sexual acts.
- Physical contact which could be construed as sexually suggestive, sexual innuendo and/or insinuation.

2. Acceptance of Gifts and Hospitality

- Staff must not accept any personal gift(s) (including money) or hospitality from Persons which could be interpreted as being given by the Person in return for preferential treatment. When a gift is offered or suggested then Staff must discuss the matter with their supervisor immediately and prior to taking possession of the gift.

3. Inappropriate Personal Disclosure

- Staff must not divulge any inappropriate personal information about themselves or other Staff members. This would include but not be limited to home address, phone numbers, pictures of friends or relatives and any Personal information about other Staff.

4. Concealing information from treatment team about Persons

This might include:

- Personal information gleaned from the Person.
- The intention of Person's self-harm or danger to harm others.
- Not reporting violent or critical incidents/issues.
- Not reporting child protection/vulnerable adult protection issues.
- Not completing full records of Person interactions.

5. Touch – Physical Contact

- Staff should approach physical touching (i.e. placing a hand on the arm or shoulder) with great care and caution. Where touching or hugging does occur, it must take place within the specific professional boundaries as outlined in individual treatment plans, policy and training.
- Some Persons may misinterpret physical contact as affection outside the professional relationship. Persons may also see physical contact as expressions of favoritism, for example where Staff hugs one Person and not another. Staff should be aware that many Persons have severe physical trauma histories and may perceive touching as a threat or trigger to their post-traumatic stress. All Staff should therefore be aware that physical contact risks being misunderstood, and it may result in Staff being vulnerable to allegations of inappropriate professional behavior.
- In all clinical circumstances where touching occurs it must take place within the context of a professional relationship and with the Person's agreement. The limits and boundaries for touch between Staff and Persons should be fully described and documented.
- Where touching may be an integral part of service delivery, Staff should discuss the subject regularly with the treatment team so as to ensure consistency and clarity of approach.

6. Misuse of Money/Property

- Staff must not enter into any financial transactions with Persons including bullying, selling, exchanging or bartering goods or services.
- Staff must not lend their Personal money or possessions to Persons.
- Staff must not borrow money or possessions from Persons.
- Staff should not give or accept gifts from Persons.
- Staff should not accept monetary charitable donations without the prior agreement of Liberty management.
- Staff should not normally handle money on behalf of Persons except as defined by any specific Personal property policies or practices.
- Staff should not agree to become trustees, beneficiaries or executors in relation to the wills of Persons.
- Staff must not eat Persons food or eat their own food in Persons area.

7. Relationships and contact with Persons within work

- Staff must never overstep professional boundaries and confuse befriending with friendship. All Staff must be aware of the difference between: Befriending a Person – which is a professional relationship, made to meet Persons' needs as opposed to becoming a Person's friend – which is a relationship that focuses on the needs of both people. A professional relationship focuses solely on the needs of the Person.
- Staff has a responsibility to discourage over reliance of the Person on one employee and to encourage and enable the Person towards independence.
- Where members of Staff know Persons prior to entering the service, the Staff member must inform their supervisor. The Staff member should not be given the role of the primary therapist/caregiver and should possibly be removed from the unit.

8. Relationships and contact with Persons outside of work

- Staff must not give Persons their Personal contact details, or in the contact details of other Staff members for example postal address, telephone number, fax number, email address, etc.
- Staff, who encounter Persons outside of their work location or after hours, should be pleasant and civil if approached by the Person, but should generally discourage prolonged social contact. Staff should not approach Persons in any social setting if the contact is not instigated by the Persons especially where their behavior indicates that they do not want to be recognized or indeed identified as a consumer of services.
- Staff must not maintain Personal contact with a Person by phone, e-mail, instant message, internet chat rooms, social networking websites, including posting of pictures, letters, or any form of communication media.

9. Treatment Plan and other forms of care

- It is not acceptable for a member of Staff to carry out treatment or give other care that is not part of the Person's individual treatment plan or has been approved by the treatment team, i.e., taking photographs without the Person's permission, haircuts, alternative therapies, etc.
- If Staff thinks there is a risk of a potential breach or breakdown of his/her professional boundaries, he/she must bring it to the attention of their supervisor. If Staff feels a colleague is at risk of potential breakdown of professional boundaries, then they too have a duty to protect both the Person and Staff and should bring the matter to their supervisor.
- Staff must alert their supervisor if they have personal knowledge of a boundaries, violation between Staff and any Person under Liberty's care.

10. Employee Relationships

- During working time and in working areas, employees are expected to conduct themselves in an appropriate workplace manner that does not interfere with others or with overall productivity.
- During nonworking time, such as lunches, breaks, and before and after work periods, employees engaging in personal exchanges in nonwork areas should observe an appropriate workplace manner to avoid offending other workers or putting others in an uncomfortable position.
- Employees are strictly prohibited from engaging in physical contact that would in any way be deemed inappropriate in the workplace by a reasonable person while anywhere on company premises, whether during working hours or not.
- Employees who allow personal relationships with co-workers to adversely affect the work environment will be subject to Liberty's disciplinary policy, including corrective counseling for minor problems. Failure to change behavior and maintain expected work responsibilities is viewed as a serious disciplinary matter and may result in termination.

- Employee off-duty conduct is generally regarded as private, as long as such conduct does not create problems within the workplace. An exception to this principle, however, is romantic or sexual relationships between supervisors and subordinates.
- Any supervisor, manager, executive or other company official in a sensitive or influential position with Liberty must disclose the existence of a romantic or sexual relationship with another co-worker. Disclosure may be made to the individual's immediate supervisor or Human resources (HR). Liberty Residential will review the circumstances to determine whether any conflict of interest exists.
- When a conflict-of-interest or potential risk is identified due to a company official's relationship with a co-worker, Liberty will work with the parties involved to consider options for resolving the problem. The initial solution may be to make sure the parties no longer work together on matters where one is able to influence the other or take action for the other. Matters such as hiring, firing, promotions, performance management, compensation decisions and financial transactions are examples of situations that may require reallocation of duties to avoid any actual or perceived reward or disadvantage. In some cases, other measures may be necessary, such as transfer of one or both parties to other positions or departments. If one or both parties refuse to accept a reasonable solution, such refusal will be deemed a voluntary resignation.
- Failure to cooperate with Liberty to resolve a conflict or problem caused by a romantic or sexual relationship between co-workers or among managers, supervisors or others in positions of authority in a mutually agreeable fashion may be deemed insubordination and result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.
- The provisions of this policy apply regardless of the sexual orientation of the parties involved.
- Where doubts exist as to the specific meaning of the terms used above, employees should make judgments based on the overall spirit and intent of this policy.
- Any concerns about the administration of this policy should be addressed to the HR Department.

Approved By: _____

Revision History

Version	Date	Author	Summary of Changes
#1	04/01/2014	Camille Tanner	Policy Created
#2	10/29/2020	Camille Tanner	Policy reviewed with no changes needed
#3	06/23/2021	Camille Tanner	Added Employee Relationships