

<b>PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES POLICY</b>	
<b>Author</b>	Chief Executive
<b>Division</b>	SMT
<b>For use by</b>	All employees and volunteers
<b>Purpose</b>	The policy sets out Age UK Norfolk's principles and good practice guidelines on professional boundaries with service users.
<b>Key related Documents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gifts, Tips, Legacies and Anti-Bribery Support and Supervision</li> <li>Disciplinary</li> <li>Grievance</li> <li>Safeguarding</li> <li>Whistleblowing</li> <li>Equality and Diversity</li> </ul>
<b>Revision number</b>	2.1
<b>Approval Date</b>	Q2 – 2021/22
<b>Review Date</b>	Q2 – 2024/25

## **1. Introduction**

The policy sets out Age UK Norfolk's principles and good practice guidelines on professional boundaries with service users.

Age UK Norfolk's aim is to achieve a shared understanding of acceptable and unacceptable practice, enabling us to apply clear and consistent standards across our services.

The rights and needs of service users should be respected at all times. It is acknowledged that the relationship between the service user and staff member or volunteer is not necessarily an equal one.

Staff and volunteers must recognise and understand that they are in a position of power. This power must not be abused at any time. It is essential, therefore, that all interactions between service users and staff and volunteers must be seen in terms of a professional relationship.

The policy also covers relationships between staff/volunteers and between staff/volunteers and external individuals.

Failure to meet this responsibility will be investigated and may be dealt with under the organisation's Disciplinary Policy and Procedure and may lead to dismissal.

## **2. Policy Statement**

Age UK Norfolk recognises the importance of maintaining professional boundaries with people who use its services. Whilst it is expected that staff and volunteers establish a rapport with service users and provide friendly and accessible services, they are also responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries.

Boundaries allow a service user and a member of staff or volunteer to engage in a supportive relationship and are based on trust, respect and the appropriate use of power.

Boundaries protect and inform staff and volunteers and the people who use our services by clarifying what types of behaviour are appropriate and protect staff and volunteers from the risk of false allegations of unprofessional conduct.

Clear boundaries also help to help develop professionalism by encouraging high standards of work and consistency.

## **3. Who this policy applies to.**

This policy applies to all staff and volunteers.

## **4. Roles and Responsibilities**

All staff and volunteers are individually responsible for applying and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries in their day-to-day work and for raising any associated issues or training needs with their line manager.

### **4.1 Line Managers**

Line managers have responsibility to:

- Ensure this policy is disseminated effectively to their teams and that teams adhere to this at all times.
- Facilitate regular training and updating in relation to this policy.
- Ensure personal and professional boundaries are the subject of regular team discussions in order to keep the policy requirements clearly understood at all times.
- Ensure all staff and volunteers understand how and why abuse occurs and have a clear understanding of how boundaries are breached, as well as how to manage challenging behaviours on the part of the service user.
- Ensure staff and volunteers are able to access regular supervision as appropriate to their needs and that active engagement with these processes is monitored.
- In the event of a possible boundary violation, take this seriously and investigate all allegations and complaints.
- Adhere to the requirements and further responsibilities outlined in Section 5 of this policy.

Line managers also have the specific role of monitoring day to day team and individual practice and have a responsibility to challenge and address staff when standards are not being maintained.

### **4.2 Staff and volunteers**

Staff and volunteer have responsibility to:

- Be aware and comply with this policy.
- Specifically, maintain good professional/therapeutic relationships and appropriate professional boundaries with service users. For further guidance, staff and volunteers should seek advice from their line manager.
- Accept individual accountability for the promotion and protection of the interests of service users they are providing support to, irrespective of race,

disability, gender, age, religion, belief and spirituality, sexual orientation, and gender reassignment.

- Develop their knowledge of good relationships, personal and professional boundaries and refreshing this regularly.
- Increase their level of self-awareness and the impact they have on the service user.
- Alert their line manager immediately if they perceive there to be a risk of potential breakdown of boundaries in the relationship, an actual breakdown or an inability to establish the relationship appropriately in the first place, being mindful of the need to maintain service user confidentiality.
- Ensure that they are working within an agreed framework and completing comprehensive reporting (which may highlight history of disrupted attachments, boundary pushing or inappropriate relationships).
- Regarding 'service user information', staff and volunteers are expected to explain the relationship between them and the service user in a sensitive manner.
- Adhere to the requirements and further responsibilities outlined in Section 5, of this policy

### **4.3 Management Team**

Supported by HR the management team has a responsibility to ensure that the policy is followed fairly and consistently. This responsibility involves:

- Ensuring the effective implementation and embedding of the policy through education and monitoring activity; and
- Ensuring that the policy is maintained and updated accordingly in line with any organisational changes or legislative changes.

## **5. Implementation**

### **5.1 Working with Service Users**

This section sets out a professional context for working with service users by describing basic values and principles that govern professional practice.

These principles are:

- Boundaries define the limits of behaviour, which allow a professional and a service user to engage safely in a supportive relationship. These boundaries are based upon trust, respect and the appropriate use of power.

- The relationship between staff/volunteers and service users is a relationship that must focus solely upon meeting the needs of the service user. It is not established to build personal or social contacts for staff. Moving the focus from meeting service user's needs towards meeting the employee's/ volunteer's own needs is an unacceptable abuse of power.
- On occasions a member of staff or volunteer may develop an attachment towards a particular service user. The staff member or volunteer should ensure that this does not lead to a breach of professional boundaries. Staff should be encouraged to discuss these issues with their manager or colleagues.

## **5.2 Befriending**

Staff and volunteers must never overstep professional boundaries and confuse befriending with friendship. All staff must be aware of the difference between:

- Befriending a service user – which is a professional relationship, made to meet service user's needs, and
- Becoming a service user's friend – which is a relationship that focuses on the needs of both people. A professional relationship focuses solely on the needs of the service user

Befriending is an appropriate relationship for staff and volunteer, and part of building the necessary trust to work with service users. Becoming a friend is inappropriate. Staff and volunteers are appointed by Age UK Norfolk to work with service users as part of their contract of employment/volunteer agreement and it is potentially an abuse of power to represent the relationship as a friendship.

## **5.3 Counselling**

Similarly, staff and volunteers must be aware of the difference between being a counsellor and using counselling skills (such as active listening with a non-judgmental approach) that are appropriate for the delivery of support. Counselling is not an appropriate role for staff unless you have been employed specifically to counsel, and your job description outlines the areas of work for you to cover as a professional counsellor.

Where it is appropriate that a service user may need counselling, they should be given advice and support on accessing other appropriate agencies.

## **5.4 Providing advice**

In general, advice should normally only be offered to service users when they request it, unless there are good reasons to be more directive. Where you do offer more

directive advice, for example in a situation where there is a potential for physical harm or danger, you should aim to do this in a non-judgemental manner.

When you offer advice to service users you should ensure that you provide sufficient information for service users to make an informed choice.

You should be aware of the areas in which you are not qualified to give advice and/or feel it is not appropriate for you to offer advice. In these instances, you should inform the service user of this, making every effort to assist them in accessing appropriate and/or qualified advice.

## **5.5 Influence**

Staff and volunteers must be careful not to influence service users with their own beliefs and personal values. Staff and volunteers should also be aware of their potential to influence vulnerable and/or impressionable service users.

Although morality, religion and politics are common areas of conversation and service users may wish to discuss their views, staff and volunteers should never promote or impose their own views.

## **5.6 Approachability**

Staff and volunteers should be seen as approachable, open to fair challenge and criticism, and available to engage in meaningful dialogue. They should not be seen as intimidating or inaccessible. Service users must not be discouraged from accessing support within agreed boundaries or from making complaints.

## **5.7 Privacy**

Staff and volunteers must respect service users' rights to privacy and be sensitive and responsive to any different personal and cultural needs for privacy that may arise.

## **5.8 Inappropriate Personal Disclosure**

Staff and volunteers must not divulge any personal information about themselves or other staff members or volunteers.

## **5.9 Touch – Physical Contact**

Age UK Norfolk staff should approach touching with great care and caution. Where touching does occur, it must take place within the specific local work instructions or professional boundaries within the service.

Some service users may misinterpret physical contact as affection outside the professional relationship. Service users may also see physical contact as expressions or favouritism. 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 behaviour.

In all service contexts where touching occurs it must only take place within the context of a professional relationship and with the service user's agreement. The limits and boundaries for touch between staff or volunteers and service users should be fully described and documented.

In those service contexts where touching is an integral part of service delivery, staff and volunteers should discuss the subject regularly at staff meetings so as to ensure consistency and clarity of approach.

#### **5.11 Financial relationships:**

- Staff and volunteers must not enter into any financial transactions with service users including buying, selling, exchanging or bartering goods or services.
- Staff and volunteers must not lend their personal money or possessions to service users.
- Staff and volunteers must not borrow money or possessions from service users.
- Staff and volunteers must not under any circumstances persuade, solicit or coerce service users or any spouse, partner, relative or friend of service user into giving gifts, hospitality, tips, legacies or bequests.(see Gifts Tips,Legacies and Anti-Bribery).
- Staff and volunteers should not accept monetary charitable donations to the service without the prior agreement of line managers.
- Staff and volunteers should not normally handle money on behalf of service users except in clearly defined local work instructions.
- Staff and volunteers should not agree to become trustees, beneficiaries or executors in relation to the wills of service users.

#### **5.12 Relationships and contact with service users within work:**

- Where members of staff know service users prior to entering the service, the staff member must inform their line manager. The staff member should not be given the role of the key worker. New members of staff starting work may find that they know existing service users. This should be brought to the attention of their line manager. The line manager will explore with the member of staff issues around confidentiality and risk assessment.

#### **5.13 Relationships and contact with service users outside of work:**

- Staff and volunteers must not encourage service users to develop relationships with the staff member's relatives or friends.
- Staff and volunteers must not give service users their personal contact details, for example postal address, telephone number, fax number, email address, etc.
- Staff and volunteers must not give service users the personal contact details of any colleague.
- Staff and volunteers who encounter service users out of hours should be polite if approached by the service user but should generally discourage prolonged social contact. Staff should not approach service users in any social setting if the contact is not instigated by the service user especially where the service user's behaviour indicates that they do not want to be recognised or indeed identified as a user of the service.
- Staff and volunteers must endeavour not to arrange out of hours contact with service users.
- Staff and volunteers leaving Age UK Norfolk should not maintain relationships with service users.
- Staff and volunteers must not become social media friends with service users. If you are approached by a service user to become a social media friend, you should inform them of Age UK Norfolk Facebook and Twitter and encourage them to follow the Charity.

#### **5.14 Discussing others:**

- 'Gossip' or hearsay should not feature as an aspect of service culture and should be actively discouraged among both staff and service users.
- Staff or volunteers must never share personal details about other staff or volunteers with service users.
- Staff or volunteers must never discuss other staff members with service users
- Staff or volunteers must never discuss service users with other service users and other third parties.
- Where any of the above does occur, the incident must be brought to the attention of the relevant line manager as soon as possible.

#### **5.15 Managing Boundary Issues**

Staff and volunteers may unwittingly be put in a position where their relationship with service users is compromised, or they are drawn into conversations or situations



where their boundaries are being stretched or crossed. In some situations, the fine line between good and bad practice may not always be obvious or clear.

Staff and volunteers should seek the guidance of their line manager if they are unsure about the nature of a relationship developing with a service user, or if they need advice on how they intend to deal with a situation.

Similarly, if the immediate line manager requires advice, they must consult their line manager.

In situations where it has not been possible to access support in this way, any action which has been taken must be discussed with the line manager as soon as is possible.

Other people in your team, particularly those who are likely to work with the service user must also be aware of where a boundary has been blurred or crossed. This is for two reasons:

- so they can maintain consistent practice with that service user (and a consistent explanation with other service users); and
- to ensure that the action taken does not look like a 'guilty secret'.

A written record of a broken or blurred boundary must be kept ensuring openness and consistency, this should be on both the client and staff/ volunteer record.

Boundary issues should be discussed with the line manager and within each team on a regular basis, and on occasions specific team training or facilitated discussion may be appropriate.

There are some events and arrangements planned with service users that are highly valued by them but may present potential boundary issues. In these instances, there may at times be a need to exercise flexibility and discretion in the interpretation of this policy. Such instances where there are clear potential benefits to service users should be brought to the attention of the manager. The situation will then be risk assessed, any necessary safeguards agreed with the line manager and a record kept.

This approach should ensure that transparency is maintained in agreeing variations and that positive risk taking is managed.

#### **5.16 Reporting Concerns in Relation to a Possible Breach of Boundaries**

- If a member of staff or volunteer suspects a possible breach of personal and professional boundaries on the part of a work colleague, they should report this to their line manager as a matter of urgency.
- Prompt action is of paramount importance in order to safeguard the interests of both the service user and the member of staff concerned.

- Breaches of personal and professional boundaries would normally be dealt with under the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure. The relevant line manager will carry out an initial fact-finding investigation to determine immediate actions required.
- Depending on the circumstances, the police may need to be alerted.
- Where a `vulnerable adult is involved in the breach, the Safeguarding Policy must be adhered to.
- In the event of a complaint, it will be for the investigation to establish the facts.
- Provided concerns in relation to work colleagues are reported in a timely manner and in good faith, if they are subsequently discovered to be without substance or unfounded, they will not result in any detriment to the staff member who has brought the concern to the managers attention.

### **5.17 Guidance for staff who are related or in a relationship**

- In general terms staff who are related (e.g., by marriage, brother / sister etc), or staff that form a relationship with another member of staff should not work together in the same service area. This may be allowed as long as the certain conditions are met:
  - where staff work in the same service area and one is more senior than the other, the senior person must not be the other's supervisor;
  - neither individual should exert influence over the other in relation to work issues;
  - either member of staff should report to their line manager where they feel that their ability to maintain personal / professional boundaries is being compromised by other work colleagues;
  - There may be exceptional circumstances whereby related staff do work alongside each other e.g., where one staff member is covering for other staff sickness;
  - The line manager will monitor these relationships and should discuss any concerns with either individual and seek appropriate action to ensure that personal / professional boundaries are managed and maintained.

## 7.0 Document Control

<b>Version</b>	<b>Revision</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Date</b>
1	1.1	Rebrand and change People and Development	CA	30/10/17
2.	2.0	Substantial amendments and re-formatting	HM	August 2019
2.	2.1	General updating	VA	Oct 2021