

POLICY TITLE:	Professional Relationship Boundaries
Policy Number:	OP41
Version Number:	04
Date of Issue:	21/09/2015
Date of Review:	20/09/2018
Author:	Assurance team
Ratified by:	Carol Stevenson, Group Policy, IG and Accreditation Manager
Responsible signatory:	David Watts, Director of Safety
Outcome:	<p>This policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides a Code of Practice which will assist all staff in establishing and maintaining professional practice and boundaries with service users, colleagues, other professionals and partner agencies • should be read in conjunction with the guidelines of the Priory Employee Handbooks and any professional bodies that staff are registered with
Cross Reference:	<p>CR06 Access to Service Users Homes & Keyholding (Supported Living)</p> <p>H105 Practising Privileges for Independent Doctors</p> <p>H105.1 Practising Privileges for Therapists and other Health Professionals</p> <p>HR01 Safer Recruitment and Selection including Prevention of Illegal Working</p> <p>HR08 Bribery Act 2010</p> <p>HR11 Use of Social Media by Employees</p> <p>OP02 Data Protection</p> <p>OP25 Service Users Funds</p> <p>OP27 Confidentiality</p> <p>OP28 Supervision</p> <p>Group Employee Handbook</p> <p>Priory Bank Worker Handbook</p>

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Priory Group is committed to the fair treatment of all in line with the Equality Act 2010. An equality impact assessment has been completed on this policy to ensure that it can be implemented consistently regardless of any protected characteristics and all will be treated with dignity and respect.

In order to ensure that this policy is relevant and up to date, comments and suggestions for additions or amendments are sought from users of this document. To contribute towards the process of review, e-mail on SQCHelpdesk@priorygroup.com.

PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP BOUNDARIES

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document is intended to provide a code of practice which will assist all staff in establishing and maintaining professional practice and boundaries with service users, colleagues, other professionals and partner agencies.
- 1.2 This guidance is intended to complement the Priory Staff Handbooks and other corporate policies and procedures.

2 WORKING WITH SERVICE USERS

- 2.1 **Values and Principles Governing Individual and Team Practice with Service Users:**
 - (a) It is the purpose of this section to establish a professional context for working with the people who use our services by describing the basic values and principles, which govern professional practice
 - (b) It should be acknowledged that as the people who use our services are dependent on support staff in order to receive their required level of support and care, the staff can therefore be perceived as having “power” and influence over them
 - (c) There are many ways in which staff could deliberately or inadvertently influence the people who use our services and it is therefore important that we consciously maintain professional relationships at all times.
 - (d) Many of those who come to us for treatment, care or to study are vulnerable. Therefore it is not permissible for staff to enter into a non-therapeutic relationship with our service users or their families. Nor is it permissible for any employee to have social contact with ex-service users who have received Priory Group care and treatment within the last three years, or where the ex-service user is still a child or is a vulnerable adult or where contact could result in vulnerability. Staff should approach their manager if they feel concerned about any aspect of their relationship with a current or ex-service user. If it is the case that a support worker is to continue to support a service user after discharge, the nature of this support should be clearly documented in the discharge plan in the service user’s records.
- 2.2 **Professional relationship with service users** – It is a relationship formed between two people, one being the recipient of a defined service and the other a member of staff paid to provide part or all of the defined service:
 - (a) The relationship is formed to meet the needs of the service user and not the service provider
 - (b) In remaining professional, the staff must depersonalise the issues and remain objective with the aim of achieving a positive and, hopefully, agreed outcome for the service user. It is not, and never can be, an equal relationship, but inherent within it is that both parties are treated fairly, with dignity and respect and as valued individuals
 - (c) A professional relationship should be maintained at all times. The people who use our services should not feel in any way indebted to staff, or that they are the recipients of charity or goodwill. It should be appreciated that staff are paid to carry out their duties and overt gratitude should be discouraged and the reasons for this explained
 - (d) This should be achieved whilst recognising that good support delivery is based on the development of working relationships with the people who use our services, not a cold mechanical approach.
- 2.3 **Favouritism:** There should be no favouritism, or the *appearance* of favouritism, shown by staff towards particular people they are supporting/treating/teaching. Whilst staff may find some people easier to work with than others, this should not be reflected in the amount or quality of attention offered. Support offered should be:
 - (a) Based on what the person wants and needs, as defined within their individual needs assessment, support plans/care plans and risk assessments and within the levels

- indicated in the service specification or statement of purpose / service user guide.
- (b) As defined by the 'Agreed Support Plan', in Craegmoor Supported Living services.

- 2.4 **Approach:** Consideration should be given as to how to approach service users, to ensure interaction always takes place within a framework of respect. Staff should ensure that:
- (a) They do not present themselves as superior
 - (b) They use tact, empathy and diplomacy in all contacts and interactions
 - (c) They are careful not to influence service users with their own beliefs and values
 - (d) They adopt a flexible, non-regimented approach
 - (e) They are prepared to admit error or lack of knowledge.

- 2.5 **Rights and Choices:** The rights of service users must be given a high priority at all times. Throughout the supporting/treating/teaching process, service users should be offered choice, and expressions of individual cultural and personal preference should be encouraged and catered for. (The exception to these points is when a service user is detained under the Mental Health Act and requires treatment without their consent or when a person is at risk of immediate harm to self).

- (a) Staff must respect people's rights to privacy
- (b) Staff should not enter a service user's home/room without being invited or given permission
- (c) The people who use our services have the right to refuse support/treatment/care or not take advice. (In Supported Living services if someone is breaching their support agreement, there should be a review meeting to determine the appropriate course of action)
- (d) Staff should always be careful not to prejudge, label or stereotype individual people or groups of people

The people who use our services must, wherever possible, be involved in all decisions which impact on them either directly (i.e. via their support plan, care plan) or indirectly (i.e. changes or reviews in policy and procedure).

- 2.6 **Financial Transactions:**

- (a) No financial transactions, buying, selling, exchanging or bartering should take place between staff and service users. The exception to this is that in Supported Living Services the service user is required to pay for admission and staff meals
- (b) Staff must not lend their personal money or possessions to service users
- (c) Staff must not borrow personal money or possessions from service users
- (d) Staff must not give or accept personal presents from service users, except in the exceptional circumstances when it may be appropriate (Refer to HR08 Bribery Act 2010 and the Employee Handbook)
- (e) Staff should not accept any offer, or elicit offers of labour from service users e.g. cleaning staff cars
- (f) Staff should not use their own store loyalty card when shopping with service users, nor benefit from 'Buy one, get one free' offers.
- (g) Staff should not to discuss their own personal details or problems with a service user

- 2.7 **Relationships/Contact with Service Users outside of work:**

- (a) Staff must not allow service users to visit their homes
- (b) Staff must not encourage service users to develop relationships with their (the staff member's) friends or family members
- (c) Staff must not give service users their personal addresses or phone numbers
- (d) Service user social activities must be part of their overarching care plan and development programme. These should be agreed with site management and supported and facilitated by staff as part of their key task and accountabilities and employment contract
- (e) Out of hours social contact should be kept to a minimum. Staff who 'bump into' service users out of hours should be pleasant and civil, but should generally discourage prolonged social contact. Where this does occur, a note of the encounter should be made in the individual's support/care records and brought to the attention of the

relevant line manager

- (f) Staff should never arrange out of hours contact with someone who uses our services.
- (g) Staff must not use social media or social networking sites, such as Facebook or Instagram, to be 'friends' with current service users (Refer to HR11 Use of Social Media by Employees). Where a service user or their family members were, before admission, existing social media 'friends' or 'followers' of a staff member the staff member should inform their manager and take great care, consideration and responsibility in respect of any posted material (Refer to HR11 Use of Social Media by Employees).
- (h) Staff are advised to approach their manager if they feel concerned about any aspect of their relationship with a current or ex-service user. In the event that a current or ex-service user initiates personal contact with a staff member he/she should make no response other than to politely refuse that contact and promptly inform and discuss this with their manager. Where a current or ex-service is seeking advice or support they should be signposted to the appropriate individual or agency, for example their GP, community mental health team or a particular department of the Priory Group.

2.8 **Discussing Others/Gossip:**

- (a) Gossip or hearsay should not feature as an aspect of service culture and should be actively discouraged among both staff and service users
- (b) Staff should never share personal details about other staff with service users
- (c) Staff should never discuss other staff members with service users except on issues relating to support
- (d) Staff should never discuss service users with other service users.

2.9 **Illegal Activities:**

- (a) Staff must not participate in any illegal activities e.g. buying stolen goods or allowing them to be kept on Priory Group premises or storing or using drugs on Priory Group premises
- (b) Staff must not collude with service users by turning a blind eye to illegal activities or, in shared accommodation, to breaches of house rules
- (c) Staff should inform line management immediately of any incidents of illegal activity within the service
- (d) In Supported Living, staff must support service users to maintain their tenancies and therefore must not ignore issues that could constitute breaches of tenancy.

2.10 **General Relationship Issues:**

- (a) Staff should always ensure that service users are treated equitably and without favouritism
- (b) Staff should never enter into anything but a professional relationship with service users
- (c) Staff should not use inappropriate language with service users or colleagues e.g. referring to them by pet names, in terms of endearment, or in ways which are demeaning.

2.11 **Befriending/Counselling:** Staff should never overstep professional boundaries and confuse befriending with friendship.

- (a) A friendship meets the needs of both parties, whereas befriending is a professional relationship which meets the needs of the service user
- (b) Staff should be aware of the difference between employing 'counselling skills' (active listening, empathy etc.) which are appropriate for staff to use, and 'being a counsellor', which is not an appropriate role for anyone who is not qualified and employed in this capacity.
- (c) Staff should be aware of when they should refer service users to another agency who can provide specialised support.

2.12 **Providing Advice:** All advice offered by staff should be as non-directive as possible and should provide options to enable the service user to reach their own informed choice:

- (a) Staff should support people through a process of decision-making, which should be

- documented in their support/care records
- (b) Staff should maintain an awareness of areas where they are not qualified to give advice or they feel it is not appropriate to do so. In these circumstances they should inform the service user of this, making every effort to assist them in accessing appropriate/qualified advice, for example contact with an advocacy service or a welfare rights centre
 - (c) Generally, advice should only be given at the request of the service user. If the staff member is concerned about some behaviour or activity on which advice has not been sought (e.g. a potentially exploitative relationship or a situation where there is the potential for danger) they should initially discuss their concerns with the manager who will consider whether it is appropriate to present these concerns to the service user in a non-judgemental manner, following safeguarding procedures if necessary.
- 2.13 **Respect:** Respect is the foundation of the relationship between service users and staff and must be seen as a two-way process. Outlined below are issues that staff need to be conscious of when working with service users, but it should not be forgotten that staff should also be treated with respect by the people who use our services and others.
- (a) Staff should address or refer to the people they work with by their chosen, preferred name
 - (b) Patronising behaviour or remarks that consciously or unwittingly demean other people not occur and should be challenged if they do
 - (c) Labelling or stereotyping should not occur
 - (d) Racist, sexist, homophobic or any other discriminatory remarks or behaviour from whatever source must be challenged
 - (e) Staff must respect everyone as individuals and for their differences
- 2.14 **Confidentiality:** Staff should maintain service user confidentiality in line at all times (Refer to OP27 Confidentiality and OP02 Data Protection)
- (a) Information can, and sometimes should, be shared within the Priory Group. However consideration should always be given to the necessity for disclosure of information.
 - (b) All staff must be clear on the limits of confidentiality and new staff should be made aware of these limitations at the induction stage
 - (c) Service users must be given details about how the information they provide us with will be used and about when confidentiality might have to be breached (**OP Form: 08 Using & Sharing Information About You** should be given to all service users on admission)
 - (d) Service users must be made aware that any information relating to illegal activity cannot be kept confidential
 - (e) Staff should not disclose service user names, whereabouts or occupancy details to any third party without their expressed permission, or prior agreement. This includes other service users, family, friends, etc.

3 RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLEAGUES/TEAM WORKING

- 3.1 For information regarding employment of staff working with relatives, friends or those in relationships refer to HR01 Safer Recruitment and Selection including Prevention of Illegal Working. For queries or advice refer to the Central HR team.
- 3.2 In order to enable the delivery of high quality and effective services, the establishment and maintenance of professional, co-operative and open relationships with colleagues is essential. It is important to remember that individual staff members have a responsibility to contribute constructively to effective team practices and procedures and that failure to communicate with, and support colleagues is a major contributory factor in instances of risk at work.
- 3.2.1 In order to reduce risks it is recommended that relatives, friends and those in relationships are not engaged within the same unit where there may be collusion on confidential information or security, or where the activities of one may compromise the other. Employees should not report into or manage a relative, friend or someone they are in a relationship with or be engaged where one may have the authority to influence the discipline or payments

made or the career development of another.

3.2.2 If colleagues notice relationships developing which cause or could potentially cause concerns and could be to the detriment of service users, this should be reported to their manager immediately. Further advice on handling these situations can be sought from site or Central HR.

3.3 The following values and principles should underpin all aspects of practice in relationships, boundaries and professional practice with individual colleagues and the team.

3.3.1 Systems and forums to assist in high quality communication such as handovers, daily support records, diaries, regular staff meetings and training are important in the maintenance of a cohesive team. These activities provide the opportunity for discussion and the resolution of issues that arise during the working day and help to prevent the spread of gossip and hearsay. All staff should understand the reason for, and respect the use of, these activities and be committed to actively support and participate in them.

(a) In services where staff are lone working in the community and do not see other colleagues on such a frequent basis, attention to the detail of written records is essential and thought must be given to other ways of maintaining regular contact, such as telephone calls

(b) Staff supervision and team meetings should be used to highlight, discuss, monitor and review the issues raised in this document

4 RELATIONSHIPS/CONDUCT WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND PROFESSIONALS

4.1 The establishment and maintenance of professional relationships with partner agencies and individuals is essential to ensure that service users obtain the best possible range of services. Staff should:

(a) Always remember that they are representing Priory Group when working with partner agencies and professionals and therefore should conduct themselves in a professional manner

(b) Discuss only relevant information and ensure it is communicated in a concise and accurate way avoiding anecdotes and hearsay

(c) Dress appropriately for the working environment

(d) Ensure any issues that may impact on confidentiality are discussed with their line manager prior to meetings / events

(e) Never represent the service, Priory Group or the people who use our services in a negative light. It is expected that staff will represent the Priory Group and service users accurately, fairly and professionally, bearing in mind issues of confidentiality, contractual obligations to funders and partners, and this policy

(f) It is recognised that staff may have personal views on specific issues that may differ from the corporate approach. Staff are expected to present and support the corporate viewpoint, and not present personal views under Priory Group's name. Staff are required to seek clarification from their line manager if they are unclear about the corporate approach on particular issues and to use supervision to explore complicated issues they may be expected to respond to. (Refer to OP28 Supervision)

5 IF BOUNDARIES HAVE BEEN OR ARE SUSPECTED TO HAVE BEEN BROKEN

5.1 It is recognised that in practice it can be difficult to maintain professional boundaries and many situations/dilemmas will occur which are not specifically covered by this or any other policy. It is also appreciated that in the area of operations, staff are constantly being confronted with issues that require them to make quick decisions on complicated issues. Such situations require staff to exercise high standards of professional judgement in what is often a high-pressured environment.

5.2 Priory Group is committed to providing support to staff in these situations but this can only be done if line management is made aware that difficulties exist. If staff find themselves in a

situation where they feel there is the potential for a boundary to be broken, in order to manage a situation, the following steps can be taken:

- 5.2.1 **Access Line Management:** Staff should let their line manager know what they are doing or intend to do, preferably in advance, although it is accepted that this is not always possible. Similarly, if staff have concerns about the actions of a colleague then they should also advise their line manager of their concerns. If the direct line manager is not available they should go to the next management tier for advice or access advice via supervision (refer to OP28 Supervision).
- 5.2.2 **Confidential Reporting** – Priory Group has a 24 hour free-phone line 0800 197 3166 (quoting 71191) available, which is private and confidential, for staff to make reports of issues that they are not comfortable with taking to management. (See OP21 Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing)).
- 5.2.3 **Involve colleagues:** Other people in the team, particularly those likely to work with the service user concerned, should also be aware of where a boundary may have been blurred or crossed. This will enable staff to maintain a consistent approach and will also enable other opinions to be taken into account prior to any actions being taken.
- 5.2.4 **Keep a Record:** A written record of a broken or blurred boundary should be kept in an appropriate file or book (to be agreed with the Hospital Director, School Principal, Registered Home or Service Manager) to ensure openness and consistency and assist in monitoring.
- 5.2.5 **Disciplinary Action:** It is worth noting that the breaking or blurring of boundaries and professional conduct is potentially a disciplinary offence and taking the steps outlined above not only constitutes good practice, but will also potentially serve to protect staff in the event of disciplinary action being taken. Employees could also be referred to their registering professional body and the Disclosure and Barring Service.

6 RESPONSIBILITIES

- 6.1 It is the responsibility of the Hospital Director, School Principal, Registered Home or Service Manager to ensure that this policy is implemented and of all staff to adhere to it on a day to day basis.
- 6.2 Professional with practicing privileges should also adhere to this policy and could be reported to their professional body if they do not.

7 REFERENCES

- 7.1 General Teaching Council for Scotland (2012) Code of Professionalism and Conduct
DFE (2011) Teachers' Standards: Guidance for school leaders, school staff and governing bodies
NMC (2012) Maintaining Boundaries
GMC (2013) Maintaining a Professional Boundary Between You and Your Patient
www.Professionalstandards.org.uk