# **Handout 03 - Techniques for Creating & Maintaining Healthy Volunteer-Client Boundaries**

*(Content developed by THN)*

#### Set clear boundaries with clients from the beginning of your volunteer role:

* Establish clear agreements with the client about your role as a service provider, your availability, and the best ways to communicate with you.
* Establish clear agreements about what to do if you see each other in public. Define the limits of your expertise (for example, clients should not have reason to confuse education about a prescribed HIV regimen with medical advice, or a sympathetic ear with psychotherapy).
* Be clear about the amount of time and energy you can give, especially if you are available to clients outside of normal working hours.
* Advise and periodically remind clients of any program requirements that limit the duration of support.

#### Address issues as quickly as possible and rely on supervision.

* Consult with your supervisor if you are feeling uncomfortable talking with clients about boundaries.
* When boundary issues or warning signs appear, address these issues with the client quickly.
* Be sensitive to clients’ feelings when doing this; emphasize the importance of, and your commitment to maintaining healthy boundaries.
* Use your supervisor as a sounding board, especially when boundary issues are impacting your ability to provide objective, compassionate care.

#### Be empathetic and patient, and be prepared to repeat and check in.

* Realize that how a client interprets your words and actions might not match what you were trying to communicate:
  + You may need to frequently clarify your role and boundaries.
  + Ask the client to repeat back what you said to ensure that they understand.
  + Give the client an opportunity to ask clarifying questions.
* Dual & multiple relationships:
  + If you had a personal relationship with a client before becoming a volunteer with the agency, realize that you need to use your professional judgment when interacting with the client in social settings.
  + Pay particular attention to the client’s confidentiality and their physical and emotional security.

#### Power, care, and self-care

* Situations in which one person can hold power over the other person must be avoided if possible.
* Remember that you can’t (and shouldn’t) “do and be everything” for a client: you will not help them if they become dependent on you.
* Take care of yourself! Make sure you are getting enough sleep, eating well, spending time with friends and family, exercising, seeking supervision as needed, and leaving work at work!

#### Think carefully about self-disclosure to clients.

* If you decide to tell a client something personal about yourself, ensure that the information is related to the client’s goals.
* Too much self-disclosure shifts the focus from the client to the volunteer and can confuse the client in terms of roles and expectations of the relationship.