

Handout #1

Key Concepts: Privacy, Confidentiality and Boundaries in Helping Relationships and Dual & Multiple Relationships

Privacy

Privacy refers to an individual's right to be free from intrusion or interference by others. It is a fundamental right in a free and democratic society. Individuals have privacy interests in relation to their bodies, personal information, expressed thoughts and opinions, personal communications with others, and spaces they occupy. ... An important aspect of privacy is the right to control information about oneself. The concept of consent is related to the right to privacy. Privacy is respected if an individual has an opportunity to exercise control over personal information by consenting to, or withholding consent for, the collection, use and/or disclosure of information. (Source: www.pre.ethics.gc.ca)

Confidentiality

The duty of confidentiality may be a legal or ethical duty. It refers to the obligation of an individual or organization to safeguard entrusted information. The duty of confidentiality includes obligations to protect information from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, modification, loss or theft. Fulfilling the duty of confidentiality is essential to the trust relationship. (Source: www.pre.ethics.gc.ca)

Privacy & Confidentiality in Policy & Practice

Agencies should require each staff member and volunteer to read and sign a confidentiality agreement. This requirement is routinely included in agency policy and reflected in agency practice and forms. The confidentiality agreement or form you complete and sign as a volunteer will probably cover numerous types of confidential information as well as various relationships which give rise to duties of confidentiality. As a volunteer, your duty of confidentiality extends beyond clients' confidential information, and includes the agency and its staff and volunteers.

For example, the agreement or form you are asked to sign might state:

Volunteers must maintain privacy and confidentiality of information they gain while volunteering, including information about:

- *Clients and their families*
- *Staff and other volunteers, including Board members*
- *Agency program decisions, business activities, funding, fundraising, finances and governance matters*
- *Terms and conditions of agency partnerships*
- *Agency internal policies and procedures*

Volunteers must not disclose any personal or confidential information they receive, either directly or indirectly, during the course of their volunteer duties. Volunteers must not disclose any confidential information even after they are no longer volunteering.

Boundaries in Helping Relationships

Boundary: Is the point at which the relationship changes from professional and therapeutic to unprofessional and personal. Crossing a boundary means that the service provider is misusing the power in the relationship to meet their personal needs, rather than the needs of the client, or behaving in an unprofessional manner with the client. The misuse of power does not have to be intentional to be considered a boundary crossing.

Source: Adapted from, *Therapeutic Nurse-Client Relationship, Revised 2006* (Toronto: College of Nurses of Ontario, 2009)

The idea of a relationship implies that the client is a participant in seeking services and assistance to address their needs. The power dynamics between a service provider and each client may differ, and the power dynamics may change over time and be different according to the specific issue being addressed or the assistance sought. Ethical codes of practice, standards of practice, client codes of conduct and client rights and responsibilities documents can help a service provider and their client understand and identify boundaries in their relationship.

Dual & Multiple Relationships

Where a volunteer (or service provider) and a client have an additional relationship inside or outside the agency (e.g. friends, business relationship, family, employee/employer, board or committee members, sexual partners, regulated professional-client). Source:

Adapted from, *Canadian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2005)*