

BOUNDARIES IN HOMECARE

Madeline works for a homecare company and really cares about her clients. She frequently stays late and doesn't write down the extra time on her time sheet--she doesn't mind. She has also brought her client food from her home and will bring her kids to see a client when she wasn't working. She also will occasionally "bum" a cigarette from a client or borrow a movie. The clients don't seem to mind.

Probably everyone who works in homecare has found themselves in a situation that they were not quite sure what to do about a client's request. You may have felt like you were good friends with a client and this led to the client taking advantage of you and/or you asking the client for favors. There may have been times you left a client's home feeling uneasy about some of the things you said or did for the client. Many of these situations could be avoided if we keep proper boundaries in mind.

What are boundaries?

Boundaries serve to separate things. An easy to see physical boundary is a person's skin. However, physical boundaries also extend to our "personal space". Have you ever felt uneasy when someone stood too close to you? That feeling is a result of our physical boundary being crossed. In personal relationships, we have boundaries. Boundaries are the limits that define our relationship with others. Boundaries are necessary and vary in different types of relationships. An example of crossing a boundary would be walking into your neighbor's house and getting food out of their refrigerator and eating it without asking. While this may be okay at a close relative's home, this is not okay at your neighbor's house. Some boundaries are concrete, while others are not. Boundaries define where we go, what we do, what we should do and how close we get to people both physically and emotionally. Boundaries are especially important in homecare when we care for others.

Why are boundaries important?

Boundaries define relationships. Boundaries between friends are different than boundaries between coworkers. The boundaries between two people are what make the relationship different. They also provide security and order. Maintaining boundaries keeps our relationships in the proper place. They also make our jobs easier, because we know what we can and cannot do. They make the client feel safer because they know what to expect from us. If you keep proper boundaries, you will not need to feel guilty or worry about getting into trouble with your supervisor or the law.

Who is responsible for maintaining boundaries?

The caregiver, **not the client**, is responsible for maintaining boundaries. Sometimes it is easy to blame clients for crossing boundaries, but it is **our** responsibility to say no if a client asks us to do something that crosses a boundary. There are clients who will have unclear boundaries and push you to cross boundaries. These clients may make "special requests" (they may say "this time only" or "could you do me a favor?") or ask you to do something, but not tell the office.

How do we maintain boundaries?

Unfortunately, boundaries are not black and white. They can be easily crossed, often unintentionally. However, keeping the following things in mind will help us to maintain our boundaries:

1. **BE AWARE**--Realize that boundaries are important and necessary

2. Remember that there is a difference between your relationship with friends and clients. One is personal, the other work related.
3. When in doubt, call the office and ask for advice.
4. Ask yourself:
 - Am I dealing with this client differently than I would another client?
 - Would I do this if my supervisor were here?
 - Would I write this in the charting?
5. Plan ahead for when awkward situations occur. You might consider using this type of response when a client asks you to do something that would be crossing a boundary: *I can't do _____, but I can do _____.*
6. If a client begins to tell you about his/her personal life and you feel uncomfortable with the information they are sharing, you can politely say "I am not comfortable discussing this with you".
7. Remember that you are there to care *for the client*, not to do errands, etc. for yourself.

Examples of crossing boundaries:

This list is not meant to be all inclusive but should help you be alert to crossing boundaries.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Doing special favors for a client ○ Going to a client's home when you are not working ○ Going to a client's family event ○ Bringing a family member to meet the client ○ Borrowing a clients' car, books, money, cigarettes, etc. ○ Loaning a client money or personal belongings ○ Taking a client to your home or family gathering ○ Giving gifts to clients ○ Calling clients or giving clients your phone number 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yelling or swearing at a client or client's family ○ Asking a client to keep a secret ○ Doing something that makes you uncomfortable ○ Bringing a family member with you to work ○ Caring for a client's family member ○ Talking on your cell phone while working with a client ○ "Dating" a client or client's family member ○ Meeting with friends or family while working ○ Asking a client to pay for your purchase ○ Unneeded physical touching
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- Taking a client's family member with you to do activities with the client
- Bringing a pet or something from home to the client's home
- Taking something of the client's home (including taking a client's pet home to care for it)
- Taking money (except reasonable gas money for taking a client somewhere) or a gift (per personnel policies, you can not except a gift if valued at more than five dollars) from a client
- Sharing information about a client with people outside of your job
- Hugging clients, especially of the opposite sex—a good way to handle this is to hold out your hand for a hand shake
- Complaining about your job, other staff, or the company to clients
- Agreeing to work shifts you are not scheduled for or rearranging your schedule **without checking with the office first**
- Doing tasks not covered by PCA services, such as snow shoveling, washing windows, painting, helping a client rearrange or move furniture, or doing lawn work
- Persuading a client to go to the store, laundry mat, etc you want to go to, rather than where the client prefers
- Doing your laundry or personal errands during the client's shift
- **Talking about your personal life**—Remember the following

1. Should only be if it will help the client, not so you have someone to “vent” to or feel sorry for you
2. Talking a little about your personal life is appropriate to help the client feel comfortable with you, so they don’t feel they have a stranger in their home (this should be limited to general information about yourself).
3. Don’t complain to clients about your health or difficulties at home
4. Telling clients about your difficulties adds to their worries
5. Before talking about your personal life, ask yourself—Why am I telling my client this—is it for my benefit or the client’s? Will this make **me** or **the client** feel better?
6. If you are having a bad day or week and the client asks what is wrong, a response of, “I’m having a difficult week, but everything is going to be okay” is better than “spilling your guts”. Try to change the subject to something more positive.
7. Can lead to your relationship becoming friendship rather than client/caregiver.

Why is it so important to maintain boundaries?

- ****ALL CLIENTS ARE CONSIDERED TO BE VULNERABLE**, therefore, the law holds us to a high standard of conduct.
- Crossing boundaries in small ways will lead to crossing boundaries more often and in bigger ways.
- If one caregiver crosses a boundary, it will put others in an awkward situation because the client will expect the same of the next caregiver.
- Once you begin crossing boundaries, it is very difficult to have proper boundaries again and can lead to hurt feelings.
- Boundaries protect you and the client.
- It decreases frustration because both you and the client know what is acceptable.
- Crossing boundaries can cause the client to become more dependent on you and less independent---they rely on you to do things they could do themselves.

Policy on Client Transportation

(Not following this policy is crossing boundaries)

The PCA program allows the PCA to accompany the client outside the home for medical appointments and other normal life activities. Therefore, if the client is unable to use their own vehicle or medical transportation, then the PCA may drive the client in their own vehicle for the purposes of accompaniment for covered PCA services only. **However, this is limited to:**

- Medical/Therapy appointments within the community limits of the client’s residence
- Normal Life activities outlined by the PHN or SW and listed on the client’s care plan (also within community limits of client’s residence)

The company cannot guarantee that an employee has a safe vehicle, auto insurance or a valid driver’s license at any given moment during their employment. Therefore, the company uses the following options for client transportation:

- Medical Transportation services
- Client’s personal vehicle

The PCA may NOT:

- **Transport someone** in their vehicle **who is NOT the client**
- Transport the client at any time if they do not have a current driver’s license and automobile insurance
- Transport the client at any time if the PCA did not pass their motor vehicle report (MVR) which is completed upon hire

- Transport the client at any time for services that are not medically necessary or on the client's care plan
- **Transport the client out of town** (meaning outside of community limits of the client's address)
- **Transport a minor child (under 18 years of age)** unless it is specifically noted on the client's assessment and then only for standing physical/occupational/speech therapy appointments, or tutoring, not for a doctor or any other appointments or reasons.
 - *The client **cannot** be taken to Superior during a scheduled shift with the PCA, even if their doctor is over there, as that is in another state.*
 - *"Within the community" for medical appointments means locally. For example, if the client lives in Cloquet, but their doctor is in Duluth, that is considered community. Same applies for Moose Lake if they live close to there, or other reasonable locations within 30 minutes of the client's home.*
 - ***Hibbing, Finlayson, Bemidji offices:** "Within the community" for medical appointments means locally; reasonable locations within 30 minutes of the client's home.*
 - *If the client is scheduled to see a specialist in the Twin Cities area, for example, the only way the PCA would get paid to accompany the client is if the client used a Medical Transportation service.*
 - *It is preferred for the **client's vehicle** to be used whenever possible (if they have one). PCA's are not reimbursed by Heartland PCA for gas used doing errands for the client during their shifts.*

Sources: "Professional Boundaries in Healthcare Relationships"—The Bulletin—Vol. 24, No1—July 1998; Psychiatric Illness In-service by Marilyn Chamber

- Professional Boundaries In-service—by Safe Transitions, Inc. by Julie Bogenholm; "Maintaining Healthy Boundaries in Professional Relationships"