



# PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES POLICY

## Introduction

The relationship between support workers and clients is often close and can be challenging to navigate. Maintaining professional boundaries is an essential aspect of the role of support workers and carers. This policy aims to cover what professional boundaries are, why they're important, and how to maintain them.

## Scope

This policy applies to all employees of Empowering You Disability Services, including full-time, part-time, temporary, casual, and contract workers. It covers all aspects of employment when working directly with a participant.

## What are professional boundaries

Professional boundaries are the limits and guidelines that define the professional-participant relationship. They aim to protect the participant from any harm, including emotional, physical, and psychological, through clear communication and ethical behaviour. This helps to create a safe and trusting environment, which is crucial for building relationships with participants.

## Why must you set professional boundaries

The role of a support worker is to build, strengthen, and support a participant in their NDIS journey to achieve their goals. This often involves being involved in aspects of a participant's private life. The role of a friend is different from that of a worker and can cause conflict of interest when doing your job. At times it can be difficult to set a boundary with a participant because they are often isolated and looking for friendship. A support worker's role is to assist to build friendships, not be the friend. It is important to not blur the line between a personal and professional relationship. Doing so can lead to:

- Unreasonable demands from the participant or their family.
- Worker stress and burnout.
- Inability to maintain objective and professional support.
- Distress due to relationship tension.
- Feelings of grief and loss once the engagement is over.

## **Signs that professional boundaries may have been violated**

Boundary violations can occur when the participant-support worker relationship gets too close or blurred. As a support worker, being aware of these signs can help you recognize boundary violations and avoid them in the future.

- Conversations include personal, marital, and financial problems.
- Interactions happen even outside of work time.
- Money or expensive items are given as gifts.
- One views the other as a “friend”.
- Disclosing personal details such as address and phone numbers.
- Emotional attachment.
- Sexual attraction.

## **How to maintain professional boundaries**

Maintaining professional boundaries involves establishing clear boundaries at the beginning of the participant-support worker relationship. This includes outlining expectations, limits, and policies to ensure that both parties are aware of their responsibilities. Additionally, support workers should maintain a professional demeanour and avoid disclosing personal information or opinions about participants, colleagues, or management.

Regular communication with the Team Leader or Case Manager can also help support workers reflect on their work and identify and correct any boundary violations. Follow these guidelines to ensure a professional relationship with the participant:

### **1. Maintain respect and privacy**

It is important to avoid seeking personal information that is not essential in the working relationship or in the performance of duties. Conversations involving private matters are not encouraged to clearly define the boundaries of your relationship. In cases when confidential matters need to be discussed, a Support Worker should approach in the most appropriate, respectful, and professional manner.

### **2. Stick to Duty of Care**

Support Workers should stick to their duty of care—to help protect the participant from risks of injury or harm. While being knowledgeable about their disability and living situation is essential, any unnecessary advice regarding

their family, relationship, and financial status must be avoided. This will help maintain professional communication.

### 3. Prevent conflicts of interests

It is recommended to avoid playing the role of a “friend” with the participant to prevent conflicts of interest at work. The focus of a Support Worker is to help build and strengthen the social, family, and community network of the person with a disability. Therefore, a Support Worker can help enable the participant to build circles of friends through their support.

### 4. Set professional limits

Support Workers should not be in a relationship with the family members of the participant. In addition, they should not also be included in social or family activities. One must practice care in setting professional limits to avoid blurring ethical boundaries.

### 5. Discourage gifting.

While it may be customary for people to offer gifts as a sign of gratitude, when it comes to Disability Support Work, this should be done with caution. As such, money and expensive presents should be politely declined. What’s more, Support Workers must convey a polite and clear message that while they appreciate the thoughtfulness, they are focused on completing jobs and tasks which fall within their scope of work.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, professional boundaries are essential in creating a safe, trustworthy, and effective relationship between support workers and participants. Through proactive communication, clear expectations, and ethical behaviour, professionals can establish healthy boundaries that protect themselves and their participants from harm. As disability support workers, it is our responsibility to prioritise the well-being and safety of our participants, and by maintaining professional boundaries, we are taking the necessary steps to ensure that we are providing the best quality of care possible.