

Residential Counselor Orientation Series – Episode 2 – Professional Boundaries

Professional boundaries includes:

1. the schedule of when you'll have contact with the kids,
 2. limits on physical touch,
 3. limits on personal disclosure, and
 4. the general tone of the professional relationship.
1. Your contact with clients is during scheduled hours.
 - Be polite but minimize any accidental contact with clients outside of work.
 - Don't talk about your clients in public.
 2. Limits on physical touch.
 - a) Providing Physical Assistance:
 - If your clients require physical assistance with hygiene, always be business-like and clinical.
 - b) Affectionate Touch:
 - Kids thrive on affectionate touch but because of the treatment issues common in residential programs your organization likely has guidelines to avoid types of affectionate touch that are too intimate.
 - c) Sexualized Touch:
 - Sexualized behaviors toward clients is clearly a boundary violation.
 - You may have to set limits on sexualized clients trying to relate to you in a sexualized or harassing fashion.
 - d) Directive Touch:
 - If your clients require physical assistance with hygiene, always be business-like and clinical.
 - Only use directive touch in a manner consistent with your organization's trainings, policies, procedures, and practices.
 3. Limits on personal disclosure.
 - Your relationships with the kids are based on the time you spend together, not on your personal history, your life outside of work, or the type of information you might exchange with peers in order to develop a relationship.
 - Kids will test to see if you have professional personal disclosure boundaries, so have in mind some respectful ways to not answer questions about your life outside of work.

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- Don't disclose personal issues that overlap with issues that the kids bring into treatment, such as drug use, unless your program directly trains and supports you in how to use that sort of disclosure in a therapeutic way.
4. The general tone of the professional relationship.
- Dress like a professional. Speak like a professional. Carry yourself in a confident fashion.
 - Don't promise to keep any secrets. You're part of a treatment team and may be professionally obligated to share any information you learn from a client.
 - Allow yourself to develop genuine caring feelings for the kids, but maintain a level of clinical distance to create an important professional emotional boundary.