



Guidance on Professional Boundaries

The Living Room is intended to be a place where visitors are treated with kindness and respect, and where a relaxed, friendly atmosphere is created for visitors and volunteers to interact in. However, it is also extremely important that professional boundaries are maintained, to protect both volunteers and visitors and to prevent allegations of unprofessional conduct and abuse.

These guidelines are intended for everyone who works, in whatever capacity, within *The Living Room* regardless of whom they are employed by or volunteer for. These guidelines however cannot cover every eventuality and where there is an element of doubt as to the appropriateness of behaviour a worker should always seek guidance.

Responsibility

The Living Room have a responsibility to ensure that staff have a full understanding of professional boundaries and the standards required to ensure that they are maintained.

If a volunteer or staff member thinks that there is a risk of a potential breakdown of their professional boundaries they must immediately seek the guidance of a manager or an appropriate other if they are not available.

Guidance regarding specific behaviour:

Prohibited on all Occasions.

Sexual relations

Initiating gratuitous talk about sex

Physical contact with sexual intent

Rough handling

Receiving money for yourself

Receiving money to purchase something on behalf of a service user

Giving money to residents

Saying you love a service user

Kiss on the cheek

Swearing

Using power inappropriately (The way in which a worker relates to a user can emphasise the worker's power verbally or in actions. Power can be used for personal advantage and users denied power might give more than they wish or behave differently to gain favour. The power relationship needs to be acknowledged.)

Should any of the above be initiated by the service user then you should politely explain that it is not appropriate and record the incident in the service user's notes.

Disclosing Personal Information

In disclosing personal information a worker must be personally responsible for exercising professional judgement about the validity, wisdom and necessity of such disclosures giving due attention to possible outcomes (e.g. disclosing material status or sexual orientation).

Limits of the relationship

A worker cannot gain personally from the relationship for example gaining favours or material items. Additionally, the worker cannot gain emotional support from a client regarding their own problems.

Conflict of Interest

If a volunteer has a prior relationship with a visitor to The Living Room, including friends or family members, it should be reported to the project manager as soon as possible who will make a decision about whether any action needs to be taken.

Social Media

The use of social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc. can be a positive way of keeping in touch with friends, but can also be abused, and for this reason volunteers at *The Living Room* are expected not to make any kind of connection with visitors to the project via the internet or social media. This includes accepting friend requests, sending messages electronically, responding to messages electronically etc. Do not make contact with, or accept 'friend requests' from guests or ex-guests via social media platforms including (but not limited to) Facebook, Twitter etc. This is in keeping with our policy of no contact outside *The Living Room* activities and being friendly towards guests but not becoming friends. This maintains important emotional and safety boundaries for both the guest and yourself.

Gifts

From time to time guests may wish to give gifts to staff or volunteers. The general rule is that all gifts should be shared with the team and the guest should be told that this is the policy. All gifts should be reported and recorded in the logbook. Any gift deemed to be too expensive or in some way inappropriate should be discretely returned to the guest. Let your shift leader know.

Similarly we do not encourage volunteers to give gifts as it can inadvertently set up an expectation of return, and it can also be interpreted as favouritism. You may become aware of a situation where a guest is in need of a particular item that you have spare. You should not feel obliged to try and meet the needs of the guests, but if you feel you would like to pass something on to them, please speak to the Project Co-ordinator. They may know more about the guest, and can let you know if it's appropriate, and if so, they can arrange for the gift to be passed anonymously, so that the guest does not then feel beholden to you. We may email out requests for donations of items where guests have specific need, (e.g. old kettles) so there are appropriate avenues through which you can give.