

# Professional Boundaries Policy

## Policy and Procedure Manual

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### 1. Policy

The purpose of this policy is to give all staff clear guidance on safe ways of working. This ensures that all staff are behaving consistently, and within the professional boundaries that Apex Care has identified. Clear boundaries are essential with maintaining professional behaviour.

Apex Care understands the imbalance of power that exists as a result of our position, whether that is between adults, or between adults and youth. The imbalance of power between adults and youth is of particular importance in a social or healthcare environment. The power imbalance is increased when the person supported has limited knowledge, and/or is part of a marginalised group, for example, a person with disabilities, people with mental illness, children and youth. Staff working in the healthcare industry have a responsibility to ensure their own personal, sexual, or financial needs are not influencing interactions between themselves, or the person supported. It is the staff members responsibility to maintain the appropriate professional boundary of the therapeutic relationship. For Apex Care, a lack of boundaries can limit where we can place support workers, the relationships they form can be unintentionally harmful to those they support and the approach the team is making. For this reason, a **breach of boundaries may result in disciplinary action.**

### 2. Scope

Applies to all Apex Care employees.

### 3. Overview

Apex Care employees have an important role where there is a need for a certain level of trust from those they support and their families. Therefore, establishing a professional relationship with certain restrictions is essential. Key risk areas are documented below.

#### **Communication with young people including the use of technology**

All interactions with children and young people need to be carefully considered and planned to ensure these occur in ways that reduce potential risk to children. Apex Care staff should clearly understand the need to maintain appropriate professional boundaries in their communication with children, and expectations around boundaries need to be firmly established to provide guidance to staff. These situations include communicating with children at work, at home, in public settings and through the use of mobile technology and social media. This includes the wider use of technology such as mobile phones, text messaging, e-mails, digital cameras, videos, web-cams, websites and blogs.

Children are at increased risk of sexual abuse and exploitation where adults have the opportunity to gain access to children and young people in a setting that is not open to casual observation by other adults. Staff should also be careful when it comes to their communications with children so as to avoid any possible misinterpretation of their motives or any behaviour which could be construed as grooming.

All Apex Care staff are required to:

- Ensure that their communication with children takes place within the boundaries of a professional relationship and are open to scrutiny from other adults.
- Have no secret social contact with children or their parents
- Take care that their language or conduct does not give rise to comment or speculation
- Consider the appropriateness of the social contact according to their role and the nature of their work and always have any contact approved by senior colleagues
- Understand that some communications may be called into question and need to be justified
- Do not give their personal contact details to children, including their mobile telephone number

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### **Gifts, Rewards, and Favouritism**

All support workers should be aware of Apex Care’s guidance on rewards including arrangements for the declaration of gifts received and given. All staff need to be aware however, that the giving of gifts can be misinterpreted by others as a gesture either to bribe or ‘groom’ a young person.

All Apex Care staff are required to:

- Act as a role model to those you are supporting and your colleagues, being especially conscious of your actions and words at times and in places where they can be observed by those requiring our support.
- Create a therapeutic and positive relationship with the person you are supporting and their family (if involved).

Apex Care requires staff to NOT:

- Lend or give rangatahi money or buy gifts, sweets, drinks, food, or cigarettes
- Moving beyond therapeutic self-disclosure and oversharing that is detrimental to the person and/or provides no therapeutic gain
- Believe that they have a ‘special’ relationship with the young person, and that only they understand the young person
- Become so caught up with someone they support that this interferes with their work/life balance and/or where the person being supported will only agree to speak with a particular member of staff
- Enable or foster dependency on the person supported and sabotages the recovery process.

### **Sexual Contact**

All staff should clearly understand the need to maintain appropriate boundaries in their contact with clients. Intimate or sexual relationships between our staff and our clients will be regarded as a grave breach of trust and illegal. Allowing or encouraging a relationship to develop in a way which might lead to a sexual relationship is also unacceptable. There are occasions when adults embark on a course of behaviour known as ‘grooming’ where the sole purpose is to gain the trust of a child and manipulate that relationship so sexual abuse can take place. Apex Care staff should be aware that consistently conferring inappropriate special attention and favour upon a client might be construed as being part of a ‘grooming’ process and as such will give rise to concerns about their behaviour.

Any sexual activity between Apex Care staff and the client with whom they work will be regarded as a criminal offence and reported to the Police. Such activity will always be a matter for disciplinary action.

Apex Care requires staff who:

- Respect people’s right to privacy
- Take responsibility to set and maintain clear and consistent boundaries with those we support and their families
- Maintain only professional relationships with those we support and their families, acting transparently and unambiguously.

Apex Care requires staff to NOT:

- Change his or her dress style for work when working with a particular person
- Participate in flirtatious communication, sexual innuendo or offensive language with a person supported
- Breach the young person’s personal space in a way that is not clinically indicated
- Touch the person more than is appropriate, if at all
- Includes sexual context or innuendo in interactions with the person supported or in relation to their partners, family/whanau and friends.

### **Staff Member’s Home**

No client should be in or invited into the home of any support worker, unless the reason for this has been firmly established and agreed with parents and caregivers and an Apex Care manager. It is not appropriate for any organisation or service to expect, or request, that private living space be used for work.

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Apex Care requires staff who are vigilant in maintaining their privacy and mindful of the need to avoid placing themselves in vulnerable situations.

Apex Care requires staff to NOT:

- Attempt to see the client (or vice versa) outside the work setting or outside normal working hours or after the professional relationship has ceased
- Receive gifts or continue contact with a former client after the care episode or therapeutic relationship has concluded
- Give or accept social invitations.

### **Supporting at Home or Motel**

All Apex Care staff are required to:

- Ensure that their behaviour remains professional at all times
- Never share beds with a client of any age
- DO NOT share bedrooms unless it involves a dormitory situation and the arrangements have been previously discussed with the social worker, Apex Care manager, parents and children.

### **Transporting Young People**

It is inappropriate for support workers to offer lifts to a child or young person outside their normal working duties, unless this has been agreed to by the social worker, Apex Care manager, parents/guardians.

There may be occasions where the child or young person requires transport in an emergency situation or where not transporting the child may place the child at risk. Such circumstances must always be recorded and reported to a senior manager and parents/guardians.

### **What if I am concerned about a colleague?**

If you are unable to speak to the colleague directly or if the colleague does not recognise the problem, the next step is for you to speak to your manager. Please put the concerns in writing and include:

- the date, time
- witnesses
- what was observed?
- how was the behaviour received?
- the impact on the health of the client

### **Linked Policies:**

- Code of Conduct
- Dress Code
- Paramourncy and Child Protection

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