



AFOA CANADA


Building a Community of Professionals

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES FOR INDIGENOUS WORKERS

*The Importance of
Confidentiality*

AFOA.CA





It is often very challenging to live and work with community members to develop and maintain appropriate professional and personal boundaries. Managing professional boundaries in community while using local services poses a unique challenge because of the nature of community connectedness. Everyone knows everyone and is connected at some degree of separation that is tangible. As an organization, it may be important to define roles, expectations, and boundaries to secure confidentiality for your community members, clients, and stakeholders.

WHAT ARE PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES?

Professional boundaries are rules and limits that prevent the lines between professional/service provider/carer/other and client from becoming blurred.

Maintaining professional boundaries ensures a safe working environment for both clients and staff.

However, working with family and friends can make it difficult to maintain these boundaries, and in community, it can be particularly difficult to be able to know when to put on your professional hat and create a boundary with your relations. However, it's essential to find a balance between personal relationships and professional responsibilities.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN POLICY AND PRACTICE?

Having a confidentiality policy in place can help mitigate the risk of blurred boundaries for your organization. Your policy should clearly define expectations of your staff to refrain from sharing confidential information during or after their employment with the company, and define what information must be kept confidential, and who has access to it.

Defining conflict of interest whether perceived, potential or actual, what constitutes a “relation” under the policy, and the responsibility of employees to disclose where it may exist may be included herein as well. Recognizing that working in community by its very nature will mean that conflicts of interest do arise, and having clearly defined policies and protocols in place to address them when they do is critical to organizational and community wellness. You should also include strategies to help employees set professional boundaries within your policy. **These may include:**

- **Self-Reflection:** Regularly assess your own feelings and biases. Be aware of any conflicts of interest.
- **Clear Communication:** Set expectations early on. Clearly define roles and responsibilities.
- **Consistency:** Treat all community members equally, regardless of personal relationships.
- **Flexibility:** Understand that some situations may require flexibility while still maintaining professionalism.
- **Seek Supervision:** Regular supervision or consultation can help you process challenges and make informed decisions.