**[How to Maintain Professional Boundaries in Social Work](http://www.wikihow.com/Maintain-Professional-Boundaries-in-Social-Work)**

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1. **Understand what professional boundaries are.**
   * In a professional relationship, you can be friendly with your client, but not your client's friend.
   * You are responsible for modeling healthy boundaries for your client. If you do, the client will be less likely to expect or attempt to have a nonprofessional relationship with you.
   * You should be clear on your limits as a provider. Social work boundaries are set to keep you focused on the work you are doing with the client. Without boundaries, you may overstep your duties of providing counseling and support to offering money or personal advice to your client.
2. **Identify poor boundaries.**
   * You and your client call each other friends and interact outside of the facility where you work.
   * Valuable gifts are exchanged between you and the client.
   * You reveal personal information that is not relevant to your client's case.
   * You find yourself discussing the client and his or her case during social interactions with your family and friends.
   * You are having discussions with the client about other social workers or staff members at the facility.
   * You find yourself offering your client assistance with transportation or directly helping him or her with moving or babysitting, etc.
3. **Know the consequences of poor boundaries.**
   * Without professional relationship boundaries you may not provide appropriate services to your client. If you are acting as the client's friend, and not his or her provider, you may not challenge the client to deal with presenting problems or terminate services when it is appropriate.
   * Talking to your client about other staff members could lead to "splitting." Splitting occurs when a client says negative things to different members of a staff that eventually pits them against each other.
   * Failure to set professional boundaries can cause you to burn out from caring for your client beyond what is required of a professional relationship. You can have too much compassion for the client that will make it difficult for you to provide the objectivity your client needs.
   * If you do not maintain professional boundaries, you may find yourself acting in an unethical manner, such as becoming sexually involved with the client.
   * You and your client may be emotionally traumatized by the relationship.
4. **Create strong professional boundaries.**
   * Explain your role as provider and the limits of your availability to the client outside of office hours at the beginning of the relationship. Make it clear that the client will only be able to contact you at the facility and that your personal life (outside of the relevant information you volunteer) is not up for discussion.
   * Make sure that any personal information you reveal (called self-disclosure) is helpful to the client's case. For example, if the client is homeless, it is appropriate to talk about your history of homelessness and the resources you used to change your life. You are making the session about you if you discuss parts of your personal life that are not relevant to the client.
   * When a client crosses the professional boundaries, redirect them by immediately clarifying your role and the limits of your relationship with the client.
   * Avoid having a dual relationship with a client. A dual relationship occurs when you have a therapeutic relationship with a client and you have some form of interaction with him or her outside of the facility. For example, you may be providing therapy to a client and then discover you both attend the same church. Your options could be to assign the client to another social worker or to change the time you attend church services to avoid interacting with the client.
   * Discuss boundary issues with your supervisor, colleagues or your own therapist.
   * Be sure to maintain good physical, emotional and mental health so you work at your personal best. Review the code of ethics established by the National Association of Social Workers.

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<http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp>

www.first5scc.org/inc/docs/PDF/BoundariesTrainingCurriculum.pdf