


Drawing your line – the challenge of ethics and boundaries in working with children and young people

Jenny Rose 
 Snr Social Worker
 MAASW (Acc.), MMH (Child and Adol), BSW, BA (Welf), Dip Bus,
 Cert IV TAA

Aims

To encourage you to:

- reflect on your practice
- discuss with your colleagues
- read your code of ethics/conduct



Professional Boundaries

May be set by:

- Your profession
 - Your agency
 - Your peak body
- Aim to allow us to provide an effective service to our clients.



Nursing

'limits which protect the space between the professional's power and the client's vulnerability' and allow for safe, objective and effective engagement with a person

(Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, 2010).



Social Work

- "Social workers, not their clients or former clients, are responsible for setting and maintaining clear and appropriate professional boundaries in all forms of communication..." (5.1.6 c)
- 'Where dual or multiple relationships exist or are unavoidable, social workers will set and enforce explicit, appropriate professional boundaries to minimize the risk of conflict of interest, exploitation or harm' (5.1.6 j)



Psychology

- ...are aware of, and take steps to establish and maintain proper professional boundaries with clients and colleagues...



Teaching

- You must not develop a relationship with any student that is, or that can be misinterpreted as having a personal rather than a professional interest in a student...
- Where a personal relationship, such as family relationship or close friendship exists between you and a student, or where there is a pre-existing sexual relationship with an adult student attending the same workplace, you must report... to your supervisor or principal, and it must be managed carefully.



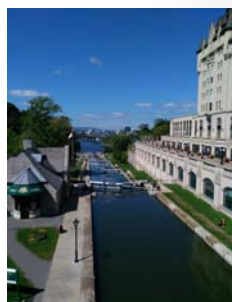
CHW Professional Boundaries

- “Professional boundaries are crossed when staff encounter conflicts between their professional duties and their social, sexual, religious or business relationships
- When staff engage with patients and families more than ‘doing their job’, a dual relationship develops. The professional relationship may be combined with social, sexual, religious or business relationship before, during or after their time working at the Hospital.
- Professional boundaries also apply to relationships between managers, staff and students.”



Ethical dilemmas

- Must make a decision about the best course of action
- Must be different courses to choose from.
- No matter what course is chosen some ethical principle is compromised. Allen 2012



Ethical Dilemmas

Table 1. Personal and Professional Ethics, Values, and Morals

Professional	Personal
Ethics What relevant standards and expectations are outlined by my profession in its Code of Ethics? How do ethical principles conflict in this case? • If ethical principles conflict, use an ethical decision making process to resolve.	Values What relevant personal values apply in this case and where did they originate? What professional values are outlined in the Code of Ethics and do any of them apply in this case? • If there is conflict between personal and professional values, how can I manage my personal values so that I allow my professional ethics to guide me? • Seek supervision, use self-reflection and value clarification process.
Laws and Policy Are there any legal obligations in this case? How do my agency's policies direct me? Are there any conflicts between my profession's ethics and my legal obligations or my agency's policies? • Legal obligations usually supersede professional ethics. • Agency policies should not prevent the ethical practice of social work. • Seek supervision in both cases.	Morals How does my behavior affect my relationship with others? What would I like to do and/or what would I want done to me in a situation like this? • Distinguish between personal and professional behavior and obligations.

Allen, 2012



Questions

- A social worker refuses to work with a same-sex couple because it contravenes his/her religious beliefs.
- Action would be taken: NO / YES
- If 'IT DEPENDS' what might it depend on?
- If YES, what codes of practice or agency policies would be relevant?
- How are they likely to be used?
- Sheffield Hallam University, 2009



Challenges

Boundaries are hard when you want to be liked ...

Brené Brown, Rising Strong



Areas for reflection

- Technology
- Social media
- Physical contact



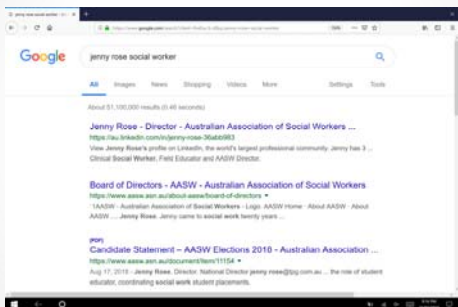
Technology

- Generational differences
- Geographic challenges re connectivity
- Switching off?
- Dual roles- employee and self employed
- Public vs private



Social media

Your professional relationship may be compromised if you: invite students to join your personal electronic social networking site or accept students' invitations to join theirs (Dept of Education Code of Conduct)



Physical Contact

- What are you comfortable with?
- At home
- At work
 - with colleagues
 - With clients
- What influences this?



Legal findings



Legal findings

- the practitioner failed to observe proper professional boundaries in circumstances where he had knowledge that Patient A had recently been admitted to Mirrabrook and that she had observed him working there as a nurse, in that he:
 - (a) accepted Patient A's request for her to sit and have a cigarette with him outside Shellharbour Square;
 - (b) engaged in social conversation with Patient A outside Shellharbour Square;
 - (c) provided Patient A with his personal mobile phone number;
 - (d) spoke with Patient A on more than one occasion on the telephone and in person.

[https://www.austlii.edu.au/other/austrlii/au/other/austrlii/au/other/mca/journals/mba/2019/2019020119.html](https://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/austrlii/au/other/austrlii/au/other/mca/journals/mba/2019/2019020119.html) accessed 22/01/19

Legal findings

he engaged in unprofessional conduct of a serious nature by engaging in an inappropriate personal and social relationship with an individual who had been a client of Mr Heyward's from April 2005 to December 2005. The inappropriate personal and social relationship involved Mr Heyward meeting with the client on a number of social occasions, including meeting to have meals together, and extensive email and telephone communications between Mr Heyward and the client.

[https://www.austlii.edu.au/other/austrlii/au/other/austrlii/au/other/mca/journals/mba/2019/2019020119.html](https://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/austrlii/au/other/austrlii/au/other/mca/journals/mba/2019/2019020119.html)

Legal findings

- From July 2011 until November 2013, the patient consulted Dr Ojo from time-to-time about her various health issues. That included a referral to a psychologist. During this time, the patient demonstrated a growing emotional attachment to Dr Ojo, including sending him multiple text messages relating to personal matters as well as a number of inappropriate photographs.
- Dr Ojo failed to maintain an appropriate doctor/patient relationship by phoning the patient at least 90 times and sending her text messages in which he gave advice about his church, her and her children's health and provided encouragement and comment about non-medical matters. The doctor/patient relationship was further compromised when the patient obtained employment at the medical centre.
- [Medical Board of Australia](#) accessed 12/2/2019


Cultural appropriateness?

The dominant professional discourse insists on the maintenance of separateness between the personal and professional self, for example not developing friendships with clients or adopting a professional role with family members (AASW 2000)... **these identities coexist and converge as a result of kinship ties, obligation and the realities of living and working in small communities.**

(emphasis added) Australian Social Work/March 2003, Vol. 56, No. 1

Self disclosure

Appropriate self-disclosure of positive and negative experiences, and sharing some aspects of one's own experience, enables the worker to be seen as a 'normal' person rather than a remote professional (Trevithick, 2000).



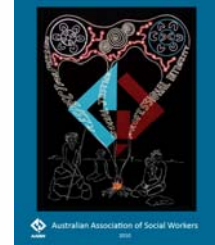
A way forward?

...take the necessary step from a prescriptive list of do's and don'ts to a broader strategy that helps to build an ethically engaged workforce. Sheffield Hallam Uni
 "...a stretchy piece of elastic..." Green et al 2007



Supports

- Critical reflection- Jan Fook, Fiona Gardner
- Clinical Supervision
- Mentors
- Peer supports
- Organisational processes



Selected References

Karen Allen, [What is an Ethical Dilemma?](#) The New Social Worker Spring 2012
 Bindi Bennett & Joanna Zubrzycki (2003) [Hearing the stories of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers: challenging and educating the system](#), Australian Social Work, 56:1, 61-70
 Brené Brown, Rising Strong
 Rosemary Green, Raelene Gregory & Robyn Mason (2006) [Professional Distance and Social Work: Stretching the Elastic?](#), Australian Social Work, 59:4, 449-461
 The Children's Hospital at Westmead [Professional Boundaries](#)
 AMA [Social Media and the Medical Profession](#)
 NSW Department of Education, [Code of Conduct](#)
 Sheffield Hallam University, [Professional boundaries: research report](#)

Questions

