



Professional boundaries in advocacy

Training Aid 7

A guide to professional boundaries in advocacy

This guide is designed to help advocates understand and maintain professional boundaries while supporting clients. Clear boundaries ensure advocates can effectively represent and empower individuals while safeguarding their own wellbeing and maintaining the trust of those they support.

Understanding professional boundaries

Professional boundaries are the ethical and legal limits that define the appropriate interactions between advocates and the individuals they support. These boundaries ensure that relationships remain professional, safeguarding both parties and maintaining the integrity of the advocacy role.

Advocates should adhere to Your Voice Counts service engagement protocols specific to the different types of advocacy provided. Additionally, they should follow established standards and guidance, such as the Advocacy Charter, which emphasises the key principle of Clarity of Purpose, as well as the NICE guidance for advocates working in health and social care.

Why professional boundaries matter

Professional boundaries help:

- Foster trust and respect between the advocate and the individual.
- Keep the advocate's focus on the individual's needs and rights.
- Protect advocates from conflicts of interest or dependency issues.
- Support the integrity and impartiality of the advocacy process.
- Promote advocate wellbeing by managing workload and preventing emotional exhaustion.

Key principles of professional boundaries

- **Clarity:** Clearly define and communicate your role as an advocate to the individual, their family, and other stakeholders.
- **Impartiality:** Represent the individual's wishes without inserting personal opinions or biases.
- **Non-interference:** Avoid actions that fall outside the scope of advocacy, such as providing direct care, handling finances, or offering medical advice.

- **Confidentiality:** Maintain the individual's privacy and share information only with their consent or as required by safeguarding policies.

Examples of maintaining and overstepping boundaries

Within role:

- Gathering information, consulting relevant contacts, and presenting findings to decision-makers.
- Using non-instructed advocacy techniques when individuals cannot express their wishes directly.

Outside role:

- **Scenario:** An advocate decides to assist a client with finances, such as withdrawing cash. This is outside the scope of advocacy, potentially leading to dependency and safeguarding issues.
- **Scenario:** An advocate intervenes in a family dispute, taking sides. This risks compromising impartiality and detracts from the advocate's role of representing the individual's voice.

Scenarios illustrating professional boundaries

- **Scenario 1: emotional boundaries** **Situation:** Sarah, an advocate, supports John, who is experiencing severe depression. John starts to rely heavily on Sarah for emotional support, reaching out frequently and attempting to contact outside of working hours. **Appropriate action:** Sarah should gently remind John of the professional nature of their relationship and provide information about other support services available including for after-hours assistance.
- **Scenario 2: physical boundaries** **Situation:** A client attempts to hug an advocate as a gesture of gratitude. **Appropriate action:** The advocate should consider cultural norms and personal comfort, offering a handshake or verbal expression of thanks if physical contact is not appropriate, while explaining their preference for maintaining professional boundaries.
- **Scenario 3: time boundaries** **Situation:** A client requests late evening meetings outside of the advocate's working hours. **Appropriate action:** The advocate should clearly communicate their available working hours and schedule meetings within those times, emphasising the importance of work-life balance.
- **Scenario 4: role boundaries** **Situation:** An advocate is asked to help with personal tasks like grocery shopping. **Appropriate action:** The advocate should explain that these tasks fall outside their role and refer the client to appropriate support services.

Strategies for maintaining professional boundaries

- **Self-awareness:** Regularly reflect on your interactions to ensure professionalism.
- **Supervision:** Participate in regular supervision for guidance and support.
- **Training:** Engage in ongoing training to stay updated on best practices.

- **Clear communication:** Clearly set and communicate your professional boundaries from the start. Completing the Advocacy Plan and making initial introductions, where you describe your role, help establish these boundaries and set clear expectations for both the advocate and the individual.

Tips for advocates

- **Use ConnectCom:** Reference the Teams channel to stay informed about local services and organisations that can provide additional support to clients.
- **Training resources:** Regularly review training aids and guides on topics such as professional curiosity and effective communication.
- **Maintain transparency:** Ensure that individuals understand your role and the limits of your support.

Case studies for reflection

- **Scenario 1:** Marie, an Independent Mental Capacity Advocate, is asked to assist John beyond her role by helping him with personal care tasks due to staff shortages. Marie recognises that this crosses professional boundaries and redirects the issue to appropriate care staff.
- **Scenario 2:** Tom, an Independent Mental Health Advocate, is involved in a discharge planning meeting where family members disagree. He focuses on supporting Lisa to express her views rather than mediating between the family members

Reflection prompts

- How would you respond if asked to perform a task outside your advocacy role?
- What steps would you take if you felt pressured by external parties to overstep your boundaries?
- How do you maintain impartiality when presenting an individual's case in difficult situations?

Maintaining professional boundaries is crucial in advocacy to protect both clients and advocates. By understanding and adhering to these boundaries, advocates can provide effective, ethical, and professional support. Regular reflection, supervision, and training are key components in upholding these standards.

For further resources and training materials, please refer to the ConnectCom Teams channel and the Training and Skills Teams channel, which offer comprehensive guides on communication, advocacy standards, and advocacy role specific guides.



Your Voice Counts

Greenesfield Business Centre

Mulgrave Terrace

NE8 1PQ

0800 048 7856



mail@yvc.org.uk



www.yvc.org.uk

