**What Are Professional Boundaries?**

* Clearly established limits that allow for safe connections between service providers and their trainee
* Being **friendly**, not friends
* The ability to know where you end and the student begins
* A clear understanding of the limits and responsibilities of your role as a service provider

**The Importance of Boundaries**

* Role modeling to the student healthy communication and professional relationships
* Avoiding the “rescuer” role
* Staying focused on one’s responsibilities to the student & the provision of helpful and appropriate services to the student
* Avoiding burnout (“compassion fatigue”)
* If working in conjunction with other services providers: maintaining a healthy, open, communicating and functioning team
* Maintaining one’s physical and emotional safety

**Consequences of Having Loose/Poor Boundaries**

* Compassion fatigue – the service provider’s role may not feel sustainable
* Potential for “splitting” on teams
* Student may not be given appropriate or helpful services, which could affect his/her willingness to accept future services
* Student may feel betrayed, abandoned, and/or poorly served
* Service provider may act unethically
* The reputation Job Corps and/or the service provider’s profession may be compromised
* Service provider and/or student may be emotionally traumatized and/or put in physical danger

**Signs that Boundary Issues May Be Present**

* Student and service provider begin referring to each other as friends
* Service provider receives gifts from or gives gifts to student
* Student has or is asking for service provider’s home phone number or other significant personal information
* Student asks/expects service provider to socialize with him/her outside of professional setting (e.g., student asks service provider to begin attending church with his/her family)
* Service provider reveals excessive personal information to student
* Service provider is unable to sleep due to anxiety related to trainee/trainee’s situation
* Discussion regarding work/trainees dominates service provider’s social interactions with friends & family
* Service provider offers to provide assistance to student outside of his/her role (e.g., babysitting; transportation)
* Service provider finds him/herself “venting” with student about other service providers on the team

**Techniques for Creating & Maintaining**

**Healthy Professional Boundaries**

* As early as possible in the relationship (ideally at your initial meeting/intake/ assessment), **establish clear agreements** with the student regarding your role as a service provider, your availability, best ways to communicate with you, and what to do if you see one another in public.
* When boundary issues or warning signs appear, **address these issues** with the student quickly. Be sensitive to their feelings when doing this; emphasize the importance of and your commitment to maintaining healthy boundaries.
* Self-disclosure: if you do decide to tell a student something personal about yourself, **ensure that the information is related to the trainee’s goals.** Too much self-disclosure shifts the focus from the student to the service provider and can confuse the student in terms of roles and expectations of the relationship.
* Realize that how a student interprets your words and actions might not match what you were trying to communicate. With these sensitive relationships, you **may need to frequently clarify your role and boundaries** and ask the student to repeat back what you said to ensure that he/she understands. This will also give the student an opportunity to ask clarifying questions.
* Use your supervisor, professional colleagues and/or a mental health professional as a **sounding board** when you have questions or concerns regarding boundaries, and especially when boundary issues are impacting your ability to provide objective, compassionate care. Also consult with your supervisor or professional colleagues if you are feeling uncomfortable about talking with your trainees about boundaries.
* Dual relationships: If you had a personal relationship with a student before becoming the trainee’s service provider, realize that you **must use your professional judgment when interacting with the student in social settings**. Pay particular attention to the trainee’s confidentiality as well as his/her physical and emotional security. Situations in which one person is in a position to hold power over the other person must be avoided if at all possible.
* For supervisors: Recognize that questioning someone’s boundaries can create defensiveness. Rather than instructing someone to “have better boundaries”, **use open-ended questions** to help the service provider identify for him/herself that his/her work would benefit from the establishment of clearer boundaries.
* If you are working with a team of service providers, remember to **promote and role model positive, open communication and respectful sharing of information.** Trust that team members are fulfilling their roles as service providers, and remember that you can’t (and shouldn’t) “do and be everything” for your student.
* **Take care of yourself!** Make sure you are getting enough sleep, eating well, spending time with friends and family, exercising, seeking supervision as needed, and “leaving work at work” to the greatest extent possible.