Travis County HHS/VS Procedure Manual

Procedure Number	HHSVS PR5
Procedure Title	Professional Boundaries
Key Words	Customer, service, intervention
Related County Policy	https://www.traviscountytx.gov/images/commissioners_court/Doc/county-code/chapter-9.pdf
Submitted by	Travis County HHS&VS Procedures Committee (Corie Cormie, Laura Sovine, Christinia Kuehn, Jane Prince-Maclean, Stacy Landry)
Date Submitted	February 3, 2016
Responsible Party	HHS&VS Department Staff

Employees assume the full burden of setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries with clients and participants of HHS&VS. Clients are program participants who are seeking services, financial assistance or intervention from the Department. Individuals who participate in community forums, trainings and other community development activities are considered participants rather than clients.

In order to maintain these professional boundaries, Travis County HHS&VS employees shall:

1. Be alert to and avoid conflicts of interest that interfere with professional discretion and impartial judgment. A conflict of interest is a situation in which an employee takes advantage of any professional relationship to further their personal, religious, political, or business interests. Employees will inform clients when a real or potential conflict of interest arises and take reasonable steps to resolve the issue in a manner that makes the clients' interests primary and protects clients' interests to the greatest extent possible. In some cases, protecting clients' interests may require termination of the professional relationship with proper referral of the client.

2. Not engage in dual or multiple relationships with clients or former clients if there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client. Dual or multiple relationships exist when employees relate to clients in more than one relationship, whether professional, social, or business. Dual or multiple relationships can occur simultaneously or consecutively. In instances when dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable, employees will take steps, in the best interests of the client, and in consultation with their supervisor to protect clients. Employees are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries. In the event a dual relationship occurs, the employee must notify the supervisor and seek consultation.

3. When providing services to two or more people who have a relationship with each other (for example, couples, family members), clarify with all parties which individuals will be considered clients and the nature of employees' professional obligations to the various individuals who are receiving services. Employees who anticipate a conflict of interest among the individuals receiving services or who anticipate having to perform in potentially conflicting roles will clarify their role with the parties involved and take appropriate action to minimize any conflict of interest.

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4. Under no circumstances engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with current clients or former clients, nor provide services to someone with whom they have had a prior sexual relationship, even if it is consensual. Employees will not engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with clients' relatives or other individuals with whom clients maintain a close personal relationship where there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client.

5. Not initiate or engage in physical contact with clients, such as hugging or caressing, where there is a possibility of psychological harm to the client because of the contact.

6. Not engage in relationships with clients where legitimate business transactions take place in which money, goods, or services are exchanged such as fundraising activities, private businesses, or sales.

7. Keep relationships with clients strictly professional rather than personal, such as not exchanging gifts, attending each other's personal parties, socializing.

8. Terminate services to clients when goals are completed or services are no longer needed according to program guidelines. Should services need to be terminated suddenly for any reason, proper referrals or service coordination is the responsibility of the employee.

9. Complete annual professional boundaries training provided by the Department.

If employees engage in conduct contrary to any of these prohibitions or claim that an exception to this prohibition is warranted because of extraordinary circumstances, it is the employee who assumes the full burden of demonstrating the client or former client has not been exploited, coerced, or manipulated, intentionally or unintentionally.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT STATEMENT
I have read and understand the above procedure and agree to abide by it. I understand that failure to follow Department Procedure may lead to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

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Employee Signature

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