



PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES AT WORK POLICY

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1.1 Definition:

At the Let's Play Project we believe that every child, young person and vulnerable adult has a right to be safe from harm. Professional boundaries are the framework by which an individual member of staff or volunteer's relationship with a service user is clarified to ensure that it is always safe and appropriate. It defines the parameters of that relationship to ensure it is professional and complies with the **Oxfordshire County Council's Codes of Practice**.

1.1.1 Purpose:

This policy not only protects the children, young people and vulnerable adults we work with but also safeguards the reputation of the Let's Play Project. If staff and volunteers are clear about professional boundaries and what is and is not acceptable this can protect them from the possibility of false allegations and poor practice.

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1.1.2 **Scope:**

- a. This policy document applies to all Let's Play Project staff and volunteers who have regular access to children, young people and vulnerable adults as part of their work.
- b. All managers should ensure it is regularly referred to when planning work with service users and their families.
- c. **A breach of professional boundaries is never acceptable**, and it is the responsibility of the managers to make sure the relationship with a service user is maintained on a professional level.

Professional boundaries are important in our work for a number of reasons:

- d. To safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults and to ensure that staff/volunteers are aware of what the Let's Play Project expects of them in terms of their conduct and relationships with them and their families.
- e. To recognise and appropriately manage power imbalances and unequal relationships.
- f. To build appropriate relationships of trust with children, young people and vulnerable adults.
- g. To ensure we understand the issues around working with vulnerable children, adults and families and their expectations of their play worker.
- h. To fulfil the commissioning requirements of different regulatory bodies and the need to comply with their codes of conduct and practice.
- i. To protect the reputation of the organisation. There is a risk to the organisation if a professional boundary is breached and a child, young person, or vulnerable adult is harmed.

1.1.3 **Setting and maintaining professional boundaries with children, young people and vulnerable adults:**

Before undertaking any work with or delivering any service to children, young people and vulnerable adults it is important that clear boundaries about the nature of the work and relationship are set. Staff and volunteers will have signed the Let's Play Project's confidentiality agreement and have read and signed to say they have read the Safeguarding Policy in order that they can refer to them in all of their work with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

1.1.4 **Professional Boundaries Policy:**

Staff/volunteers should:

- a. Be clear as to their roles and responsibilities as defined in their job description and confirm that understanding in discussion with their line manager.
- b. Know and practice the protocols around confidentiality and recording and share these with the child/young person/vulnerable adult and family as appropriate.
- c. Continually reflect upon and consider the relationships established with children, young people and vulnerable adults to ensure that the professional boundaries are being maintained.
- d. Seek help and support in dealing with issues or concerns they have about professional boundaries from their line manager.

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1.2 Managing a breach of professional boundaries:

Staff/volunteers may at times breach professional boundaries even though their initial intentions were well meaning. Regardless of the intention, the issue must be shared with the line manager and steps taken to support the individual not to repeat the behaviour or action. The breach may not be a single event but a series of events and interactions which together cause the individual to cross the boundary between what would be considered a professional relationship to a non-professional relationship.

A breach of Professional Boundaries may result in disciplinary action.

1.3 Areas where professional boundaries can be breached may include:

1.3.1 Becoming over familiar:

If the relationship with a child, young person or vulnerable adult becomes over familiar professional judgement may be clouded and behaviours may be misinterpreted.

Over familiarity is difficult to define but may involve:

- a. Thinking about the child, young person or vulnerable adult constantly
- b. Feeling a sense of attachment similar to them being a sibling or a friend
- c. Wanting to see them more than necessary or continue the relationship even when the planned work is finished
- d. Considering asking them to come with you to social events that are not work related.

In any work undertaken with children, young people and vulnerable adults there must be a clear plan of how, where, when and why the work will be undertaken and by whom. This includes not visiting service users outside of agreed and planned working hours and not inviting them to your home or to be part of your family or social network unless you are a foster or short break carer. Any changes to the agreed parameters of the work must be discussed with your line manager and recorded in a work plan.

1.3.2 Inappropriate feelings:

Any concern about the nature of the relationship with the child, young person or vulnerable adult should be discussed with the line manager to avoid misinterpretation or confusion on the part of the service user or potential breach of professional boundaries. This includes a worker's perception that a child, young person/vulnerable adult has developed a "crush" on them or another worker.

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1.3.3 Gifts and favours:

Staff/volunteers should never use a relationship with a child, young person or vulnerable adult or their family for personal gain. This includes using contacts to get information that they would not otherwise have access to or obtaining discounted or free products. Gift giving and accepting should not be expected and if it occurs should be discussed with a line manager.

1.3.4 Family and friends:

There may be some instances where staff/volunteers live and work in the same community as service users as a rule. It is inappropriate for the Let's Play Project staff/volunteers to deliver a service to a friend or family member and this should be avoided if possible. Where this is unavoidable, the situation should be monitored, and arrangements should be made for another staff member to take over the case.

1.3.5 Sexual relationships:

Any sexual relationships with service users or members of their families are a breach of professional boundaries and codes of practice and may also be against the law.

1.3.6 Self disclosure:

Although some member of the Let's Play Project staff may have had personal experiences of abuse in their own life which may give them empathy and understanding of the situations in which the children, young people and vulnerable adults they work with find themselves in, it is not usually acceptable for a member of staff to self-disclose their personal experiences to a service user. Apart from being unprofessional a worker might find they are vulnerable or at least embarrassed if their personal information is given to others. There may be occasional exceptions to some appropriate self-disclosure particularly in therapeutic and group work with survivors.

1.3.7 Giving out personal contact details:

Staff must never give out their personal mobile or home telephone numbers or home email or social media details (e.g. Facebook or Twitter details) or other mode of electronic communication to children, young people or vulnerable adults. During activities (for example on day trips) it may be the wish of parents/carers to have the individual play worker's mobile number for the duration of the trip. If this is the case, then parents/carers should agree this with the play worker and numbers should be deleted from phones at the end of the session. If the family needs to contact the play worker at other times the office email, telephone or Core Staffs' mobile numbers should be used.

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1.3.8 Continuing a personal relationship after the service or piece of work is complete:

It is normally not acceptable for a member of staff to continue to see a child, young person or vulnerable adult in a personal capacity once the service or piece of work they have been involved in is complete. Any exceptions to this must have been agreed with line management and demonstrate there is a purpose to the continued contact that is in the service user's best interest and does not compromise professional boundaries in any way. For example, if a play worker is working privately as a respite carer for a family the Let's Play Project Manager should be made aware.

1.4 Management responsibility and supervision:

- a. It is important that managers use supervision to help workers reflect on their professional relationship with children, young people and vulnerable adults and identify if there are any warning signs that professional boundaries may be in danger of being compromised. If at any time a member of staff believes that it is appropriate to act in a way which is counter to this policy and procedure, they must discuss this with their manager before taking any action and a record must be kept by them and the manager of the discussion.
- b. All staff and volunteers have responsibility to act if they suspect that a colleague may be in breach of professional boundaries.
- c. In the first instance you should share your concerns with your line manager. If you don't feel able to do this then you should refer to the Let's Play Project Safeguarding Policy & Procedures, PP12. These will enable you to talk through your concerns confidentially. You must always act upon your concerns to protect children & young people, vulnerable adults
- d. Line managers must print this form for staff/worker signature at the commencement of employment or for already employed workers at the next supervision meeting. All play workers must sign the master list to indicate that they have read and understood this crucial policy.

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