



Practice Pavestones

Pathways to sustainable & effective practice

Professional Boundaries Introduction & Self Reflection Exercises

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A Brief Definition

Professional boundaries are frameworks that define the limits of a professional relationship. They protect the space between a professional's power and a client's vulnerability, ensuring that interactions remain safe, and effective for both the practitioner and the client.

The Challenges

- Apart from obvious violations (e.g. entering a sexual relationship with a client) there is no one 'rule book' on how to set appropriate professional boundaries (PBs) for all situations at all times.
- There are many factors at play in defining appropriate PBs. They are informed by both external factors (e.g. codes of conduct, organisational policies and common law) and internal factors (e.g. personal matters relevant to the practitioner such as culture, lived experience, personal traits). Other subjective influences are the personal boundaries of the client in the professional relationship.
- Problems with PBs exist on a spectrum which ranges from drift to crossing to violation. There are many 'shades of grey' and moving goal posts.
- Dietitians are typically not given adequate training in managing PBs effectively. The culture within Dietetics can influence persistent PB challenges for practitioners, due in part to historically low supervision uptake and the prevalence of perfectionistic, helper-oriented personality traits.
- Appropriate PBs can be put at risk by the same workplace that asks for their observance by making unrealistic demands of health care staff.
- Poor PBs present a significant risk for practitioner burnout.
- Developing your PB skills set is a career long practice. There is NO final arriving.

The Good News

- Managing PBs is a learnable skill.
- Building your capacity to set effective boundaries in your professional practice can improve your confidence and effectiveness and contribute to the sustainability of your practice.
- Gaining insight into the motivations, vulnerabilities, and risk factors that influence your professional practice can foster substantial personal growth and development, resulting in positive impacts across all aspects of your life.
- You can access individualised career long PB support. Attending supervision regularly (with a supervisor who is trained in PB management) is highly supportive of PB skill development.

Self-Reflection Exercises

PART 1

As Dietitians we are encouraged to be very warm and friendly with our clients to develop rapport. This can present challenges when the lines get blurred between 'friendliness' and 'being friends'.

Have you ever had a situation where a client asked for more contact outside of session, and it felt hard to say no? What challenge did that present?

If you have not experienced this, how confident do you feel in setting a boundary with the client in this scenario? What would you say?

Have you ever felt pressured to see someone you know (friend or family) in a professional capacity? How would you respond to this request? What might be the concern if you decided to proceed? How would you manage this if there was no choice? (working remotely)

PART 2

As Dietitians we are often encouraged to 'prove our worth' and 'give the client value'. This can present challenges with time management in session when we might find ourselves going over and above to keep the client happy or cover everything we think they need to know.

What session structures do you use to keep session expectations realistic for yourself and the client?

How do you explain to a client that the session needs to finish even though there may be more matters to discuss?

How do you (or would you) manage emails from clients asking more questions after a session? What problems might this create if it became a regular part of your practice?

PART 3

Dietitians tend to be conscientious, caring people with high expectations of themselves. If these are traits you identify with, chances are you are going to find PBs challenging. PBs often ask us to face our fears of letting people down.

What particular concerns do you have about your readiness for building and maintaining PBs?

What would you value about feeling more confident in your PB skills?

What supports could you pro-actively engage in to prepare for the inevitable challenges this area of professional life will present?

Resources for Ongoing Learning & Support

1. FREE WEBINAR for DA Members 'The Razzle Dazzle of Session Frazzle'. Available here: [Managing Client Contact for Sustainable Practice](#). Email for slides/handouts [HERE](#).
2. Practice Pavestones Professional Boundaries Training [HERE](#). This workshop typically runs two or three times a year (online)
3. Practice Pavestones Motivational Interviewing Training [HERE](#). This workshop equips attendees with conversational skills and session structures to help manage client expectations and deliver effective care and runs three times a year online.
4. **Find a Supervisor:** Dietitian Supervision Resources Australia & International www.dsrai.net