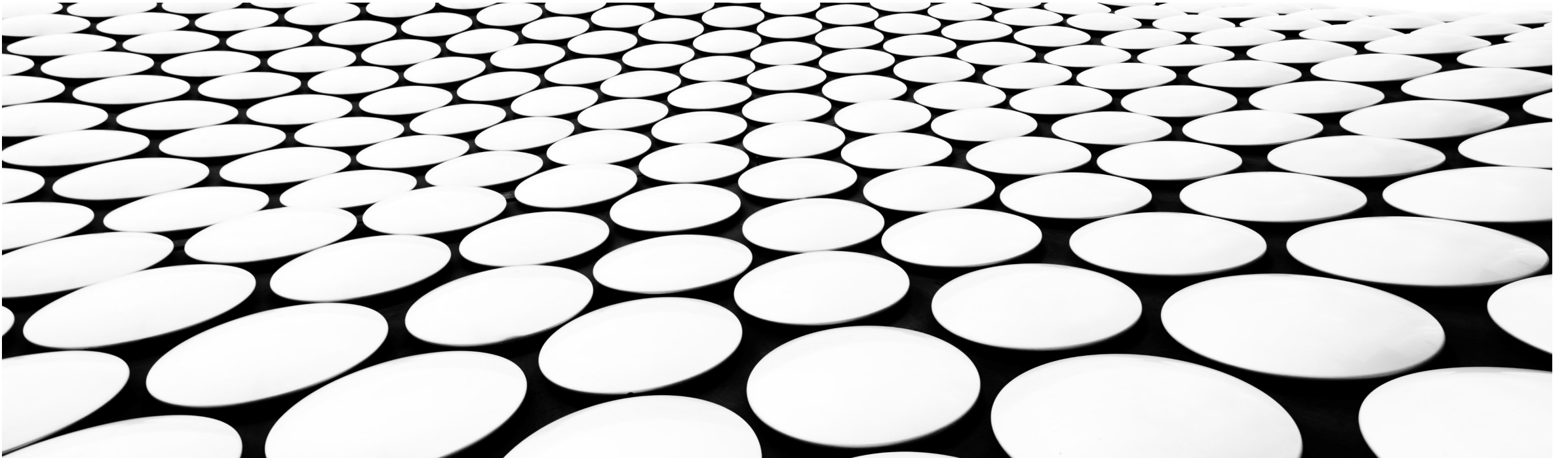


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# **ETHICS AND BOUNDARIES AS A RECOVERY COACH**

SEPTEMBER 17, 2024





# AGENDA

- Introductions (10 min)
- Brief Background/Context for peer support (10 min)
- Ethics of Peer Support (25 min)
- Boundaries (20 min)
- Case Studies (10 min)

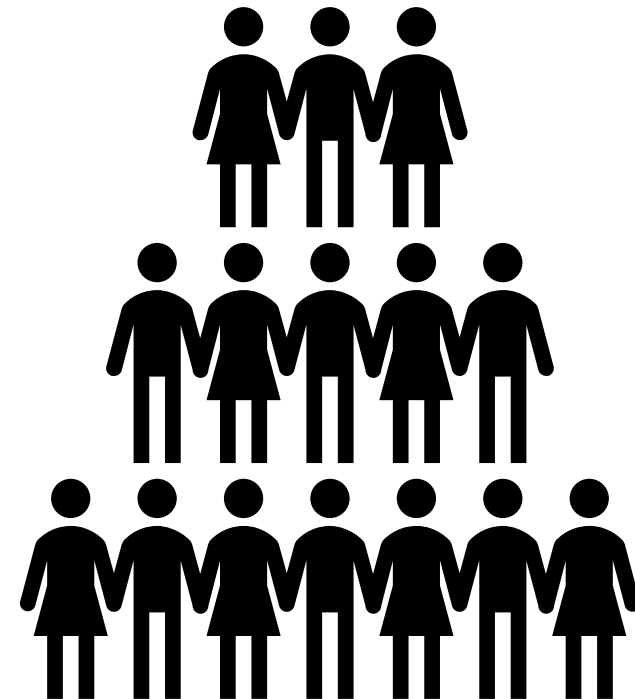


# OBJECTIVES

1. Improve participant's understanding of the role of recovery coaches
2. Develop a process for addressing ethical/boundary concerns
3. Explore case studies to underscore important ethical considerations

# CONNECT BEFORE YOU CORRECT: THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIP (THERAPEUTIC ALLIANCE)

- Relationship is the foundation of any helping profession
  - In other words, we can only be as effective as our relationships with our clients allow us to be.
- Research shows the importance of rapport-building:
  - Counseling
  - Peer Support
  - Training





# WHO AM I?

- Person in recovery
- Co-founder of Voices of Hope
- Assistant Professor at University of Kentucky
- Also:
  - Former clinician (Marriage and Family Therapy)
  - Recovery Coach



# MY WORK AT UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

- Translational Scientist
- My research:
  - Harm Reduction
  - Recovery Capital
  - Peer workers (i.e. recovery coaches, alumni coaches, peer support specialists, etc.)



# A BRIEF BACKGROUND OF PEER SUPPORT

- The concept of peer support certainly isn't new:
  - Wounded Healers
  - Peer support forms the basis for mutual aid organizations (i.e. AA, SMART, etc.)
  - Neurological basis for peer support
- The increasing burden of SUD has driven a need for new models of support (the current continuum of care is inadequate)
- In response, there has been a surge in peer support implementation
  - Today, more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  of all behavioral health facilities in the US offer peer support (Videka et al., 2019)

## ROLE OF THE PEER

- “In the infancy of emergent peer support models, some researchers warned of external threats to the integrity of the peer worker role. William White (2006) identified the potential overlap among peer support with either addictions counseling or mutual aid sponsorship as potential sources of encroachment (White, 2006). **‘If it is to survive, a new service role must stake out its distinctive turf and justify its existence, and it must do so in the context of other roles claiming the same or adjoining territory’** (p. 2). White explains that peer workers emerged in response to a need for a new type of de-professionalized peer role that fills gaps in the continuum of care which cannot be addressed by addiction professionals. Peer workers have more diffuse boundaries and are therefore better able to build rapport and provide close-contact, continuous recovery support. However, as peer workers are being implemented across the country with wide heterogeneity in terms of function within different organizational structures, the integrity of peer support is at risk.” (Elswick, Murdock, & Fallin-Bennett, 2023)





# ROLE OF THE PEER

- Peers play a SPECIFIC and IMPORTANT role in every context
- Peers are NOT:
  - Therapists
  - Sponsors
  - Junior therapists or therapists with less training
  - Drug and Alcohol counselors
  - Life coaches
  - Priests or clergy
  - Family or friends



# ROLE OF THE PEER

- Peers are:
  - Advocates
  - Motivators
  - Outreach workers
  - Role models
  - Problem solvers
  - Resource brokers



# WHAT MAKES PEERS DIFFERENT FROM ALL THE REST

- Recovery support relationships are less hierarchical (less differential of **power** and **vulnerability**) than the counselor-client relationship, involve different core functions, and are governed by different accountabilities.
  - As such, the ethical guidelines that govern the addiction counselor are often not applicable to the recovery coach.
- Also, rapid rapport building and prolonged engagement
  - The duration, frequency, and intensity of the therapeutic relationship is different



**YOU CAN'T ALWAYS MAKE THE RIGHT DECISION, BUT  
YOU CAN ALWAYS GO ABOUT MAKING THE DECISION  
THE RIGHT WAY!**

ETHICS OF PEER SUPPORT





# ETHICS OF PEER SUPPORT

- Ethics: Moral principles guiding a person's or organization's behavior
  - Ethics are not intended to be punitive
  - Ethics are a guide to serve you
- 4 Principles of Ethics:
  - Autonomy
  - Beneficence
  - Justice
  - Non-Maleficence

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# AUTONOMY

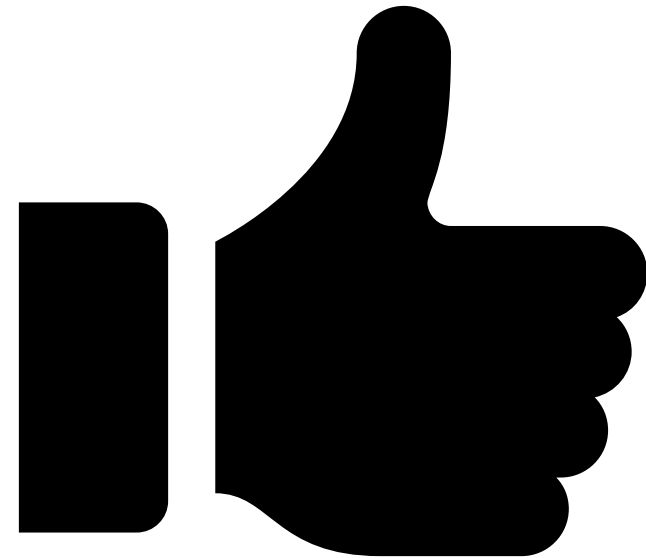
- The right for an individual to make his or her own choice
- Example: Meeting clients where they are



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# BENEFICENCE

- The principle of acting with the best interest of the other in mind
- Example: Connecting clients to evidence-based treatment



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# JUSTICE

- A concept that emphasizes fairness and equality among individuals
- Example: Culturally appropriate treatments and services





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## NON-MALEFICENSE

- The principle that “above all, do no harm”
- Example: “My recovery pathways is the only acceptable pathway”



# RISK OF HARM

Vulnerable Party	Significant Risk of Harm	Moderate Risk of Harm	Minimal Risk of Harm
Participant			
Recovery Coach			
Service Organization			
Recovery Support Services Field			
Image of Recovery Community			
Community at Large			



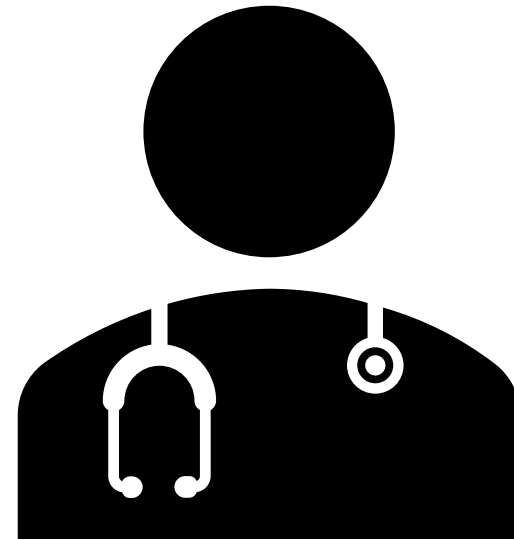
# ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Iatrogenic
- Fiduciary
- Boundary violations vs. ethical violations

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# IATROGENIC

- Iatrogenic: unintentional harm caused by treatment providers
- Example: Synanon Shame Circles



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# FIDUCIARY

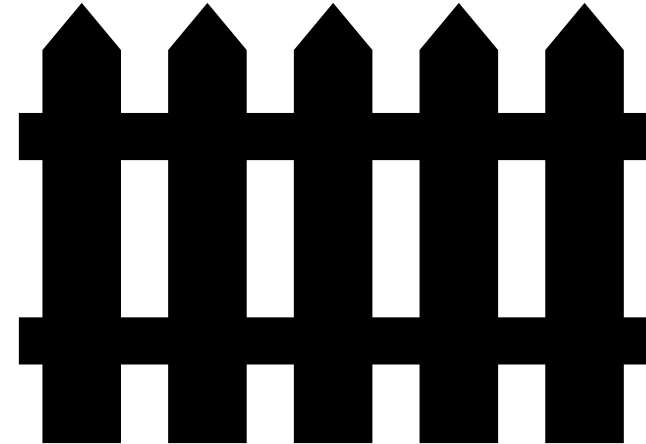
- A fiduciary is a person who acts on behalf of another and is legally bound to act in their best interest
- The word “fiduciary” implies that one person in this relationship enters with increased vulnerability requiring the objectivity, support, and protection of the other—like a relationship we would have with our own physician or attorney.
- Example: Typically, your clients will be in a much poorer economic position than you. It would be important to keep this economic vulnerability in mind.



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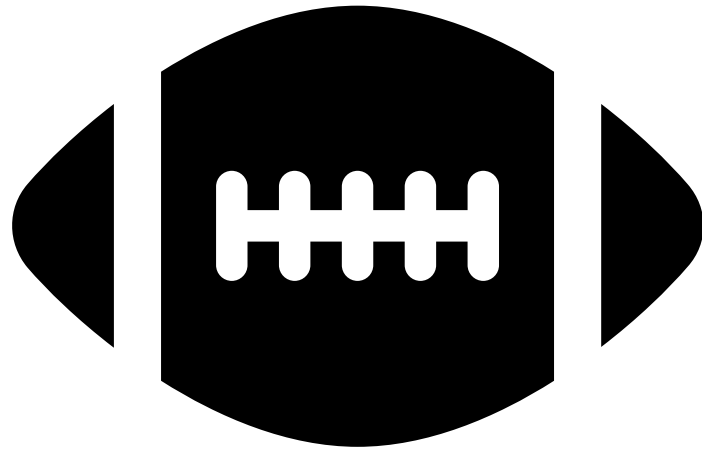
# BOUNDARIES VS ETHICS

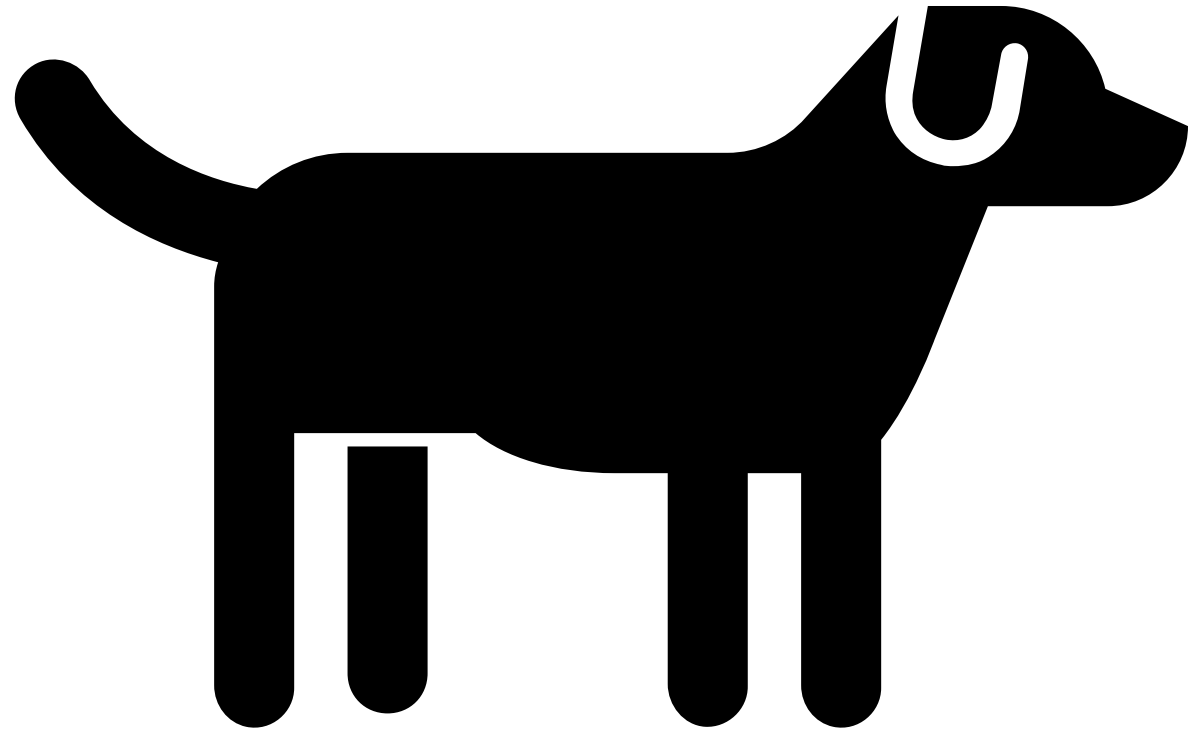
- Most ethical violations are self-serving
- Most occupational boundary violations are well-intentioned transgressions



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**BOUNDARIES EXIST TO HELP YOU!**

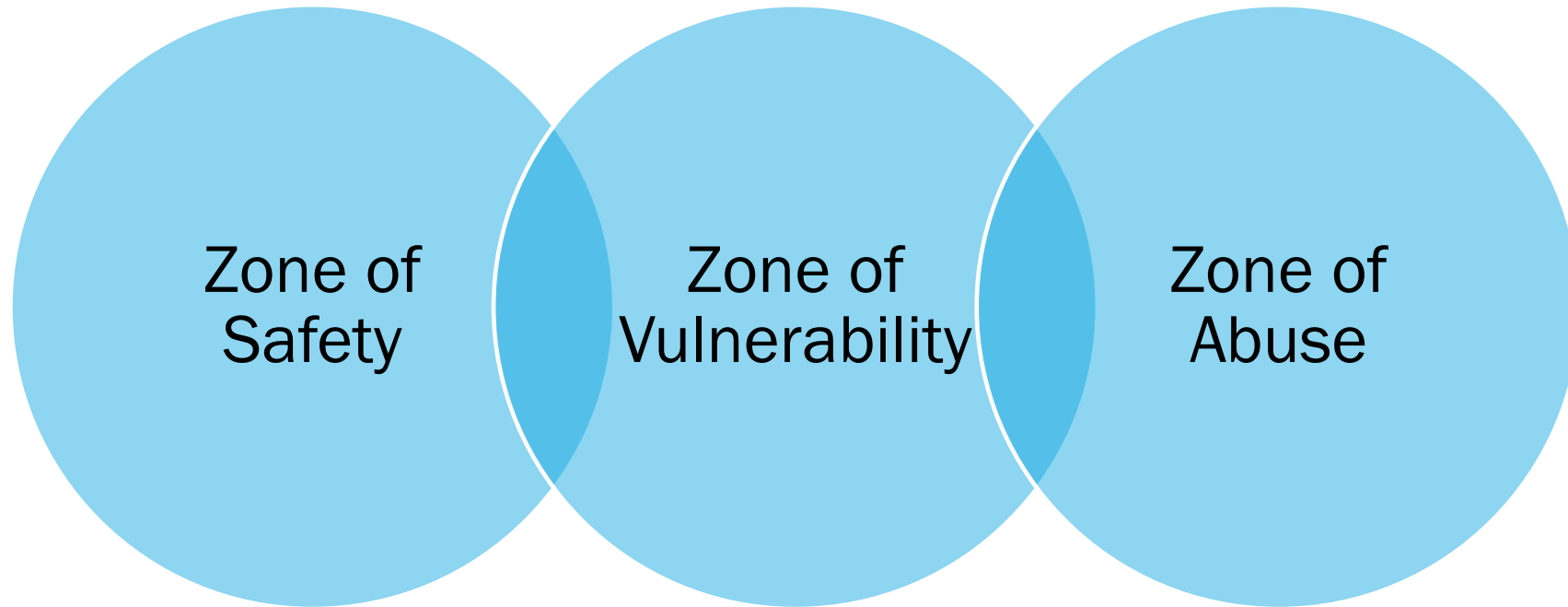






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## **BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT: AN INTIMACY CONTINUUM**



Boundary Management refers to the decisions that increase or decrease intimacy within a relationship

# INTIMACY CONTINUUM

Behavior	Always OK	Sometimes OK	Never OK
Accepting or giving a gift			
Lending or accepting money			
Giving a hug			
Having a sexual relationship with a participant			
Giving your cell phone #			
Using profanity			
Attending a recovery support meeting with a participant			
Hiring a participant to do work			



**YOU CAN'T ALWAYS MAKE THE RIGHT DECISION, BUT  
YOU CAN ALWAYS GO ABOUT MAKING THE DECISION  
THE RIGHT WAY!**

BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT



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## STEPS TO WORK THROUGH BOUNDARY ISSUES

Step 1: Discuss  
the details with  
your supervisor



Step 2: Identify  
the ethical  
concern



Step 3: Describe  
the possible  
solutions and  
pros and cons



Step 4: Decide  
which solution to  
pursue and take  
action



# STEP 1: DISCUSS THE DETAILS WITH YOUR SUPERVISOR

- Questions to ask:
  - What are the facts? (vs gossip)
  - How can I get more factual information?
  - Who is vulnerable to harm in this situation?
    - A participant
    - A recovery coach
    - An organization
    - The recovery community
    - The community at large



## **STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE ETHICAL CONCERN**

- Having all the facts, does this situation pose an ethical problem?
- Does someone have the potential to be harmed?
- Have organizational ethics been violated? (refer to handbook)



## **STEP 3: DESCRIBE THE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS AND PROS/CONS**

- What laws or standards might guide your conduct?
- How can we solve this ethical problem?
  - Of the possible solutions, which causes the least harm to all parties?
  - Which solution has the most potential benefit?
- Should someone else be involved to help make this decision?



## **STEP 4: DECIDE WHICH SOLUTION TO PURSUE AND TAKE ACTION**

- Do we have consensus around next steps?
- Who is responsible for taking action?
- How will we document or record our actions?
- When there is great risk of harm, document:
  - What approaches you considered
  - Who you consulted
  - What you ultimately did
  - The outcome of the actions you took



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## STEPS TO WORK THROUGH BOUNDARY ISSUES

Step 1: Discuss  
the details with  
your supervisor

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graph LR; A[Step 1: Discuss the details with your supervisor] --> B[Step 2: Identify the ethical concern]; B --> C[Step 3: Describe the possible solutions and pros and cons]; C --> D[Step 4: Decide which solution to pursue and take action];
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Step 2: Identify  
the ethical  
concern

Step 3: Describe  
the possible  
solutions and  
pros and cons

Step 4: Decide  
which solution to  
pursue and take  
action



## **CASE STUDY #1:**

- During the course of a client's stay at the facility, you become aware that the client has purchased cigarettes for one of your colleagues, an employee of the facility. This raises concerns about the potential breach of ethical boundaries between the client and the staff member.
- The client successfully completes the program and leaves the facility. However, post-graduation, you observe ongoing communication between the client and the staff member. The nature of this communication is ambiguous, and it is unclear whether it is appropriate or not. You are faced with several questions and considerations



## CASE STUDY #1:

- **Organizational Policies:** Familiarize yourself with the facilities policies regarding professional boundaries, gift-giving, and post-treatment communication. Evaluate whether these policies provide clear guidance on how to handle such situations.
- **Professional Boundaries:** Evaluate the professional boundaries that should exist between healthcare providers and clients. Reflect on whether the exchange of gifts during the client's stay was appropriate and whether it may have blurred the lines between personal and professional relationships.
- **Post-Graduation Communication:** Assess the appropriateness of continued communication between the client and the staff member after the client has left the program. Consider the potential impact on the client's ongoing recovery and the staff member's professional responsibilities.
- **Reporting and Intervention:** Consider your role in addressing and reporting potential ethical violations. Reflect on the appropriate channels for reporting concerns and the potential consequences for both the client and the staff member.



## **CASE STUDY #2:**

- A male alumni who has successfully completed the program engages in behavior that raises concerns about appropriate boundaries.
- The alumni, in a seemingly playful manner, begins making innuendos about your appearance that extend beyond simple compliments. As a participant in this ethics and boundary training specific to a substance abuse facility, you are faced with several questions and considerations:



## CASE STUDY #2:

- **Recognizing Inappropriate Behavior:** Assess the alumni's comments and determine whether they have crossed the line from friendly banter to inappropriate innuendos. Reflect on how such behavior may impact the therapeutic environment and the well-being of individuals in recovery.
- **Recovery-Oriented Approach:** Consider the recovery-oriented approach of the facility and how inappropriate comments may affect the therapeutic alliance between staff and individuals seeking treatment. Reflect on the importance of maintaining a safe and respectful environment conducive to recovery.
- **Alumni-Staff Relationships:** Explore the nature of Alumni-staff relationships in a substance abuse facility. Reflect on the potential impact of inappropriate comments on the trust and therapeutic rapport established during the alumni's time in the program.



## CASE STUDY #2:

- **Professional Boundaries in Recovery:** Discuss the significance of maintaining professional boundaries in the context of substance abuse treatment. Consider how breaches in boundaries may impact the overall treatment process and potentially compromise the well-being of individuals in recovery.
- **Supervision and Support:** Explore the role of supervision and support within the facility. Reflect on the importance of seeking guidance from supervisors or colleagues when faced with situations that challenge professional boundaries.
- **Educational Component:** Consider the potential for an educational component to address appropriate behavior post-treatment. Explore opportunities to reinforce the expectations around maintaining respectful and therapeutic interactions, even after completing the program.
- **Organizational Policies and Reporting:** Familiarize yourself with the facility's policies on professional boundaries, ethics, and reporting mechanisms. Assess whether these policies provide clear guidance on addressing situations where alumni engage in inappropriate conduct.



## **CASE STUDY #3:**

- You are involved in the placement and support of transgender client in both sober living and group therapy settings. This scenario aims to address ethical considerations and boundaries specific to working with transgender Alumni.



## CASE STUDY #3:

- **Inclusive Placement Considerations:** Your facility actively supports transgender individuals in their journey to recovery. You are responsible for placing transgender Alumni in sober living arrangements that respect their gender identity and ensure a safe and supportive environment.
- **Group Therapy Dynamics:** In Alumni Groups, you encounter situations where discussions around gender identity and related challenges arise. It becomes essential to foster an inclusive and respectful atmosphere, ensuring that transgender Alumni feel comfortable sharing their experiences while educating other group members on the importance of sensitivity.
- **Privacy and Confidentiality:** Recognize the importance of respecting the privacy and confidentiality of transgender Alumni. Discuss the unique challenges they may face, and emphasize the need for staff and fellow Alumni to maintain confidentiality regarding individuals' gender identity and related personal information.





## CASE STUDY #3:

- **Cultural Competence Training:** Explore the nuances of providing affirming and respectful care, understanding the impact of stigma, and dismantling biases that may exist within the facility.
- **Handling Misgendering and Discrimination:** Address situations where Alumni or staff may unintentionally misgender or discriminate against transgender individuals. Explore effective strategies for intervening in a way that educates and promotes understanding, emphasizing the importance of creating an environment free from discrimination.
- **Balancing Support and Professional Boundaries:** Navigate the balance between offering support to transgender Alumni and maintaining professional boundaries. Reflect on how to be an ally while ensuring that relationships remain within the ethical framework of the therapeutic setting.
- **Inclusive Language and Policies:** Evaluate the facility's language and policies to ensure they are inclusive of transgender individuals. Consider how policies related to room assignments, documentation, and communication can be adapted to promote an affirming and supportive environment.



## **CASE STUDY #4:**

- A female alumni approaches you with a concerning situation. She expresses that a male alumni has made unwelcome sexual advances, causing her discomfort. This scenario serves as a basis for exploring ethical considerations and appropriate responses within a substance abuse treatment setting.



## CASE STUDY #4:

- **Active Listening and Validation:** As the staff member, your first responsibility is to actively listen to the female alumni's concerns. Validate her feelings and create a space where she feels heard and supported in sharing her experience.
- **Trauma-Informed Approach:** Consider the trauma-informed approach within the substance abuse facility. Recognize the potential impact of unwanted advances on individuals in recovery, especially considering the vulnerability that may accompany the process of addressing substance abuse issues.
- **Safety Assessment:** Assess the immediate safety of the female alumni and address any immediate concerns for her well-being. Explore whether there is an ongoing threat and take appropriate steps to ensure her safety within the facility.



## CASE STUDY #4:

- **Empowerment and Autonomy:** Empower the female alumni by providing information about available options and resources. Respect her autonomy in deciding how she wants to proceed, whether through reporting the incident, seeking additional support, or taking other measures that align with her preferences.
- **Confidentiality and Reporting:** Discuss the importance of confidentiality while also explaining any mandatory reporting obligations within the facility. Navigate the balance between respecting privacy and ensuring the safety and well-being of individuals involved.
- **Supportive Resources:** Inform the female alumni about available supportive resources within the facility, such as counseling services or support groups. Reinforce the commitment to creating an environment where individuals feel safe and can access the assistance they need.



## **CASE STUDY #5:**

- You were invited to make an appearance at a housewarming event by an individual associated with the substance abuse facility. You politely declined the invitation.



## CASE STUDY #5:

- **Professional Boundaries:** Explore the concept of professional boundaries within the context of a substance abuse facility. Discuss the importance of maintaining a clear line between personal and professional relationships.
- **Handling Social Invitations:** Reflect on the decision to decline the housewarming invitation. Discuss the reasons behind the decision and how it aligns with maintaining professionalism and avoiding potential ethical dilemmas.
- **Communication Strategies:** Examine effective communication strategies for politely declining social invitations while reinforcing the commitment to supporting individuals in their recovery within the professional context.



## **CASE STUDY #6:**

- An alumni, after completing the program, starts texting you daily, expressing the need for someone to talk to. The text and calls begin to become more and more frequent until they are directly affecting your time out of work.



## CASE STUDY #6:

- **Post-Treatment Boundaries:** Discuss the challenges associated with maintaining boundaries after an individual has completed the substance abuse program. Explore the fine line between providing support and potentially enabling dependency.
- **Balancing Support and Boundaries:** Reflect on strategies for offering emotional support while maintaining professional boundaries. Discuss the importance of encouraging individuals to utilize appropriate support systems and resources.
- **Referring to Resources:** Explore ways to guide alumni towards available resources for ongoing support, such as support groups, counseling services, or community organizations.





## **CASE STUDY #7:**

- An alumni contacts you, seeking financial support for personal reasons.



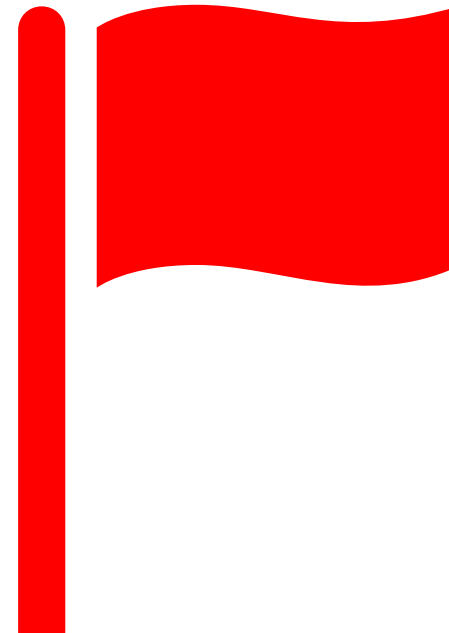
## CASE STUDY #7:

- **Financial Boundaries:** Examine the ethical considerations associated with alumni seeking financial support. Discuss the potential impact on the professional relationship and the well-being of both parties.
- **Referral to Proper Channels:** Explore the importance of referring alumni to appropriate channels for financial assistance, such as relevant community organizations or resources. Discuss the facility's policies on providing financial support to alumni.
- **Maintaining Professional Objectivity:** Discuss strategies for maintaining professional objectivity when faced with requests for financial assistance, emphasizing the importance of avoiding personal involvement in financial matters.

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## WARNING SIGNS (RED FLAGS)

- Arguing/debating
- Imposing your own views
- Reluctance to disclose to supervisor
- Secrecy: “we’ll keep this between us”
- A desire to attract or impress a client
- Client taking up too much mental real estate





## WRAP-UP

- What is one thing that you will take away from this training to help you as an alumni advisor?



# THANK YOU!

- Questions or comments?
- [Alexander.Elswick@uky.edu](mailto:Alexander.Elswick@uky.edu)

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