

In the Know
presents
A Professional Growth Module:

Maintaining a Professional Distance

Instructions for the Learner

We hope you enjoy this Inservice, prepared especially for nursing assistants like you. You work very hard, and we appreciate the effort you make to complete these educational materials. It shows your desire to continue learning and growing in your profession!

After finishing this inservice, you will be able to:

- Define "professional distance".
- Compare personal and professional relationships.
- Discuss Maslow's five levels of human needs.
- Describe at least six warning signs that professional distance has been lost.
- Demonstrate your own professional distance throughout your daily work with your clients.

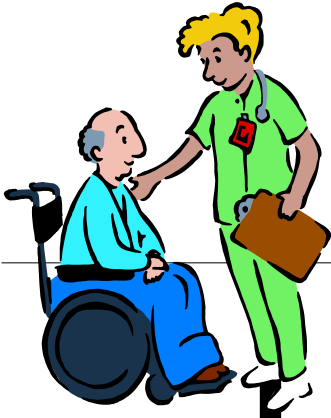
If you are studying the inservice on your own, please:

- Read through all the attached materials. You may find it useful to have a highlighting marker nearby as you read. Highlight any information that is new to you or that you feel is especially important.
- If you have questions about anything you read, please ask _____.
- Take the quiz. Think about each statement and fill in the best answer.
- Check with your supervisor for the right answers. You pass the quiz with at least eight correct answers! Print your name, write in the date, and then sign your name.
- Keep the inservice information for yourself, and turn in the quiz page to _____ no later than _____.
- Show your Inservice Club Membership Card to _____ so that it can be initialed.

THANK YOU!

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Keep reading to learn more about:

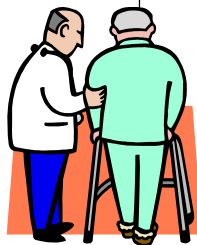
- The difference between personal and professional relationships.
- Why it takes courage to care.
- The five levels of basic human needs.
- Warning signs that professional distance has been lost.

Maintaining a Professional Distance With Your Clients

As health care workers, you are expected to understand your clients' needs, put yourselves in their shoes *and* care about what happens to them. Yet, you are also expected to maintain a professional distance while you provide client care. What exactly does this mean?

To maintain a professional distance, you should:

- Recognize that your relationships with your clients are *professional*, not personal.
- Behave in a caring manner, always putting your clients' needs above your own.



IMPORTANT:
Maintaining a professional distance does not require you to harden your heart or build walls between your clients and yourself.

Let's face it. It's hard to work in health care without getting emotionally involved in clients' lives. As nursing assistants, you run a high risk of getting overly involved with clients. Why?

Because you have repeated contact with the same clients. You care for your clients' most basic needs. And, you spend more time with clients than any other member of the health care team. Sometimes, the professional distance between you and your clients can break down slowly, without you even realizing it.

For example, have you ever:

- Spent extra time with a favorite client?
- Visited a client when you are off duty?
- Counseled a client about his or her personal life?
- Shared private details about your life with a client?

Doing any of these things—even if you mean well—may do your clients more harm than good. It may also cause you to develop job “burn out”. Keep reading to learn more about maintaining a professional distance.

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306 Brandermill Drive Durham, NC 27713
www.knowingmore.com

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If you have a personal relationship with someone who then becomes your client, you may have trouble keeping things professional.

For example, you may attend the same church as your client or the client may be a friend of your family.

If you find yourself in this situation, discuss the issue with your supervisor. You may want to switch assignments.



Personal & Professional Relationships

Your relationships with your clients are *professional*, not personal. They need you to provide their care in a friendly manner—but that does not mean you are friends.

When people are friends, they have an emotional commitment to each other—and the relationship meets *both* of



their needs. In a professional relationship, the focus is on the client. Only the *client's* needs are important.

Remember...the goal of a professional relationship is to prepare the client and family for the time when they will no longer need your help!

Comparing Personal & Professional Relationships

Personal Relationships	Professional Relationships
No one is <i>paid</i> to be part of a personal relationship.	Clients pay for the care they receive from health care workers.
Personal relationships may last a lifetime.	Professional relationships last only as long as a client needs help.
Personal relationships can take place anywhere, anytime.	Professional relationships take place within a healthcare setting. (In home care, the client's home becomes a health care setting.)
People in a personal relationship are equally responsible for keeping the relationship going.	Health care workers are responsible for developing and maintaining professional relationships with their clients.
There is no special training required to be part of a personal relationship.	Health care workers are trained to take part in professional relationships with their clients.
People choose how much or how little time they wish to spend in a personal relationship.	The time spent in a professional relationship is determined by each client's plan of care.



Here are some other ways to show your clients that you care:

- Get to know each one as an individual.
- Plan your daily tasks around your client's needs...not around your schedule.
- Evaluate your actions every day to determine if they helped the client. If not, ask yourself what you can do differently tomorrow.



What Does It Mean to Be "Caring"?

You don't have to *tell* your clients that you care about them. You show your care and concern for your clients every day when you:



- Help them become more comfortable with themselves and their surroundings.
- Assist them to meet their daily needs.
- Help them find new ways to help themselves.

- Call them by name and speak to them with respect and compassion.
- Touch them gently as you provide personal care.
- Allow them privacy and show respect for their personal belongings.

"Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see."

Mark Twain

It Takes Courage to Care

Showing that you care *does* take courage. Remember...as a health care worker, you are in a tough position. It's difficult to provide quality client care without getting emotionally involved in some way. Yet, the more you care about your clients, the more you risk being hurt if a client takes a turn for the worse.

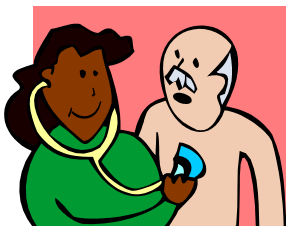
Caring about clients who are dying takes real courage. It may be hard for you to see people who are in physical and/or emotional pain. Perhaps you have memories of a family member who died, so you try not to care when you lose a client.

On the other hand, it takes courage to care about clients as they get

better. Think about it. Doesn't it feel good to be needed? When clients start needing you less, you might find yourself pulling away from them.

It also takes courage to care about a client who has an unpleasant personality or who is grumpy. For example, isn't it easier to care about a sweet old man who thanks you for everything you do than it is to care about a grumpy old woman who never seems to be satisfied?

If you're like most nursing assistants, you got into health care to help people and to make a difference in their lives. Your work takes strong muscles, a big heart and *lots* of courage!





Remember!

People with unmet needs tend to be frustrated, angry, helpless and depressed. If your clients seem upset, try figuring out which of their needs are not being met.

It's great to feel needed, but remember... your relationship with your clients is about *their* needs, not yours!

Instead of *assuming* that you know what your clients need, try asking them, "What can I *can do for you today?*"

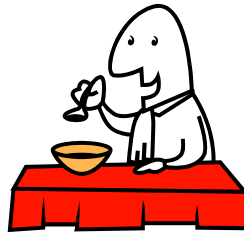
Basic Human Needs

All your clients have at least one thing in common. They have needs that they cannot meet without help. And, even though your clients are all individuals, they have the same basic needs.

A well-known psychologist, Abraham Maslow, developed a useful way to look at basic human needs. He organized them into five levels:

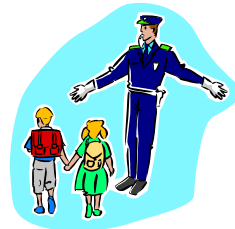
Level 1: Physical

Everyone has physical needs such as food, water, oxygen, sleep, elimination, hygiene and sex. These are the most basic human needs.



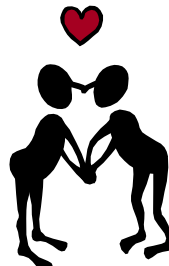
Level 2: Safety & Security

People need to feel safe in their homes and their communities. They need to feel protected from danger and free from fear. Many people also need to feel the security that comes from religious beliefs.



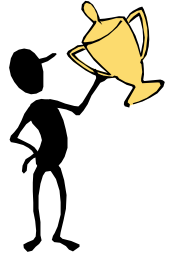
Level 3: Belongingness & Love

Human beings need to communicate with each other and feel accepted and loved by family, friends and members of the community.



Level 4: Esteem

People need to feel good about themselves and need to gain respect, approval and recognition from others.



Level 5: Self-Actualization

Another basic human need is for the satisfaction that comes when people follow their dreams and achieve important goals.



Generally, the basic physical needs at level one must be satisfied before people can move on to the higher levels. For example, a person who hasn't slept in several days is more interested in getting some rest than in boosting his self-esteem or feeling loved.

In your daily work, you spend a lot of time helping people meet their most basic needs. But, remember...it is possible to help your clients *too* much. Your challenge (and it's a big one) is to balance the care you provide by:

- Giving enough help with basic physical needs so that your clients have the energy to focus on some of their higher needs.
- Allowing your clients to take care of themselves as much as possible—so that they remain independent and feel good about themselves.



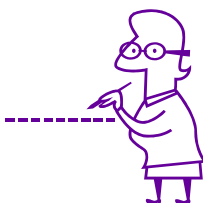
When you're in doubt about whether you've crossed the line, ask yourself:

- Am I acting in my client's best interest?
- Are my needs getting in the way?
- Would I feel comfortable telling a coworker about what I am doing?
- Would the client's family approve of what I am doing?
- Am I following the client's care plan?

Crossing the Line

Maintaining a professional distance can be difficult sometimes. You might cross the line with a client and not be aware you are doing so.

There are some warning signs that you might not be keeping your professional distance from a client. For example, you may have crossed the line if you:



- Think about a client frequently when you are away from work.
- Plan your work day around the needs of one special client.
- Spend your free time with a client.
- Share personal information or concerns about work with a client.
- Feel responsible if the client doesn't seem to be getting better.
- Give extra care to one client while ignoring others.
- Keep secrets for a client...and share secrets of your own.
- Trade assignments with coworkers so that you can work with a certain client.
- Accept gifts or money from a client.
- Give a client your address and home telephone number.

- Complain about your own aches and pains to a client.
- Dress a certain way when you know you will be seeing that client.
- Gossip about your coworkers with a client.
- Visit clients in their homes, as a friend, not as a professional.

Why is it "unprofessional" to make friends with your clients? What harm could there be in that? Here are some of the problems that can develop when you cross the line:

- When clients view you as a friend, their feelings can be hurt if you take another assignment or quit your job.
- If you perform little "extras" for your clients that aren't part of the care plan, clients will expect the same special treatment from your coworkers.
- Your clients may come to depend on you too much, rather than learning to cope on their own.
- You may find it hard to observe changes in a client—because you have gotten too close to the situation.



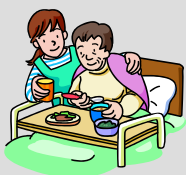
Keep reading to learn more about crossing the line...and how to avoid it.



Don't let yourself get stuck in the role of "rescuer". By always rescuing your clients, you teach them to be helpless.

After a while, they lose the skills and desire to do for themselves or they fail to learn new skills for coping with their current situation.

Remember ... it's impossible to care too much, but it's possible to provide too much care!



Doing Too Much For Your Clients

Many people choose the health care field because they like to "do for others". This is a good thing, but it's important not to go overboard! Providing *too much* care is a common mistake made by health care workers. When you do something for your clients that they could have done for themselves:

- Your time and effort is wasted.
- Your clients miss an opportunity to be independent.
- Your clients may begin to lose important self-care skills.

Here are some examples of doing too much...and how it can harm your clients:

- Stan works as a nursing assistant in a hospital. One of his patients, Mrs. Randolph, reminds him of his grandmother. Stan comes in on his day off to sit with Mrs. Randolph. He pays close attention to her every need to save her the trouble of getting out of bed. Unfortunately, Stan's loving care is keeping Mrs. Randolph from doing things for herself. She won't gain her strength back if Stan keeps doing everything for her.
- Jessie feels so sorry for one of her residents, Mr. Richmond. He never has any visitors and always seems so lonely. At mealtime, instead of just leaving Mr. Richmond's tray in front of him, Jessie sits down and feeds him.

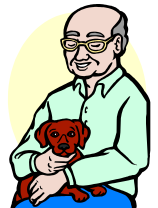


She figures it's a good way to spend extra time with him (even though Mr. Richmond is capable of feeding himself).



While Jessie has good intentions, she is *not* doing Mr. Richmond any favors. He may lose the ability and/or the desire to feed himself.

- Christina is a home health aide. She cares for an elderly client, Mr. Dennis, who has little food, few clothes, a leaky roof, and hardly any money. Christina feels sorry for Mr. Dennis, so she brings him food from home...she gives him some clothes...she gets her brother to come over to fix his roof... and she lends him some money. Christina feels that she is doing her client a favor, but what happens when he is discharged from home care? He will have learned nothing about how to manage his problems. Instead of fixing everything herself, Christina should help Mr. Dennis get in touch with outside resources, like social services. Then, he can continue to have help with his problems whether Christina is there or not!



Remember that your clients have lives beyond the few hours that you spend with them every day. Part of your job is to prepare them to manage without you.

Obviously, some of your clients aren't able to make decisions for themselves—or they may make decisions that are unsafe.



For example, Steve wants to take his wheelchair down steps, instead of using the ramp. Mrs. Wilson hates her walker and wants to ambulate without it.

These decisions could result in the client being harmed. It's your job to help your clients make safe decisions.

Help Your Clients Do Without You!

Think about your clients. Many of them have people telling them when to sleep, when to wake up and when to eat. Some may not be able to go to the bathroom without help. They have lost control over some of the most basic parts of their lives. Here are some ways to maintain your professional distance...and give some power back to your clients:

Expect more from them. People often live up to the expectations you have for them. For example, if Sarah expects Mrs. Thompson to dress herself every morning, then she probably will. (However, if Mrs. Thompson gets used to Sarah dressing her every morning, she'll probably stop doing it herself.)

Simplify things. Divide complex tasks into small steps. If your clients aren't able to perform the whole task, they might be able to do some of the steps. For example, it's time for Mr. Smith to brush his teeth. Joe knows that Mr. Smith has problems putting toothpaste on his toothbrush, so Joe does that for him. But, Mr. Smith is able to brush his teeth by himself.



Provide special equipment. Some clients may be able to do everyday tasks if they have special equipment. For example, Mr. Maxwell can't hold a regular spoon due to severe arthritis. All it takes to make it easy for Mr. Maxwell is some special silverware. This keeps the client independent and boosts his self-esteem.

Be patient. Letting clients do things for themselves can be difficult when you know that you could do the job faster or better. For example, when Sue stands back and allows Mrs. Watson to brush her own hair, it takes twice as long and Mrs. Watson never gets her part straight. However, Mrs. Watson is always proud of doing her own hair.



Praise your clients. People like to feel good about themselves and a bit of praise goes a long way. For example, Mr. Bailey tries to button his own shirt. He manages to get most of the buttons, but Jim has to help him with the last two. Mr. Bailey might feel like a failure for not finishing the job...but Jim helps him feel good by praising him for what he did accomplish.

Allow your clients to make decisions. Making decisions—even little ones—gives people a feeling of control. For example, every day, Mary gives Mrs. Nelson choices. "Would you like to wear your blue blouse or your pink one?" and "Would you like to take a walk before or after lunch?" NOTE: If you give your clients' choices, be sure you are ready to follow through with their decisions. If you don't, you may lose your clients' trust.

Encourage your clients to take care of something. Studies show that people who have responsibility for a plant or a pet live longer and remain more independent.



Professional distance can also be lost if health care workers become dependent on their clients.

For example, Mrs. Ferguson is one of Sally's favorite clients. She asks Sally questions about her life and loves to listen to her problems. Sally has come to depend on Mrs. Ferguson for support and advice about her marriage, her kids and her job. Sally has crossed the line...and no longer has a professional relationship with her client.

Talking About Yourself to Clients

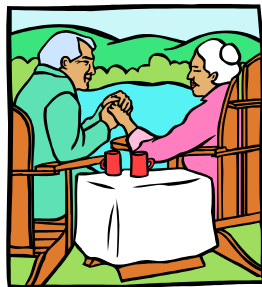
As you go through your daily work, it's natural to tell clients a little bit about yourself—especially if they ask you questions about your life. However, you must never forget that your client's needs come first. If you spend too much time talking about yourself, the focus may shift to *your* needs.



Here's an example: Mr. Connors asks John if he is married. John says that he *used* to be married, but has recently gone through a nasty divorce. He tells Mr. Connors the whole story about the break up of his marriage. John has definitely lost his professional distance!

Think about it. Mr. Connors probably brought up the topic of marriage because he was feeling the need to talk about his own.

So, what could John have done differently? He could simply have answered, "*No, I'm not currently married.*" Then, he could have asked Mr. Connors about his life: "*How long were you married?*", or "*How did you meet your wife?*" or "*What was your wife like?*" Remember...the focus of a professional relationship is always the client.



Have you ever had a client say that she was *worried* about you? If so, you may have lost your professional distance with that client.



Look at this example:

Jill's client, Mrs. Peterson, has cancer. To prove that she

understands, Jill tells Mrs. Peterson that her mother also has the same cancer. Every day, Jill gives Mrs. Peterson an update about her mother. Unfortunately, Jill's mother is not doing well. Mrs. Peterson grows more and more depressed. She tells the nurse that she knows she's going to die since Jill's mother is dying. Jill meant well, but she ended up *adding* to her client's worries.

Please remember...if you can relate to a client's situation because of a personal experience you've had, it's probably best to keep it to yourself.

Remember...

- Use your best professional judgment about how *much* or how *little* to tell your clients about yourself.
- Don't look to your clients for emotional support. Seek that from other people in your life—outside of work.
- Keep your clients' needs in mind at all times and you probably can't go wrong!



Tim feels very close to his client, Mr. Baldwin. He often calls Mr. Baldwin over the weekend to see how he is doing.

Mr. Baldwin treats Tim like a member of his family. One day, Tim mentions that he's having trouble paying bills. Mr. Baldwin offers Tim a loan until payday.

Tim takes the money, promising to pay it back. Tim has crossed way over the line, hasn't he?

Touching Clients

As a health care worker, you already cross some lines with your clients that don't usually get crossed between strangers. For example, you often bathe your clients, help them dress and perhaps even wipe their bottoms after a bowel movement.

You can demonstrate your professional distance by respecting each client's privacy. Make sure that whenever you touch a client, you do so in a gentle, but professional, manner.

Remember that your clients may come from many different cultures. Some people may misunderstand the meaning of a friendly hug or a pat on the back. To them, this type of physical contact may have a sexual meaning.



If a client seems to misinterpret your touch, discuss the issue with your supervisor right away.

Handling Gifts From Clients

It's common for clients to feel so grateful for your help that they want to give you a gift. Your workplace may allow gifts in certain situations where the client would be offended by your refusal. For example, Mrs. Jones gives you a scarf that she knitted. Or, Mr. Taylor gives you some fresh tomatoes grown in his wife's garden. Chances are, you would hurt their feelings if you turn down their gifts. **However, you must always follow your workplace policy in this situation!** When in doubt, ask your supervisor.



In addition, keep in mind that:

- Money should never change hands between health care workers and clients.
- Even if a client puts money in your hands, wanting you to take it, you must refuse. Taking a client's money could be seen as financial abuse...and, depending on the circumstances, could be considered a crime.
- Clients should never be made to feel that they will receive better care if they give gifts to their health care workers!
- Remember that "favors" can be seen as a type of gift. For example, it is probably against workplace policy for you to borrow personal items from your clients.
- If you have problems with a patient offering you money or gifts, discuss the situation with your supervisor.



Do you work in clients' homes? If so, remember that you are a "guest" who has been invited to come in and care for them.

You wouldn't want a guest in your house who arrived without calling, or who came in without knocking, or who rearranged your furniture.

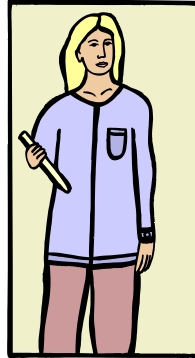
It's important to be a considerate "guest", so that you will be invited back again!



Professional Behavior

- If you feel yourself growing too attached to a particular client, talk to your supervisor about it.

Remember, if you're feeling funny about a situation, there's probably a good reason for it.



- Practice your communication skills every day. It takes good communication to develop and maintain a professional relationship with your clients.

- Remember that romantic or sexual relationships are *never* appropriate between a health care worker and a client.
- Keep in mind that it's human nature to feel closer to some clients than others. However, you have a responsibility to give equal time, concern and attention to every client.
- Remember that you are responsible for creating a professional relationship with each of your clients.

Take Care of Yourself!

Have you noticed that when a client asks for your help, you sometimes feel:

- Tired...*and in no mood to help someone else.*
- Bored by the same old thing...*with no interest in emptying one more bed pan.*
- Scared...*because your client is getting worse and you're having trouble handling it.*
- Impatient...*because your client has "cried wolf" about this same problem before.*
- Angry...*because your client never says "thank you" for all your hard work.*
- Discouraged...*because no matter what you do it never seems to be enough.*

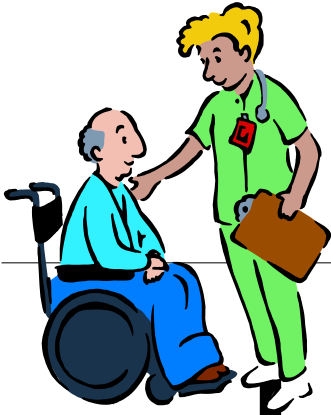
All of these feelings can keep you from fulfilling the responsibilities of your job—and from maintaining a professional distance.



Health care workers who *don't* take care of themselves:

- Can wind up getting sick.
- Are at high risk for depression.
- "Burn out" and may stop providing good quality care.

Remember that facing other people's suffering on a daily basis can take its toll. You need to recognize your own limits, be kind to yourself and work on getting your own needs met *outside* of work.



Are You "In the Know" About Keeping a Professional Distance?

Finish each statement with one of the words from the list below.

Then check your answers with your supervisor!

(Hint: You will not use every word on the list.)

- | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Rescue | Equal | Friend |
| Esteem | Responsibility | Independent |
| Touch | Relationship | Communication |
| Decisions | Gifts | Patience |
| Physical | Burn Out | Privacy |
| Professional | Needs | Emotional |

- _____ relationships last only as long as a client needs help.
- The most basic human needs that must be met first are _____ needs.
- _____ needs are met when people feel good about themselves.
- It is crossing the line when a health care worker considers a client to be a _____.
- If you always _____ your clients, you'll teach them to be helpless.
- Part of your job is to help your clients remain as _____ as possible.
- When you allow your clients to make _____, it gives them a feeling of control.
- You may lose your professional distance if you accept _____ from your clients.
- Health care workers should not look to their clients for _____ support.
- You have a responsibility to give _____ time, care and attention to every client.

EMPLOYEE NAME _____
DATE _____

I understand the information presented in this inservice. I have completed this inservice and answered at least eight of the test questions correctly.

Employee Signature _____ Inservice Credit: 1 hour
Supervisor Signature _____ Self Study _____
Group Study _____

File completed test in employee's personnel file.

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