

Care and Support Factsheet

Maintaining Professional Boundaries

You may find yourself coming into contact with vulnerable customers. In these situations it is essential to maintain professional boundaries both for your sake, and for the sake of your customer. You may come across customers who have very complex needs. Your role is assist with the provision of library services and not to get dragged into other issues that you customer is facing. It is difficult when you want to help but you must be clear about your role and refuse to get overly involved in other things. It is useful to have a list of key sources of help that you can refer customers to. Your job is to give people general information and signpost them to specialist sources of support, not to try to provide it yourself.

Below are some tips on maintaining professional boundaries:

- Ensure that customers who are in distress are given details of who to contact in an emergency and this should not be you.
- Do not give your individual contact details such as your mobile phone number.
- Protect your privacy on social media and do not befriend customers.
- Similarly, do not seek out information about your customers on-line that is private or irrelevant to your work with them.
- Maintain confidentiality. It is imperative that you do not disclose the details of your customer's struggles outside of a professional context. Do not discuss your customers with your friends or family members at social gatherings. If you disclose confidential information relating to your customer, he or she must sign a valid consent form which gives you permission to do this.
- If you are discussing confidential information with fellow colleagues or a supervisor, then make sure this is done in private. Do not discuss it in hallways, stairways or other public places where it can be overheard.
- Refrain from discussing your personal life. Aside from not being professional behaviour it could confuse your customer about the nature of your relationship.
- Watch out for conflicts of interest- If you live in a small community you may come across your customer in other situations. Try to limit this contact and do not linger in a social capacity. You should not ignore a customer but don't approach them, unless they approach you.
- Don't do any favours for your customers such as offering them a lift or lending them money. This could easily compromise professional boundaries.
- Leave work at the office. It is important for your own wellbeing that you establish clear boundaries for yourself when away from work. Do not check e mails or take professional calls when you are on leave.