

Maintaining Professional Boundaries

About the Course

This course aims to help people improve their awareness and responsibility around establishing and maintaining professional ethics. It is helpful where there are concerns, allegations or findings in relation to issues such as:

- Inappropriate emotional or sexualised relationships with colleagues
- Sexualised relationships with patients
- Inappropriate use of touch
- Sexual harassment
- Sexualised or inappropriate language

About the Organisation

CBS works around professional conduct, values and boundaries and is concerned with the prevention of harm in the delivery of care services. CBS runs preventative, recovery and remedial services. CBS acts as consultant to organisations who want to improve their approach to prevention and support.

When the course is helpful

The course is for professionals who have a need to look at professional boundaries. It can be helpful when there are concerns about inappropriate or sexualised behaviours, and when there are disciplinary or conduct hearings or other professional processes.

It is helpful whether there are concerns, allegations or findings - it is important to understand that the course has been helpful to people who face allegations, including where allegations are contested, as well as where there is agreement about the concerns.

Purpose of the course

The overall intention of the course is to create a space for powerful insight. The course is intended as being part of a restoration or prevention plan. The course is intended to provide a space for participants to examine the roots of behavior perceived as problematic and to have assistance in making personal and professional changes. Other elements may be required to fully restore safety to practice.

The course can be utilised as a preventative measure or as part of employee development or return-to-work plans. Regulatory or disciplinary panels can refer participants as part of suspension or conditions of practice orders.

The course goals are:

- To increase responsibility and awareness of professional boundaries
- To Learn techniques for establishing and maintaining boundaries
- To increase awareness of vulnerabilities and risk factors

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- To put in place a personal plan
- To improve understanding of personal history and antecedents to problems
- To increase understanding of the effects of boundary transgressions on others
- To consider needs for further professional assistance and personal development

By the end of the course, participants will:

- Improve understanding of personal history and antecedents to problems
- Consider needs for further professional assistance and personal development
- Understand the impact of actions on others
- Learn techniques for establishing and maintaining sound ethical practice
- Improve understanding of professional role

Approach

The course takes a psycho-educational approach and centres on four core themes: Boundaries & Values, Vulnerabilities & Risk Factors, Impact & Consequences, Insight & Change. The schedule has been designed to facilitate a workshop approach so that it allows for participants to start from their own experience, and to utilise both the knowledge of the facilitator and the experience of colleagues to enable learning. As a participatory rather than didactic approach is taken, we provide some selected reading materials so that the educational process begins before the course and continues afterwards. Where sessions include the sharing of knowledge, this will always include discussion and participation, and participants are encouraged to speak from their experience and to utilise the core values of the course: accountability, respect, transparency and wellbeing.

Sharing individual perspective and experience helps to facilitate alignment with professional ethics and values, and also has the potential to be of assistance to others on the course. Most sessions are structured such that a topic is introduced and spoken to for a short time, following which the session is opened up for participants to share from their experience, connecting to the session topic. There are plenty of open sessions for participants to air the key issues which are there for them. Underlying the course is the development of personal development plans, with an opportunity to share plans and received feedback towards the end of the third day.

The course challenges participants to look at themselves, to be honest, to let go of defensive behaviours, attitudes of denial or blame and to step into full responsibility, for those matters for which they bear responsibility.

The Course Leader's job is to engage in conversations which reflect and expand on where the individual comes from, with a starting point that each person has a set of core values and commitments. The Course Leaders are relentless in opening up the possibility of insight and expanded awareness. The Course Leader will draw attention to any areas

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where rationalisations, denials, minimisations or other forms of deflection and adaptation have come into play.

Problematic beliefs and distortions in thinking are uncovered and a space is made available where these can be acknowledged and let go of.

These conversations, and the environment created by the course structure and course leader, open a space where powerful insight is possible; the rest is up to the individual participant.

What makes the course powerful?

- Openness
- Sharing your story
- Being open to feedback and input
- Deciding to make changes, take actions and communicate
- Writing a development plan

Pre-course work

Before the course each person will have a call with someone from the organisation, almost always this is the Course Leader (occasionally this call is taken by a colleague). There are reading materials tied to key sections of the course and part of the course agreement is to complete this reading in advance. There is also some evening work to complete on the first two days of the course.

Agreements for Participants

These agreements form the basis for effective participation in the programme. Participants are invited to consider these agreements in advance of signing up for the course, as they constitute an agreement we ask everyone participating to sign up to.

1. To complete all pre-course work on time.
2. To attend all sessions of the course.
3. To be ready to begin at the agreed times.
4. To be open about own circumstances and experience.
5. To keep all information shared by other participants anonymous.
6. To engage with the course facilitator.
7. To take responsibility for own health and wellbeing throughout the course and to communicate with others if I face any problem with these.
8. To use smartphones, tablets etc in break times only.

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Indicative Content

The courses are structured so that each session builds on the previous one. Sessions are focused on core topics, such as those described below, or are focused on a dialogue with the course leader, who works to assist participants to see their situation clearly.

Each person shares their narrative and is coached on **responsibility, values and ways of being**.

Dual relationships and the **dynamics of risk** are assessed and plans made to minimise risk in line with regulatory guidelines. The **uses and misuses of physical touch**, clinical and non-clinical, are subjected to close analysis where this has been an issue for the individual.

The **dynamics of interpersonal attraction and intimacy** are examined in the light of **power differentials**. **Practitioner self-disclosure** is studied as a common component of boundary violation. **Blurring of personal and professional boundaries** is considered as part of the context.

Participants are invited to examine their relationship with **power and authority**, to see how denial of these aspects of being have been, or could be, a context for conduct issues.

An examination of the experience of **vulnerability** and how it is defended against through **counter-dependent** ways of being, which heighten risk.

Participants look at the ways in which certain kinds of **thinking enable behaviours** associated with distress and harm, to self and others, including how assuming knowledge of the intentions of other people can be associated with stress and boundary problems.

Personal vulnerabilities, such as being over-accommodating and self-sacrificing, are explored, and new ways of being are committed to.

Blind spots, such as over-identification with certain kinds of patients or clients, are given the possibility of being seen, often for the first time.

Context is seen as critical and not determinative – a multi-factoral analysis is promoted, along with the knowledge that each person's values are critical and can act as a counterbalance to contextual pressures.

A **distinction between context and cause** is made and powerful new ways of being are given space to grow.

The notion of **total responsibility** is explored, giving a possibility of empowerment, of values-based action, of repairing that which has been broken and making new beginnings.

Each person is seen as having the capacity to be the author of their own **change**, just as they have been the author of the problems they are facing.

Sessions on **impact and consequences** require consideration of the impact of actions on other people, to see how all actions and ways of being are related and the particular ways in which others have been affected by behaviours of concern.

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Course participants are invited to demonstrate how problems have arisen, through acted scenarios, leading to the emergence of **new ways of relating and being**, in line with their own values and commitments.

Myopic views of the world are challenged and **new ways of communicating** are enabled.

Belief and its functions is examined and space is opened to see how beliefs, about self, others and the world, have been material in the difficulties identified.

Each person is supported to **develop an individual plan**, which includes their own assessment of risk as part of the plan to stay in alignment with core personal and professional values.

Each person has an opportunity for **feedback and contributions** from other participants to ensure their plans are commensurate with their situations. Personal and professional risks are identified and commitments to action are made.

Ways of being associated with problems are identified and new ways of being, in line with values, are committed to.

Ethical and boundary issues are explored through the consideration of snapshot scenarios as part of playing **The Professionalism Game®**.

Three stages of moving on after a crisis are identified by participants, with a focus on how change is lost or embedded.

Assessment/Comment on the progress of course participants.

Please note that the organisation does not provide comment or opinion concerning the level of insight, progress, extent of participation, risk, fitness to practice or any other matter arising from the course. Should a full assessment of amenability to rehabilitation be required please contact the office for advice.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is maintained and is essential to ensuring openness and effectiveness. Confidentiality may be broken by the organisation where there are disclosures related to serious harm, which had not previously been disclosed, and after, wherever possible, full discussion with the person concerned. The organisation works within the law and is obliged to respond to any orders of the court. If there are any concerns about confidentiality, please contact us and we would be happy to talk with you or a representative.

CPD

Certificates are provided after the course noting 24 hours of course attendance.

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Disclaimer

This publication and this course are designed to provide accurate information. The course can provide one element of prevention or remedial plans. Completion of the course is not in itself seen as sufficient to determine fitness to practice, which may not be fully achieved unless additional elements are put in place (such as psychotherapy, practice supervision, or monitored re-training etc). The course does not take the place of legal advice or other professional services. If legal advice or other professional assistance is required, the services of an experienced professional should be sought.

Terminology

This course is designed for people working across a wide range of settings and with a wide range of titles, including: doctor; nurse; therapist; psychotherapist; counsellor; social worker, priest; teacher; prison officer; police officer; probation officer; residential worker etc. There are several different ways of describing people who use services, including: patient, client, resident, service user, analysand, congregant, student, pupil etc. For simplicity, we have tended to use the terms 'professional' or 'practitioner' and 'person seeking help' or 'client' in the course materials.

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