

Standards of Practice

Boundary Violations

Standard

The physiotherapist acts with integrity and maintains appropriate professional **boundaries** with clients, colleagues, students, and others.

Expected outcome

Clients can expect to be treated with dignity and respect, and that the physiotherapist will maintain boundaries appropriate to the **therapeutic relationship** in all interactions.

Colleagues, students and others can expect to be treated with respect and that the physiotherapist will maintain professional boundaries in all interactions.

Performance expectations

The physiotherapist:

- Complies with the Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Standard of Practice and is aware that interactions with clients, colleagues, students, and others may contravene this standard even if they do not constitute a contravention of the Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Standard of Practice.

In regard to therapeutic relationships with clients, the physiotherapist:

- Demonstrates awareness of and sensitivity to the impact of power, trust, respect, and physical closeness on relationships with clients.
- Treats clients with respect, avoiding all situations, comments, and/or actions that could reasonably be perceived as:
 - unprofessional,
 - in violation of human rights, and/or
 - discriminatory.
- Does not enter into or continue therapeutic relationships with individuals with whom professional boundaries, judgment, and objectivity cannot be established and maintained.
- Does not make abusive, sexually suggestive, or harassing comments or engage in inappropriate physical contact with clients.
- Establishes and maintains a professional physical environment that supports the maintenance of therapeutic boundaries during client assessment, treatment, and education in both formal and informal practice environments. This includes but is not limited to:
 - proactively providing options for draping and
 - providing **privacy** while the client is undressing or dressing.

- Does not enter a **close personal relationship** with a client or a person who is a caregiver for a client (e.g., parent of a minor receiving physiotherapy services or client's spouse).
- Does not use their professional role as a means of pursuing personal relationships beyond the therapeutic relationship with clients and former clients.
- Identifies, documents, and addresses boundary violations, whether initiated by the physiotherapist or the client, by discussing inappropriate behaviour and attempting to resolve issues.
- Ends the therapeutic relationship by appropriately discontinuing treatment or transferring care as required in instances where:
 - The physiotherapist is unable to maintain their objectivity.
 - Professional boundaries cannot be maintained or re-established.
 - A positive, respectful therapeutic relationship cannot be established.

In regard to relationships with colleagues and students whom the physiotherapist supervises or has authority over, the physiotherapist:

- Demonstrates awareness of and sensitivity to the impact of power, trust, respect, and physical closeness on relationships with colleagues, students, and others.
- Conducts oneself professionally in the work environment, treating colleagues, students, and others with respect and avoiding all situations, comments, and/or actions that could reasonably be perceived as:
 - unprofessional,
 - in violation of human rights, and/or
 - discriminatory.
- Establishes and maintains professional boundaries with students.
- Does not engage in sexual advances, sexual relationships, or inappropriate contact with students.

Boundaries refer to the accepted social, physical, or psychological space between people. Boundaries create an appropriate therapeutic or professional distance between the physiotherapist and another individual and clarify their respective roles and expectations.

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Close personal relationship is one where the physiotherapist's ability to be objective and impartial, and to fulfill their professional obligations may be impaired due to the nature of the personal relationship. Close personal relationships typically exist between an individual and their romantic or sexual partner, children, parents, and close friends, but may also exist between individuals and other relatives, business partners, past romantic partners, and others.

Privacy refers to "a person's desire to control the access of others to themselves. Privacy protects access to the person, whereas confidentiality protects access to the data."

Therapeutic Relationship refers to the relationship that exists between a physiotherapist and a patient during the course of physiotherapy services. The relationship is based on trust, respect, and the expectation that the physiotherapist will establish and maintain the relationship according to applicable legislation and regulatory requirements and will not harm or exploit the patient in any way.

Due to the nature of physiotherapy practice, there is always an inherent power imbalance between the patient and their physiotherapist. Because of the existence of an inherent power imbalance, sexual relationships are prohibited for the duration of the therapeutic relationship even if the patient consents to the sexual relationship.

The therapeutic relationship extends from the time of initial professional contact between the physiotherapist and the patient until one year (365 days) from the date of the last documented physiotherapy service.

Related Standards

- Conflict of Interest
- Informed Consent
- Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct