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| ***WORKPLACE GUIDELINES – WG001.5***  ***BUILDING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES*** |

**FUNCTION**

Building and maintaining healthy boundaries as a Lifestyle Assistant is intended to define appropriate practice and interaction between individuals, their families and Community Connection employees, for the protection of both parties.

**GUIDELINES**

Building healthy boundaries is one of the most crucial topics in providing community care, today.

Providing assistance to Individuals with disabilities (physical, intellectual, mental health, or neurological) raises many challenges for Lifestyle Assistants. The role of the Lifestyle Assistant can mean that they are in many personal situations with individuals, their friends or family. Lifestyle Assistants may have access to private or confidential information. They may also encounter situations where they are confronted with needs, requests or demands for services or support that are not within their position description.

This workplace guideline is aimed to provide practical information on some of the key ethical and boundary issues in providing support in the community.

*Qualities of a Great Lifestyle Assistant*

The qualities of a great Lifestyle Assistant are many and varied. Everyone brings different strengths to their role, different values, beliefs and practical knowledge and skills. But there are some key skills areas that make them more effective, for example:

* Ability to listen and understand;
* Good communication skills;
* Interest in working within the disability field;
* Acceptance of individuals with a disability;
* Willingness to collaborate and consult with others;
* Ability to accept and respect the choices of other people;
* Respect for different needs, values, beliefs, culture;
* Commitment to increasing independence and capability in others;
* Ability to share knowledge and skills but not to take over;
* Having a positive attitude;
* Building a strong rapport with both the individual, their family, their friends, their community;
* Being aware of realistic goals and limitations – making sure they understand the individual, their strengths, needs, goals and support needs; and
* Consistency and ability to follow through.

*Why do we Need Ethical Standards?*

Ethics are the beliefs that we hold about what constitutes the right conduct in a particular situation or position.

We need to have a sound ethical framework to provide good/great quality support and to protect the rights of individuals with a disability, especially those who may be more vulnerable. Some people will have limited ability to evaluate the quality of care provided to them by Lifestyle Assistants, to communicate their concerns or complaints. Individuals themselves may also lack awareness that their behaviour and expectations places demands on Lifestyle Assistants to do things that are not appropriate to their position.

Ethical guidelines are important in providing a safe and clear working environment for Lifestyle Assistants in assisting them to provide effective and goal-directed services and support. Simply, they tell everyone what is expected of them in the performance of their work. They also ensure that Lifestyle Assistants providing services have adequate training, skills, knowledge or expertise to provide the services that they are offering in the community.

*Privacy*

All individuals have a right to privacy with their personal information, and Lifestyle Assistants should not seek information that is not relevant or necessary to the performance of their duties. Lifestyle Assistants also have a right to privacy, and these boundaries will often need to be set with individuals and families who may seek personal information about the Lifestyle Assistant, or want to have a relationship with a Lifestyle Assistant.

*Confidentiality*

Confidentiality means that any information obtained or received by Lifestyle Assistants must be kept absolutely confidential, except with the written or verbal consent of the individual or their informal or legal guardian.

Lifestyle Assistants must not discuss or disclose confidential information with anyone without this permission. It is expected that Lifestyle Assistants will sometimes need to discuss matters with co-workers, peers or supervisors but this should always be in an appropriate and respectful manner.

*Duty of Care*

Lifestyle Assistants have a duty of care to anyone who might reasonably be affected by their activities, requiring them to act I a way that does not expose others t an unreasonable risk of harm – physical, psychological or financial. Lifestyle Assistants are both ethically and legally accountable for their actions.

As a Lifestyle Assistant you are required to protect an individual from risks of injury or harm that you can foresee or anticipate. That means that they are required to act with a knowledge of the individual (particularly about their disability and the living situation), and of their own abilities, knowledge and limitations. Lifestyle Assistants should not give assistance or advice outside of their roles or expertise (e.g. financial advice, family counselling, relationship advice).

*Friendships*

The role of a Lifestyle Assistant is to build, support and strengthen the existing social, family and community network of an individual with a disability. The role of a friend is different from the role of a Lifestyle Assistant and *can* constitute a conflict of interest in performing the role.

Some Lifestyle Assistants may find this difficult as individuals are often isolated, lonely and in need of friends, but is the role of the Lifestyle Assistant to build friendships not to be the friend. Similarly, relationships with the individual’s family members may also not be appropriate and can cause the risk of blurring the boundaries of the professional relationship. However, should it so happen that the friendly rapport a Lifestyle Assistant has with the individual and their family results in the forming of a friendship, the Lifestyle Coordinator should be made aware.

An inappropriate relationship with an individual or family member *may* have risks for Lifestyle Assistants including:

* Increasing or unreasonable expectations from the individual or family;
* High stress and burnout for the Lifestyle Assistant;
* Inability to provide professional and objective support;
* Difficulty setting limits and dealing with behaviour;
* Favoring of certain employees over others;
* Distress when relationships break down;
* Grief and loss for the individual and/or their family when Lifestyle Assistants leave.

*Drugs*

Lifestyle Assistants should not be involved in the purchase of illegal drugs with individuals. They should also take care not to assist with transporting a person to purchase illegal drugs or encouraging or facilitating drug use and potentially themselves engaging in illegal activities.

*Gifts*

Occasionally, individuals and family members may offer gifts to employees as a “thank-you” for work done e.g. chocolates, flowers, cards etc. Employees may not want to refuse a small token gift and cause offence. However, acceptance of gifts should always be considered with caution, particularly gifts of money or expensive items. Employees can always respond “your thanks are enough – this is my job”. Gifts should never be solicited or requested.

Lifestyle Assistants should make their Lifestyle Coordinator aware of any intended gift from an individual and a decision will be made as to whether the gift can be accepted. All gifts will be registered on the Gift Register.

*Sexual Relationships*

A sexual relationship between an employee and individual or between an employee and a family member of a current or previous individual is a serious breach of ethical responsibilities and should not occur under any circumstances.

*Tips for Setting the Limits*

* It is important to be clear about the role of a Lifestyle Assistant, goals and objectives, right from the beginning.
* Review how you are going from time to time.
* Keep your own family and personal life private and separate to your work – be careful about self-disclosure and providing too much information about yourself or other Lifestyle Assistants.
* Ask for help when you need it – support work can be isolating with high levels of independence and responsibility.
* Discuss any concerns or worries about your own work with peers or supervisors.
* Lifestyle Assistants have an obligation to report concerns regarding other Lifestyle Assistants – individuals with a disability may be vulnerable to exploitation from others and may not be able to voice concerns or advocate for their needs and rights.

*Taking Care of Yourself*

Supporting individuals with a disability can be demanding and stressful. Employees need to take care of themselves to prevent burn-out. Ways to take care of yourself might include:

* Have a range of activities outside of your work that you enjoy e.g. social, recreational or leisure – don’t make work your whole life!
* Plan for regular breaks and holidays from work or even particular individuals.
* Be aware of signs of tension and stress (psychological and physical), and plan relaxing activities that make you feel great.
* Make sure you have someone you trust to talk – a work colleague, supervisor, friend, family or a counsellor or psychologist.
* Give yourself permission to have emotions and feelings and to express them in the right situation.
* Take care of your general health and well-being e.g. sleep, healthy food and regular exercise or relaxation.

Remember, you can’t do it all so set good limits about when you work, how long you work for, and who you work with – do the things you enjoy the most!

**RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTING WORKPLACE GUIDELINES**

All employees.

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| **DATE OF BOARD ENDORSEMENT** | 07/02/2019 |
| **LAST REVIEW DATE** | 07/02/2019 |
| **NEXT REVIEW DATE** | This workplace guideline will be reviewed on an 18-month basis.  However, if at any time the guideline is no longer appropriate in its current form, it will be reviewed immediately and amended accordingly. |

**APPENDIX**

***BUILDING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES***

***SIMPLE RULES FOR KEEPING AND MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES***

1. Do not seek out a personal relationship with individuals, or with their family, friends, or support network. Have a balanced work and home life so your personal needs are met outside of work.

2. Do not have a sexual relationship with individuals, their family, friends or people in their support network.

3. Introducing individuals to your own family, friends, or support network can only occur if this has been risk assessed by a member of the Management Team, consent has been gained from the family and strategies have been put in place to manage any foreseeable risks.

5. Do not supply or use alcohol, drugs or other illegal substances during work. The purchase of alcohol can occur where the family or individual has provided approval to the Lifestyle Coordinator.

6. Turn up on time for your shift. Don’t arrive late and leave early. People notice, including the individuals and their family. Organise your commitments and travel so that you have plenty of time.

7. Do not smoke in front of individuals, and do not lend or buy cigarettes for individuals. Encourage healthy lifestyle choices.

8. Do not borrow, ask for or lend money to individuals. Do not talk about your personal financial or other life problems with individuals.

9. Do not allow individuals you support to drive your own/work motor vehicle.

10. Do not give advice outside of your skills and expertise – e.g. financial, marital, relationship, medical – refer on to qualified professionals for any support needed.

11. Respect confidentiality and privacy – do not discuss information about an individual with your family or friends. Talk to colleagues and use peer supervision.

12. Consider whether individuals have guardians to assist with personal decision making or administrators to assist with financial decisions and consult as necessary.

13. Do not disclose personal information (yours or other work colleagues or other individuals) e.g. phone numbers, address, email, marital information.

14. Do not criticise, complain about or discuss issues relating to other work colleagues, or Community Connection with individuals or their family. Work related issues and complaints need to be dealt with in the workplace.

15. Do not ask for money, gifts, or special favours from the individuals you support.