ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES WITH VICTIMS/SURVIVORS WITH MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES

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Goals of Our Time Together

- Understand why boundaries are helpful to the victim/survivor and the advocate relationship
- Learn why boundaries can be difficult to establish with this population
- Identify ways to implement personal and organizational boundaries
We will not be excusing behaviors, however, we will be learning about their origins to help build a new lens of understanding and empathy.

We need to know why to know how.
Mental illness is NOT a monolith.

Everyone experiences mental health differently.
We will focus on creating a new lens with which to serve victims/survivors with mental illness.

We will not be endorsing ableist views of persons with mental illness through the use of words like “difficult” or “non-compliant”.

We will be analyzing the systems in place that are serving this population by dismantling the concepts that persons with mental illness are the problem instead of inaccessible systems they work, live, and play within.
Stigmatizing and Harmful Views

Rates of Victimization of Persons with Mental Illness

Lack of Integrated Services

Inaccessibility of Systems

Legitimizing Mental Illness and its Barriers
Lack of understanding how victimization affects mental illness

What is mental health related and what is trauma related?

Disclosure

Ableism and Preconceived Ideas

Perceived Vulnerabilities
How Advocates Violate Boundaries

• Advocate → Clinician
• Make Assumptions
• Doing FOR not WITH
• Not defining the relationship
• Oversharing
• Perceived vulnerabilities
Mark is a crime victim advocate who has recently been assigned to a new case involving a survivor, Jane, who has disclosed disabilities in the intake process. Jane has disclosed that they have a diagnosis of Major Depressive Disorder, PTSD, and Generalized Anxiety. Jane divulged that they have difficulties remembering things and tend to avoid tasks because of their anxiety and PTSD.

In an attempt to help Jane, Mark decides it might be best if he start making some decisions about their work together. Mark decides that because of the survivor’s depression and anxiety, all work will be done via phone and email allowing the survivor to stay home.

Mark also determines that, because Jane has a disability, he will have some conversations ahead of time with other colleagues to get the ball rolling to. Mark thinks that having a disability makes it difficult for Jane to participate and believes that these things will help her and make things a bit easier.
How Survivors Violate Boundaries

• Coercion/Manipulation
• Frequent calling/emailing
• Verbal abuse
• Encouraging/seeking dual relationships
• Triangulating service providers
• Pervasive and invasive questioning
• Making threats
Marjorie has a history of mental illness that has shaped her life thus far. She doesn’t have many friends because people think she’s “crazy” and “too much to handle”.

Marjorie has received help from the mental health field for a long time. In fact, she has had more positive relationships with mental health professionals than she has her friends, family, and people not associated with the field.

Because of these relationships, Marjorie thinks it appropriate to befriend her advocate which sometimes leads to Marjorie calling A LOT “just to talk”. When she does this, her service providers tend to distance themselves and not communicate with her. This upsets Marjorie and she reacts in ways that hurt the relationship.
When Boundaries Are Blurred

• Re-traumatization
• Bystander in their own process
• Labelling and continued ableism
• No self-determination
Benefits of Boundaries for Victim/Survivor

- Empowerment
- Self-Determination
- Self-Advocacy
- Learned skills
- Faith in systems
- Decreased frustration
Benefits of Boundaries for the Advocate

- Healthy survivor/advocate relationships
- Knowledge of MH and trauma
- Transparency and honesty focused work
- Shared responsibilities
- Mutual goals
- Decreased frustration
IMPLEMENTING PERSONAL BOUNDARIES
AS A PROFESSIONAL
Positionality, Experience, Perception

Positionality
Social/Cultural/Historical Identity

Experience
Interactions with the world around you

Perception
Understanding/cognitions; how you fit in the world
Effective Communication

• Define the relationship
  • Here is my role, this is what I can do for you, here is how we can collaborate together

• Seek clarification
  • “I know these questions can be a lot but I am asking them so I make sure I understand everything very clearly. That is how I can help you best. If you need to take a break, just let me know.”

• Shared language
  • “The process can be difficult so to help, I thought we might take some time so I can help answer your questions. Would that help?”

• Redirection
  • “I understand why you might want to leave me multiple voicemail messages. This is a very important situation for you! However, one voicemail will be plenty. It may be best for you to take notes between our phone calls so we make sure to discuss everything you would like when we do talk.”
Effective Communication

• Written Boundaries
  • “Sara, thank you for the conversation today. I wanted to take a moment and briefly summarize our conversation. In the future, should you need me, you have agreed to leave one voicemail and/or one email and allow me the time and ability to return your call/email. Affording me this trust allows me to show you that I am advocating for you while also being respectful of my time with other clients.”

• Verbal Boundaries
  • “John, I really appreciate your involvement in your case however, it would help me if you just sent one email/voicemail. One voicemail/email will be a sufficient reminder to me to call/write you back. Please know that sending me multiple emails/voicemails will not make me call you back any faster. One of each is sufficient. It is important that we have this boundary so I can be most effective for you as your advocate.”
Effective Communication

• Time Boundaries
  • Melinda, I’m just letting you know I have about two minutes left of our conversation before I need to go help someone else.”
  • Melinda, I’m sorry to interrupt but that two minutes is up. I need to go now but I will talk with you soon.

• Collaboration
  • “I can tell that how we are currently working together is not going well. What would you like me to know that would help our communication? What can I do to help you feel like you are getting your needs met?”
  • “For our partnership to be successful, here is what I need from you. These are the things I will be held accountable for. Do you agree to be accountable for these things?”
General Considerations

- Clear communication – no guessing what you mean
- Documentation!
- Intentional & Meaningful
- Anti-Shame!
- Mental Health Safety Plan
Personal Inventory

• Confronting our own pasts and demons

• F.O.G.
  • Fear
  • Obligation
  • Guilt

Emotional Blackmail is the use of fear, obligation and guilt to control another person.

https://www.facebook.com/AdultBullyingResources
IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES
ETHICS
ACCOUNTABILITY
PRINCIPLES
INTEGRITY
VALUES
Policies & Procedures

• Narratives (phone, email, in-person)
  • Suicidal Crisis
    • Suicide Prevention Resource Center
  • Yelling and threats
  • Verbal abuse
  • Physical threats

• Training from Community Partners
  • Crisis intervention
  • Psychological First Aid
Verbal Abuse Narrative

A client is cussing at you, calling you obscenities, and using an elevated tone and loud voice while you are on the phone with them.

Stay calm and repeat this sentence three times (not consecutively):
“Lisa, I would like to help you but if I cannot if you keep yelling at me. I will need to end this phone call if you cannot stop yelling.”

If Lisa doesn’t stop, say this and end the call:
“Lisa, I am ending this phone call because you have not stopped yelling at me. I will call you tomorrow to see if we can have a better conversation then.”
Benefits of Organizational Boundaries

- Staff feel supported
- Organizational culture and employee engagement
- Top down effect
- Helps in supervision to support boundaries
- Helps organization identify issues with boundaries and improve services
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