

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND BOUNDARIES



What are Ethics?

Law vs. Ethics

- ❑ Law – legal justice; following the norms established by society through the political process.
- ❑ Ethics – focus is on social justice; doing what is right. Ethics may be in conflict with unjust laws.

Definitions

- ❑ Ethics: the “rightness” or “wrongness” of an action. Moral standards by which people judge and behave.
- ❑ Code: a “set” of personal ethical principles which guide an individual’s decision making.
- ❑ Professional code: a set of guidelines for performance and evaluation based on core values and principles of a profession.

Ethical Responsibility

- Ethical Standards and Responsibilities
 - ▣ To Clients
 - ▣ To Colleagues
 - ▣ In Practice Settings
 - ▣ To the Profession
 - ▣ To Broader Society

White Sands Values

- Service – helping people in need
- Social Justice – challenge injustice
- Dignity & Worth of the Person – respect for each individual
- Importance of Human Relationships – recognition and support
- Integrity – act honestly and responsibly
- Competence – increase knowledge

How do Ethics Relate to Professional Boundaries?

Therapeutic relationships involve:

- Fiduciary relationship
- Client vulnerability
- Professional influence
- Power differential



What are Boundaries?

- Clearly established limits that allow for safe connections between service providers and their clients
- Understanding of the limits and responsibilities of your role as a service provider

Professional Boundaries

- Provides limits
- Produces consistency
- Defines power
- Responsibility rests with the professional
- Provides credibility and predictability



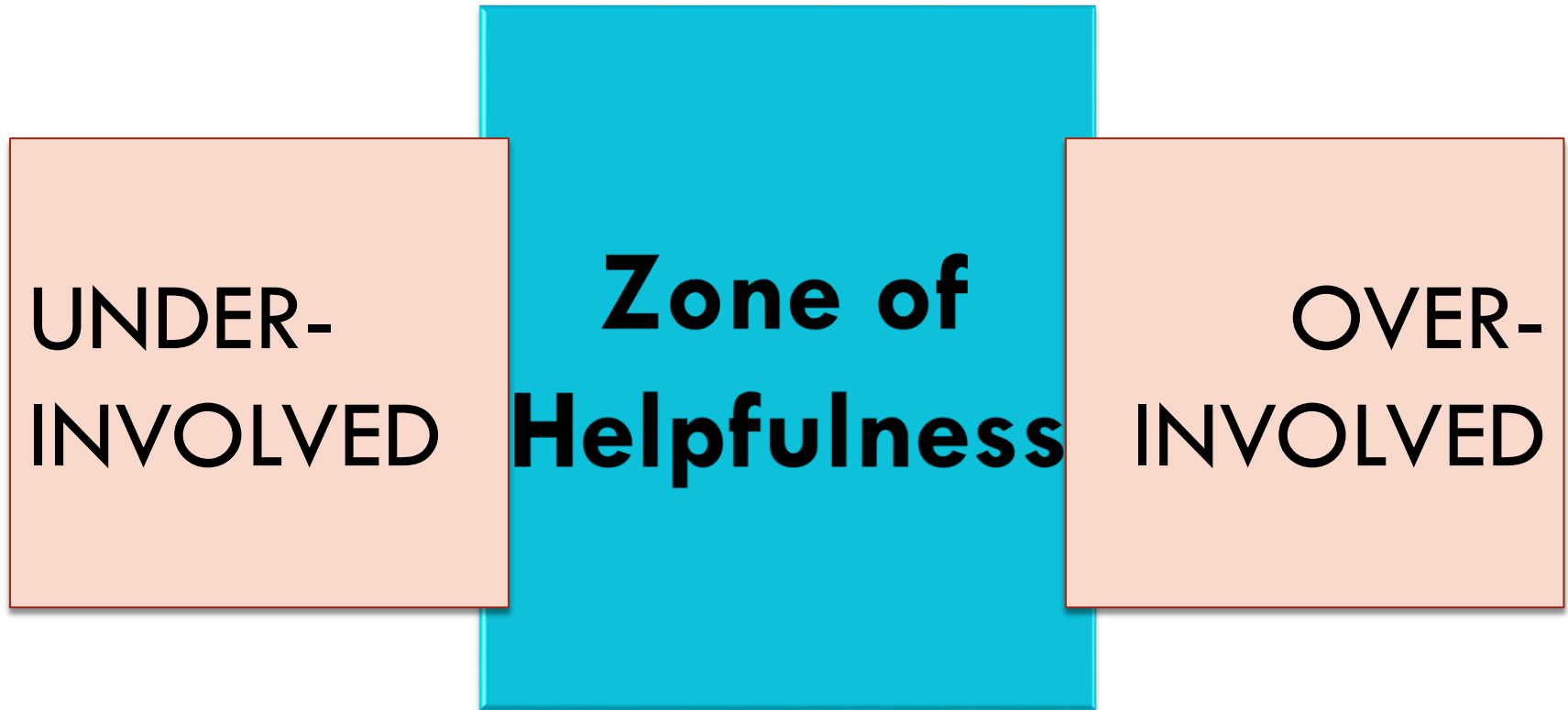
Importance of Boundaries

- ❑ Role modeling healthy communication and professional relationships
- ❑ Avoiding “rescuer” role
- ❑ Staying focused on your responsibilities to the client & provision of appropriate services to the client
- ❑ Avoiding compassion fatigue (burn-out)
- ❑ Maintaining healthy, functioning team (if working with other providers)
- ❑ Maintaining physical and emotional health and safety

Awareness

- ❑ Understanding your own needs
- ❑ Understanding your role as a professional
- ❑ Staying focused on the job at hand
- ❑ Taking care of your emotional and physical health
- ❑ Establishing clear limits

Continuum of Therapeutic Relationships



Boundary Crossings and Violations

- Intimate Relationships
- Personal Benefit
- Emotional and Dependency Needs
- Altruism
- Unavoidable Circumstances

Consequences of Poor Boundaries

- ❑ Compassion fatigue – service provider's role may not feel sustainable
- ❑ Client may not receive appropriate or helpful services, which could affect his/her willingness or ability to accept future services
- ❑ Client may feel betrayed, abandoned, or poorly served

Consequences of Poor Boundaries

- ❑ Teamwork with other agencies may fall apart
- ❑ Service provider may act unethically
- ❑ Reputation of agency/profession may be compromised
- ❑ Client and/or service provider may be emotionally traumatized and/or put in physical danger

Why is it difficult to establish/maintain boundaries?

- ❑ Dual relationships – service provider & client know each other from another setting
- ❑ Values conflicts – client and service provider do not share similar viewpoints on choices, relationships, lifestyle, etc.
- ❑ Vicarious trauma – service provider may experience trauma symptoms due to hearing about client's experiences

Why is it difficult to establish/maintain boundaries?

- ❑ Playing the “hero” – service provider feels the need to “save” the client
- ❑ Service provider does not trust other team members, believes they can provide services better, believes they are the only ones who can help client

Dual Relationships

- Some dual relationships may be unavoidable
 - ▣ You and a client belong to the same church
 - ▣ A client lives in your neighborhood
 - ▣ Your agency hires clients as staff or utilizes clients as volunteers

Questions to Ask in Examining Potential Boundary Issues:

- ☐ Is this in my client's best interest?
- ☐ Whose needs are being served?
- ☐ How would I feel telling a colleague about this?
- ☐ How would this be viewed by the client's family or significant other?
- ☐ Does the client mean something 'special' to me?
- ☐ Am I taking advantage of the client?
- ☐ Does this action benefit me rather than the client?

Signs of Boundary Issues

- ❑ Service provider & client begin referring to each other as friends
- ❑ Service provider receives gifts from or gives gifts to clients
- ❑ Sharing of home phone numbers or other significant personal information
- ❑ Asking/expecting socialization outside of professional setting

Signs of Boundary Issues

- ❑ Service provider reveals excessive personal information to client
- ❑ Discussion regarding work/clients dominates service provider's social interactions with friends & family
- ❑ Service provider offers to provide assistance to client outside of his/her role (babysitting, transportation, etc.)
- ❑ Service provider finds him/herself “venting” with client about other service providers

Warning Signs

- Personal problems
- Secretive behavior
- “Super Hero” behavior
- Special treatment
- Other warning signs



Creating & Maintaining Boundaries

- As early as possible in the relationship, establish clear agreements regarding your role as a service provider, your availability, best ways to communicate with you, what to do if you see each other in a public setting
- When boundary issues appear, address them quickly and clearly being sensitive to your client's feelings
- If you disclose personal information, make sure it is relevant to the client's goals. Too much self-disclosure shifts the focus from the client to the provider and can confuse the client's understanding of the relationship.

Creating & Maintaining Boundaries

- ❑ You may need to frequently clarify your role and boundaries to ensure understanding.
- ❑ Use your supervisor or professional colleagues as a sounding board if you have questions or concerns.
- ❑ Dual relationships – if you had a social relationship with a client prior becoming a service provider you must consider how future interactions impact a client's confidentiality, and physical and emotional security.

Creating & Maintaining Boundaries

- Working with a team of providers: Promote positive, open communication and respectful sharing of information. Build trust and recognize that you can't and shouldn't be the only help your client receives.
- Take care of yourself! Make sure you are getting enough sleep, eat well, have healthy relationships, exercise and “leave work at work”.

Exploitation and Boundary Violation

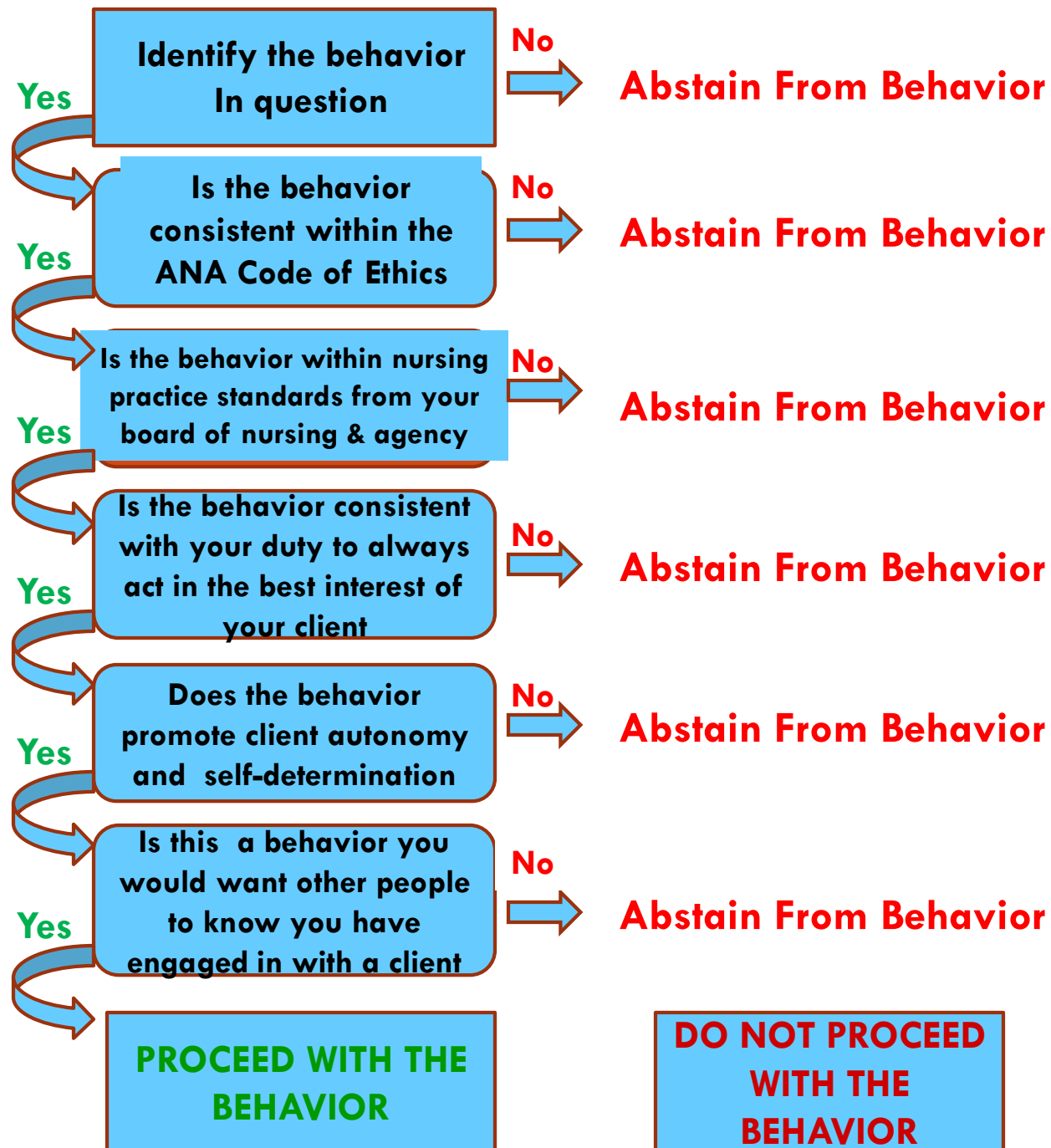
- ❑ If a minor Boundary Violation occurs it may be best to transfer the client/patient.
- ❑ If Exploitation and Boundary Crossing has been crossed it is best to immediately terminate the relationship.
- ❑ Report any incidents of Exploitation and Boundary violations.

The Best Prevention



- Be Aware
- Be Reflective
- Respect Feelings of “Dis-ease”
- Keep Client’s Need Paramount

Decision Making Framework



Questions?

