

Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital Policy and Procedure		
Professional Conduct and Boundaries		
Effective: July 2014	Revised: December 2024	Due to Review: December 2026

POLICY

It is the policy of the Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital (VPCH) that personnel be knowledgeable regarding professional conduct and boundaries. This policy provides a framework within which to carry out therapeutic and professional interactions. It is the responsibility of VPCH personnel to maintain such conduct and boundaries. Failure to uphold this responsibility will be considered misconduct and may be subject to discipline up to and including dismissal.

DEFINITIONS

Professional Conduct: Conducting oneself responsibly, respectfully, diligently, courteously, and with competence, skill, and maturity.

Boundary: A limit or margin that describes the way personnel interact and/or communicate with others. VPCH personnel are expected to maintain workplace conduct and attitudes consistent with professional standards.

Boundary Violations: An infringement of the limit or margins. The failure to maintain a boundary and/or to become involved in a manner that has the potential to compromise the quality of care provided and/or the necessary structure of professional relationships. Boundary violations may be emotional, physical, spiritual, financial, or sexual in nature, and may be brief, extended, accidental, or intentional.

Therapeutic Relationship: A professional relationship between hospitalized persons and personnel in which the latter has the responsibility for ensuring that the needs of the hospitalized persons, as described by a treatment plan, are met and boundaries are established and maintained.

Supervisor: A supervisor is specifically the incumbent of the positions bolded in the VPCH organizational chart (link provided in reference section of this policy).

PROCEDURE

Considerations/Required Steps:

- I. Professional Conduct:** It is expected that VPCH personnel conduct themselves responsibly, respectfully, diligently, courteously, as well as with competence, skill, and maturity. Examples of expected professional conduct include, but are not limited to:
 - Adherence to policies, directives/work orders, and provisions of the collective bargaining agreement.

- Utilization of the Learning Management System (LMS) to complete and schedule trainings.
- Fulfilling to the best of one's ability the duties and responsibilities of one's position.
- Devoting one's full time, attention, and effort to the duties and responsibilities assigned to one during scheduled work time.
- Completing and submitting moonlight requests before starting any outside employment, completing nepotism waiver requests as soon as the need arises, and reporting other potential conflicts of interests as soon as they arise.
- Maintaining privacy and confidentiality as expected of one's position and as a professional in the workplace.
- Conduct, whether on or off duty (*i.e.*, via social media or other public facing platforms), does not constitute unlawful harassment, threats of violence, discriminatory, or disparaging content, and does not bring discredit to or violate policy of the State of Vermont, the Department of Mental Health, or VPCH.
- Independently obtaining/maintaining/completing necessary licensure, certification, training, etc. required of their position by assigned deadlines.
- Holding oneself and members of one's team accountable for maintaining expected conduct by directly addressing and/or collaborating to resolve minor disagreements/disputes, and reporting to a superior if resolution is not achieved.
- Reading and responding to work email and other facility correspondence.
- Honesty.
- Addressing and/or reporting conduct that is discriminatory, retaliatory, or otherwise not in adherence to this or any other VPCH and State of Vermont policy as soon as reasonably possible to your supervisor, their designee, agency management staff, or any member of the State of Vermont Human Resources department.

Personnel shall not report to or perform work under the influence of, or in possession of, or with detectable odor of alcohol, marijuana, or other federally or locally regulated substance(s), on their person. Personnel taking prescribed medication which could cause either a mental or physical limitation must immediately bring this to the attention of their immediate supervisor or their designee for possible accommodation.

Personnel with, or who become aware of any personnel's, violation(s) of any state or federal law/local ordinances shall report in writing to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or designee as soon as reasonably possible.

- II. Power and Vulnerability:** The therapeutic relationship between hospitalized persons and VPCH personnel is not one of equal balance nor is the relationship between leader/supervisor and supervisee. Personnel are expected to recognize and understand actual or potential power differentials and to make every effort to not abuse them.
- Personnel shall ensure that their relationships with hospitalized persons and former hospitalized persons are therapeutic and limit the potential for relationships to be misread or confused with friendships or other personal or

romantic relationships. This is essential to protect hospitalized persons at a time when they may be vulnerable and also to protect personnel from the risk of such allegations.

- Interactions and communications between hospitalized persons and former hospitalized persons and VPCH personnel shall occur only within the hours and limits of the personnel's job and role responsibilities. Personnel perceiving an attempt by a hospitalized person to initiate an interaction or communication that is, or could lead to, a boundary violation or potential boundary violation, shall consult with their supervisor and/or members of the patient's treatment team as soon as reasonably possible.
- Personnel develop and maintain working relationships with colleagues that are collegial and consistent with professional standards. This is essential to maintain trust, transparent communication, safety, and the quality of care provided.
- Personnel should seek guidance from their supervisor as soon as possible should question or concerns about professional conduct or boundaries arise.

III. Boundary Violations and Potential Boundary Violations: Conduct that is prohibited and outside of the personnel's job and role responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Developing an exclusive relationship with a hospitalized person (including after discharge) for social or non-therapeutic reasons.
- Engaging in a social, romantic, or financial relationship with a hospitalized person, including after discharge.
- Sale or gift of personal gifts, money, or other items of value to hospitalized persons, including after discharge (anonymous donations may be made through established hospital procedures).
- Sharing sexual feelings, remarks, jokes.
- Drug or alcohol related references, remarks, except as may be used for educational purposes.
- Providing or accepting any illicit and non-prescribed drug or alcohol.
- Engaging in personal, non-therapeutic correspondence with any hospitalized person, including after discharge.
 - If personnel are contacted by a hospitalized person after discharge, they shall notify their supervisor as soon as reasonably possible.
 - If personnel receive personal contact from a hospitalized person while at VPCH, they shall notify a supervisor and the treatment team as soon as reasonably possible.
- Providing special favors to certain individuals over others.
- Developing a favoring relationship with a colleague.
- Making disparaging or derogatory remarks about others, about hospital policy, or about hospital or department operations.
- Intentional disclosure of personal information (your own or another's) to a hospitalized person including, but not limited to personal, non-patient care related information such as details of marital status, telephone numbers, family issues, job, or disciplinary action concerns for non-therapeutic reasons.
- Receiving/exchanging any items or gifts regardless of monetary value.

IV. Physical Touch: Physical touch to a hospitalized person may be necessary for providing certain elements of care. However, physical touch has many recognizable interpretations and misinterpretations and should be used sparingly and thoughtfully unless otherwise described in a hospitalized persons' treatment plan.

V. Review and Reporting Responsibilities:


- Personnel who in any way become aware of an actual or potential boundary violation whether it be between a hospitalized person and personnel, a former hospitalized person and personnel, or between personnel, shall report this information to their supervisor, or their designee, as soon as reasonably possible.
- Supervisors who become aware of an actual or potential boundary violation, whether involving current or previously hospitalized individuals, shall collect all relevant information and respond as follows:
 1. If the relevant information presents any reason to suspect that personnel have engaged in prohibited behavior with hospitalized persons, the supervisor shall proceed in accordance with the internal review stages for a mandatory report. Information collected will be submitted to the Chief Nursing Executive and the Chief Executive Officer, or their designees, for action. If the information collected identifies an action requiring a report, the VPCH Mandatory Reporting Policy and Procedure shall be followed.
 2. If the relevant information involves a potential boundary violation or unprofessional conduct that may or may not result in a mandatory report, a decision will be made in collaboration with the Chief Executive Officer, or their designee, regarding whether to immediately remove or reassign personnel in accordance with personnel policy.

VI. Pre-Existing relationships: Personnel who become aware of a potential or actual boundary complication between themselves and a hospitalized person (*i.e.*, hospitalization of family member, friend, or acquaintance) shall report this information to their supervisor as soon as reasonably possible. Actual and potential boundary complications shall be reviewed and may require reassignment or other intervention.

Violations of this policy are considered misconduct and may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from employment.

References

- The VPCH Code of Civility is included as a reference in Appendix A of this policy as it is intended to provide a framework for expected professional conduct for VPCH Personnel.
- The VPCH Organizational Chart: [LINK](#)

Approved by	Signature	Date
Emily Hawes, Commissioner, Vermont Department of Mental Health	 A blue DocuSign signature box containing the text "DocuSigned by:", a handwritten signature "Emily Hawes", and a truncated ID "C50275615A62462...".	12/5/2024

APPENDIX A: VPCH Code of Civility

The Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital's mission is to provide excellent care and treatment in a recovery-oriented, safe, respectful environment that promotes empowerment, hope and quality of life for the individuals it serves. As part of this mission employee behavior plays a key factor. The following code of civility is intended as a resource to guide employee behavior as a way to foster a positive and collaborative work environment. As members of this workforce, we have a duty and commitment to provide a safe, respectful environment to the people we serve and this effort was made to extend that duty and commitment to our fellow colleagues. Please review the four elements below and give your best effort to adhere to these principles. Any questions, concerns, or comments may be made to the Workforce Development Committee.

Professionalism: Professional conduct includes a combination of skills, words, and actions that mirror our organization's values. The most important traits begin with effective and respectful communication, being responsible and accountable, and demonstrating respect and tolerance for one another.

- Be respectful and tolerant of other's opinions
- Collaborate with other team members
- Be honest
- Maintain integrity
- Seek help when needed and help others
- Be courteous
- Adhere to the dress code
- Be patient
- Be attentive
- Have a positive mental attitude
- Be mindful of discussing personal information in shared spaces
- Use professional language

Communication: Effective and respectful communication are vital to the day-to-day operation of our workplace. Listening is one of the most important pieces of communication as well as knowing your audience, monitoring your tone of voice and paying attention to your body language.

- Respect each other's differences
- Be honest
- Use Constructive feedback
- Be objective, avoid making assumptions
- Find common ground
- Use person first language
- Listen for understanding, use active listening skills
- Be open to new ideas and other perspectives
- Practice empathy and compassion

- Do not gossip or spread hearsay

Responsibility: Acting responsibly in the workplace includes caring as much about how your work is done as you do about getting it done. We are also accountable for our own words and actions and how they contribute to or devalue our workplace culture.

- Ask questions if unsure how to complete a task
- Be honest about committing errors (everyone makes mistakes)
- Apologize if you have offended someone
- Do your part
- Be there for your team
- Be supportive
- Take ownership
- Look out for one another
- Hold each other accountable

Respect: Follow the Platinum rule: Treat others as they want to be treated, not assuming others have the same desires as you. Being respectful means considering one another's feelings and valuing others' viewpoints and contributions.

- Address coworkers directly and respect each other's confidentiality
- Cooperate and collaborate with team members
- Recognize accomplishments
- Acknowledge chain of command
- Offer positive feedback
- Lend a helping hand
- Be inclusive, we are a team
- Validate other's concerns

