

Facility Name: Middlesex Therapeutic Community Residence	
Policy and Procedure: Professional Behavior and Personal Boundaries	
	Effective Date: 05/08/22

POLICY

The rights and needs of patients at the Middlesex Therapeutic Community Residence (MTCR) shall be respected. Residents at MTCR are considered vulnerable as defined 33 V.S.A. §6902(14). Interactions between residents and employees are intended to be therapeutic and beneficial to the resident rather than therapeutic and beneficial to the employee. The resident-to-employee relationship is distinctly different from a personal relationship between equals. A relationship between a resident and a staff member is unequal because a power differential exists, and employees are in the position of power.

There is potential for this power to be abused and professional boundaries violated. To prevent exploitation, abuse, and other boundary violations, each individual MTCR employee is responsible for maintaining professional and personal boundaries as described in this policy.

Employees must recognize and behave with an understanding that they are in a position of power. This power shall not be abused at any time. It is essential, therefore, that all interactions between residents and staff shall be conducted in terms of a therapeutic relationship.

Employees shall always maintain professional boundaries with patients to prevent therapeutic relationships from being perceived or becoming friendship, romantic, or other personal relationships.

Any employee who is aware of or informed of any pre-existing relationships between themselves or another employee and a resident (*i.e.*, hospitalization/institutionalization of family member, friend, or acquaintance in the community) shall immediately disclose this relationship to their immediate supervisor, the Nurse Supervisor, or the Program Director.

Interactions and communications between residents and employees shall occur only during working hours and within the scope of the employee's professional responsibilities.

If an employee receives personal contact from an MTCR resident during their stay at MTCR, the employee shall inform their immediate supervisor and the resident's treatment team. If an employee is contacted by a former resident after discharge, the employee shall inform their immediate supervisor.

Any employee who witnesses or is informed of an attempt and/or a perceived attempt by a resident or employee to initiate an interaction or communication that is, could lead to, or could

be perceived as a boundary violation or potential boundary violation, is required to immediately inform their immediate supervisor, the Nurse Supervisor, or the Program Director. This is essential to protect MTCR residents at a time when they may be vulnerable and to prevent employees from conducting acts of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

DEFINITIONS

- **Boundary:** A limit or margin that describes the way employees interact and/or communicate with patients.
- **Boundary Violations:** Infringement of a boundary (the limit or margin). Failure to maintain a boundary and become involved in a manner that has the potential to compromise patient care. Boundary violations may be emotional, physical, spiritual, financial, or sexual in nature and may be brief, extended, accidental, or intentional.
- **Employee:** All State employees, contracted staff, students, and volunteers.
- **Pre-existing relationship:** Any type of existing familial, social, and/or sexual relationship with a patient, including former patients who have been discharged (regardless of discharge date or role with patient).
- **Therapeutic Relationship:** A professional relationship between the patient and the employee in which the latter has the responsibility for ensuring that the needs of the patient as described in the treatment plan are met.

Examples of violations include, but are not limited to:

- Providing preferential treatment to certain residents
- Engaging in any type of personal and/or sexual relationship with a resident, including former residents who have been discharged (regardless of discharge date or role with resident).
- Engaging in personal, non-therapeutic correspondence with any resident (regardless of discharge date or role with resident).
- Giving or accepting personal gifts, money, or other items to or from a resident or former resident after discharge, regardless of discharge date or role with resident.
- Sharing sexual feelings, remarks, or jokes
- Making drug or alcohol related remarks to a resident, except as used for patient/family education
- Providing or accepting from a resident any non-prescribed drug or alcohol
- Making disparaging or other critical remarks to a resident about other employees, MTCR policy/procedure, or anything related to MTCR or DMH operations.
- Disclosing non-therapeutic information to a resident about oneself, another employee, or another resident, such as marital or other relationship status, family issues, sexual orientation, telephone number, job performance or any other personal information.

Physical Touch

Physical touch of a resident is sometimes necessary while providing direct care as well as for any necessary interventions related to treatment. However, because physical touch has a high potential for misinterpretation and for boundary violation, touch should be used sparingly, thoughtfully, and consistently with the resident's treatment plan.

PROCEDURE

Review and Reporting Responsibilities

If an employee receives personal contact from a MTCR resident during their stay, the employee shall inform their immediate supervisor and the resident's treatment team. If an employee is contacted by a former resident after discharge, the employee shall inform their immediate supervisor.

Any employee who becomes aware of an actual or potential boundary violation between a resident and themselves and/or another employee shall inform their immediate supervisor. That supervisor shall immediately report the information to the Nurse Supervisor or Program Director, who shall review the relevant information and determine follow up actions to be undertaken.

Any employee of the Department of Mental Health who knows of or has received information of, or has reason to suspect, that any resident has been abused, neglected, or exploited by any person shall ensure that a report is filed with Adult Protective Services (APS) as soon as possible and no later than 24 hours after the incident. See *MTCR Mandatory Reporting Policy and Procedure* for additional information.

Violations of this Policy and Procedure

Failure to adhere to the requirements of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from employment.

Approved by	Signature	Date
Emily Hawes Commissioner Department of Mental Health		