Warning signs of crossing boundaries

- Frequently thinking about a client when away from work.
- Sharing personal information or work concerns with the client.
- Observing more physical touching than is appropriate.
- Keeping secrets with the client.
- Selective reporting of client’s behavior (negative or positive)
- Communicating in a guarded or defensive manner when questioned regarding interactions/relationship with client.
- Altering dress style while working with the client.
- Receiving gifts.
- Acting and/or feeling possessive about the client.
- Providing a client with special attention/treatment that differs from that of other clients under the same care.
- Denying that you have crossed the boundary from a therapeutic to a non-therapeutic relationship.

Short Quiz

Which one of the following would you consider a violation of boundaries?
A. Superfluous hugging
B. Becoming friends with client
C. Accepting a gift from a client
D. All of the above are boundary violations

Boundary violations

- Disclosing details of your personal life to a client
- Going out to eat with a client
- Inviting a client to a personal party or social event
- Accepting an invitation to a client special event
- Insensitivity to religious and cultural beliefs and values
- Self disclosure
- Giving or Receiving Significant Gifts
- Overlapping Relationships
- Becoming Friends
- Romantic Relationships
Questions to consider

- Does this client mean something special to me?
- Am I treating this client differently?
- Is this in the client’s best interest?
- Whose needs are being served?
- Is this behavior you would want other people to know you had engaged in with a client?
- Am I taking advantage of this client?
- Am I comfortable documenting this behavior in the client’s chart?

How to prevent boundary violations

- Avoid discussing personal life (self disclosure)
- Respect cultural and religious differences
- Do not accept invitations or invite clients to personal parties or social events
- Do not establish personal relationships with clients
- Do not accept gifts
- Refrain from excessive or suggestive touching
- Do not use gestures, tone of voice, expressions, or any other behaviors which can be interpreted as seductive, sexually demeaning, or as sexually abusive

Ethical boundaries

- Honesty
- Fairness
- Confidentiality
- Right Behavior
- Diagnosing without a license
- Neutral Communications

Consequences of boundary violations

- Discipline and/or termination from employer
- Loss of license or certification from professional organization
- Criminal charges

Reference: