

**Professional Boundaries policy**

**Aims**

* To ensure delivery of Sutton Mencap services is carried out in a safe and professional manner.
* To provide staff with guidance on the delivery of a caring service that treats service users with dignity and respect.
* To safeguard service users.
* To ensure Sutton Mencap complies with legal responsibilities and best practice in all its activities.

**Introduction**

Sutton Mencap is committed to providing professional, caring services that treat all service users with dignity and respect. We recognise that maintaining appropriate professional boundaries has a vital role to play in protecting service users, staff and volunteers. We also recognise the vulnerability of our services users, both adults and children and that appropriate professional boundaries can help to ensure we do not increase their vulnerability to others.

Sutton Mencap recognises the importance of staff and volunteers being able to discuss appropriate behaviour in an open and constructive environment to enable monitoring and improving to practice and ensure the safety of all parties concerned. Appropriate boundaries ensure that Sutton Mencap staff can act as friendly professionals, but not as professional friends. We expect staff and volunteers to be caring, whilst protecting people from abuse and/ or allegations which can have very serious consequences.

**Scope**

This policy covers all staff and volunteers and focusses on how Sutton Mencap expects them to interact with service users, both adults and children. This interaction includes physical contact, language and sharing personal information and social contact.

**Physical contact**

Any form of physical contact or interaction with children and adults could be perceived as assault or abuse. Staff must therefore ensure that physical contact only takes place:

* As part of the care that they need.
* As an integral part of the service we offer.
* As part of an intervention during a crisis situation, e.g. to save life, or avoid serious injury, in accordance with Sutton Mencap’s Positive Behaviour Management policy.

Whilst service users may have physical contact with family, friends and partners, there are only specific, limited circumstances where this is appropriate with professional carers, whether paid or volunteer. These circumstances will arise as a result of the support a person needs and as an integral part of service delivery, for example:

* During the provision of personal care.
* To help people with an activity that needs hands on support e.g. Sport or Dancing.
* Hand massage or an agreed technique to provide relaxation.
* Physio or other therapy.
* Agreed contact during a time of stress, such as when coming out of a seizure or other first aid situation.
* As part of a communication technique

**It essential that staff and volunteers maintain appropriate physical boundaries with both adults and children. Contact such as hugging or cuddling, sitting on laps or giving kisses is regarded as inappropriate.**

If a service user seeks physical contact with staff or volunteers, e.g. when distressed, staff and volunteers should establish an appropriate boundary as soon as possible, without making the service user feel they have done something wrong. If a service user is distressed, it may be appropriate to console them with a touch on the arm, whilst offering support through presence (time and attention), tone of voice, or by offering tissues if they are tearful.

**Language**

The language used with adults and children must be appropriate, accessible and age-appropriate. Service users should be referred to by their names, which should not be shortened or substituted with a nickname unless they or their parent/ carer tell us they prefer this. Terms of endearment such as Mate, Love, Pet, Sweetheart should not be used.

**Sharing Personal Information**

Sutton Mencap staff and volunteers should not share personal information, such as home/ mobile telephone number, home address, personal e-mail, social media account details, etc. with service users, unless:

* it is necessary in the context of Sutton Mencap service delivery e.g. a mobile number to arrange to meet or collect a service user;
* there is a relationship that exists outside of Sutton Mencap e.g. as a family member or working independently as a p.a. for a service user.

Where the above applies, this must be raised with the staff/ volunteer members’ line manager.

Staff and volunteers should also be cautious about discussing their personal lives: holidays, families; friends; etc. Staff should be aware of the impact of sharing this information, e.g. in relation to the possible limitations of service users’ own life experiences and opportunities. Taking care in this area can also help service users learn and understand appropriate boundaries for themselves, e.g. around providing or asking for information from strangers.

**Social contact**

Sutton Mencap staff and volunteers should not visit people in their own homes outside of their work role; attend service users parties and events outside of their work role; give gifts to service users or invite service users to their home unless they have a relationship that exists outside of Sutton Mencap, e.g. as a family member or working independently as a p.a. for a service user. In such circumstances, staff/ volunteers must discuss this with their line manager.

Staff and volunteers should not accept personal gifts from service users or parents/ carers in the context of their role with Sutton Mencap. Where gifts are offered, staff can suggest that they are donated to Sutton Mencap as future raffle prizes, or in the case of consumables, shared between the staff team.

**Responsibilities**

Trustees

* To approve and review the policy on a regular basis
* To take reasonable steps to satisfy themselves that the policy is being implemented.

Senior staff

* To communicate the policy to other staff and volunteers and to ensure it is being implemented correctly.
* To engage constructively and provide further advice and support to staff and volunteers on issues related professional boundaries
* To monitor performance of the policy and report to trustees

All staff and volunteers

* To act in accordance with the policy
* To engage constructively with colleagues and to seek advice and support from and raise concerns with senior staff at the earliest opportunity.

**Related policies**

* Safeguarding
* Positive Behaviour Management
* Code of Conduct
* Whistleblowing

**Signed on behalf of the Trustee Board of Sutton Mencap**

**Chairman:  Date: 8th November 2017**

 **Mavis Peart**