



College of
Occupational Therapists
of British Columbia

COTBC Practice Standards for Professional Boundaries

Practice Standard #3: Preventing Professional Boundary Issues

#402-3795 Carey Road
Victoria, BC V8Z 6T8

Tel: (250) 386-6822
Toll-Free BC: (866) 386-6822
Fax: (250) 386-6824

Practice Standards for Professional Boundaries



Practice Standard #3: Preventing Professional Boundary Issues

Principle Statement:

The occupational therapist will take necessary actions and precautions to prevent or avoid boundary crossings and boundary violations.

Practice Expectations

The occupational therapist must do the following:

1. Establish, maintain, and communicate professional boundaries with the client, his or her family, and other stakeholders in both clinical and nonclinical settings.
2. Advise the client that his or her consent does not make a boundary violation permissible.
3. Provide the client with information on alternative options for receiving occupational therapy services in circumstances that have a potential for professional boundary issues.
4. Modify the practice setting or therapeutic approach to minimize any identified or emerging professional boundary concerns (e.g., ask the client whether he or she would like to invite a family member to attend, drape the client appropriately, dress appropriately, provide therapeutic rationale if offering services outside traditional practice settings, or create private professional treatment spaces).

Practice Standards for Professional Boundaries



Practice Standard #3: Preventing Professional Boundary Issues, continued

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The occupational therapist will take necessary actions and precautions to prevent or avoid boundary crossings and boundary violations.

Practice Expectations, continued

5. Touch clients in a therapeutic manner only, after reconfirming consent.
6. Avoid special or discriminatory treatment towards a particular client or organization, such as
 - preferentially scheduling client appointments;
 - billing irregularly (i.e., offering variable rates or bartering or exchanging health care services for services provided by the client);
 - providing personal telephone numbers or other means of nonprofessional contact (e.g., personal social media pages or email addresses);
 - receiving or exchanging gifts (refer to *Practice Standards for Conflict of Interest*); and
 - completing for clients activities that do not fall within the therapeutic relationship.

Practice Standards for Professional Boundaries



Practice Standard #3: Preventing Professional Boundary Issues, continued

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Practice Expectations, continued

7. Not exploit therapeutic relationships or the occupational therapist's professional status for any form of nontherapeutic or personal gain, benefit, or advantage. This includes obtaining access to privileged information or knowledge the occupational therapist receives in working with the client or organization.
8. Avoid participating in activities or establishing therapeutic relationships where the occupational therapist's objectivity, judgment, or competence could be impaired because of his or her present or previous familial, social, sexual, emotional, financial, supervisory, political, administrative, or legal relationships. For example, avoid entering into dual relationships with his or her own partner, past romantic partners, family members, friends, and colleagues, except in emergency or unavoidable situations, such as can occur when working in small, rural, or remote communities.

Practice Standards for Professional Boundaries



Practice Standard #3: Preventing Professional Boundary Issues, continued

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Practice Expectations, continued

9. Never enter into nontherapeutic relationships that could adversely affect an existing therapeutic relationship, or otherwise compromise the occupational therapist's objectivity, judgment, or competence. Examples include entering into nontherapeutic relationships with any of the following:
 - A current client.
 - A former client, unless it can be established that sufficient time has passed since the professional relationship ended and that it will not be reestablished. If the care provided involves an especially vulnerable client, the occupational therapist should never enter into a personal relationship with the client.
 - A client's parent, a colleague's client, or a client receiving care in the same service or area of practice.

Practice Standards for Professional Boundaries



Practice Standard #3: Preventing Professional Boundary Issues, continued

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Practice Expectations, continued

10. Provide colleagues with feedback if professional boundary issues or the potential for such issues are identified.
11. Apply any workplace policies and procedures related to professional boundaries. Where they do not exist or are insufficient, advocate for or participate in their development as able (e.g., policies related to consent, conflict of interest, personal financial relationships with clients, gift giving, dual relationships, and nontherapeutic interactions with clients).
12. Seek proper guidance if there are concerns about professional boundaries.