

Examples of Boundary Crossings

Sharing Personal Information

Polly is a 28 year-old home health aide with two children. Bess, a 90-year old widow, is one of Polly's patients. Polly is going through a divorce and seems to be on an emotional roller coaster lately. Polly feels better when she can talk about her situation. Recently, she has begun to share her experiences with Bess, including details of her ex-husband's infidelity, his failure to pay child support, her dire financial situation, and her children's unhappiness. Bess seems to be a sympathetic "ear" for Polly and listens attentively when Polly shares her experiences.

Not Seeing Behavior as Symptomatic

Carlos, a 40 year-old CNA in a nursing home, often provides cares for Jerry, a 72 year-old resident with Alzheimer's disease. Carlos has come to Jerry's room to assist him to the dining room for supper.

CNA Carlos says to Jerry, "It's dinnertime. Are you ready to go?" Jerry smiles at Carlos and says, "Ready." But then Jerry returns to watching TV. Carlos brings Jerry's walker to him, but Jerry continues to stare at the TV.

After several attempts to get Jerry up, Carlos becomes angry. He walks out of Jerry's room, muttering to himself, "The heck with Jerry, he can just go hungry tonight. I hate it when he ignores me like that! He knows it's dinnertime. He's just trying to annoy me!"

Using Nicknames/Endearments

Edward Maxwell is an 85 year-old resident of a nursing home. Professor Maxwell taught American History at the UW-Stout for many years and after retirement traveled widely with his wife. However, he is no longer able to care for himself and must rely on nursing home staff to assist him with eating, toileting, bathing, etc.

A new CNA, Melanie, age 19, enters Professor Maxwell's room and says, "Good morning, Sweetie. Are we ready for our bath?" Professor Maxwell says to Melanie in a gruff voice, "I'm not having a bath today, young lady. Get out of my room!" Melanie leaves, wondering why it's her bad luck to get stuck with such a crabby old man!

Touch

Michael is a 30 year-old caregiver in a CBRF. Marla is a 25 year-old woman with cerebral palsy and a cognitive disability. Unknown to Michael, Marla was assaulted several years ago by a former boyfriend.

One day, Michael walks into the kitchen and sees Marla, crying softly over her breakfast. Michael bends down and places his arm around Marla who suddenly begins to scream and cry harder. She shrinks away from Michael and looks at him with fear in her eyes. The owner of the CBRF comes out of his office and wants to know what Michael has "done" to Marla.

Professional Demeanor

Susie is a 22 year-old CNA at a nursing home in a small town. She is from a large family with four older brothers and a younger sister. As a child, Susie developed an aggressive and loud manner in order to stand up to her older siblings. But her loud voice and "salty" language have now landed Susie in trouble with her supervisor. In the last few months, three different residents have complained that Susie is being verbally abusive to them. Susie can't understand it—she always gets her cares done on time and even helps others out. She really cares about the residents, but she doesn't see any reason to pretend to be something she's not!

Accepting Gifts/Favors/Tips

Heidi is a 40 year-old personal care worker who travels to the homes of several clients each week. One of her clients is Marion, a 79 year-old single woman. Marion has no children but enjoys the company of her niece, Darla, on holidays.

Marion seems very lonely to Heidi. It's clear that Marion looks forward to the caregiver's visits. For the past few months, Marion has been insisting that Heidi take gifts from her. It started with a few small things, like a candle that Heidi admired. Now, Marion is offering Heidi her dining room table and chairs. Marion jokes that if Heidi doesn't take them, she will think that Heidi doesn't love her anymore. Heidi finally agrees to take the table and chairs, justifying that the furniture will get more use at her house.

Over-Involvement

Kia is a 25-year old hospice aide. About six months ago, she began to care for a terminally ill patient, Harry, in his home. Harry's wife, Brenda, is such a trooper and both of their children and grandchildren visit frequently. Kia admires Harry and his family—they seem like such a nice, loving group. Last month, Harry insisted on inviting Kia to a family birthday party at Harry and Brenda's home. Kia felt flattered that Harry invited her—she's feeling a little like family. Not only did Kia attend the party, but she stopped by on her day off to help Brenda prepare the meal and do a little vacuuming. Brenda asked Kia to pick up the birthday cake before the party, which Kia was happy to do.

Last week, Harry took a turn for the worse and Kia knows the end is very near. Although Kia has 5 years experience in caring for hospice patients, she finds herself very depressed at the thought of Harry's death. She will miss Harry and his family very much.

Sexual Attraction/Relationships

Sheila is a 32 year-old CNA who works in a CBRF that serves clients undergoing rehabilitation for addiction to controlled substances. One of the CBRF residents is Ray, a 25 year-old man with an addiction to prescription pain killers. Lately, Sheila finds herself “dressing up” more for work than usual. She is spending more time with Ray than other residents. Ray enjoys jogging, so Sheila has begun to stay after work to jog with him. Sheila says to herself that she’s being supportive of Ray. He seems to appreciate Sheila’s efforts, and Sheila has begun to touch or hug Ray more often. He’s asked her if she would like to go have pizza next week, just the two of them.

Yesterday, one of the other residents asked Sheila if she was “going steady” with Ray. Sheila’s supervisor overheard the comment and now Sheila is worried that her supervisor will misunderstand her relationship with Ray.

Keeping Secrets

Gloria is a 78-year old woman with Alzheimer’s-related dementia and hypertension who receives services from a home health agency. During a recent home visit, the agency RN supervisor noted that Gloria’s dementia is progressing to a point where she may soon need full-time skilled nursing care. Gloria is very upset at the prospect of leaving her home and refuses to consider a different living arrangement.

Yesterday, one of Gloria’s home health aides, David, arrived at Gloria’s home and discovered a burned dish towel in the kitchen sink. When David asked Gloria what happened, she says she turned on the stove and that someone must have left the dish towel on the burner. David also notices that Gloria has forgotten to take her medication again. Gloria begs David not to tell anyone about the towel or the meds. David isn’t sure what to do. He wants to respect Gloria’s rights and maintain patient confidentiality, and he doesn’t blame her for wanting to stay at home.