Policy #FS- 3 No. 102	**Effective date:** **07/2007**	**No. of Pages: 3**	**Supplemental Forms:** Professional & Personal Boundaries Hand out
REF: Family Service Credential Training and MRA, The Management Association Reviewed by Attorney and MHC	**PC Approval: 07/2007** **PC Revision Approval: July 20, 16**	**BOD Approval 7/2007** **BOD Revision Approval: July 28, 16**	**Revision Date(s):** 2016 **Review Date(s):** July 2018 Feb. 2020 04/28/21, 5/6/22, 5/16/23

SUBJECT: Professional Boundaries Policy

POLICY: RWCFS Head Start and Early Head Start staff shall not use their professional relationship for personal gain, or to enter into personal relationships that might impair the staff's effectiveness or safety in working with children and families.

PROCEDURE:

Staff may encounter compromising situations when working with:

a) **The families we serve.**
b) **Staff we supervise.**
c) **Community Partners.**
d) **The community at large.**

Staff, Families and Community Partners

Staff will build professional relationships with families and community partners so there is a flow of information that will allow the needs of the family or community partner to be met. A professional relationship is a working partnership in which the RWCFS Head Start or Early Head Start staff members maintain an open, transparent, supportive connection with the family or partner. The purpose of the connection is to engage and support the family or partner as they participate in agency services.

At no time should a staff person burden a family or community partner with their own personal concerns. In depth staff discussions with families or community partners about the staff member's health, money, spousal or friend relationships, or their feelings about their employment are inappropriate and may result in disciplinary action.

Staff will seek out the right answer or the best course of action in working with families, community partners, or in their role of supervision. It is not possible to cover every situation, so the following guidance is not comprehensive but includes best practice approaches for maintaining boundaries.

Staff performing doula services by nature of the doula job duties, may have different approaches to maintaining boundaries and should work especially closely with their supervisor when considering whether or not they are crossing any given boundary that would typically be considered a firm boundary.

Staff will follow guidance given in training, by their supervisor and in the Personnel Policies and Procedures Employee Handbook to make the best decision when there may not be a positive way to handle the situation.

Staff are encouraged to build professional relationships with families and community partners that support respectful and appropriate communication and information sharing that will allow the needs of the family or community partner to be met.

Staff working with parents and community partners will exercise care in expressing personal information and sharing personal views that may damage the working relationship between the agency and families, or the agency and community partners.

If asked about the program, and unsure of their answer, or information requested the staff person would get back to the person with correct information.

Staff will disclose any potential conflicts of interest, i.e., *already having a personal relationship* or *special friendship* they may have in working with a HS/EHS family so a determination may be made on how to best serve the family.

Staff will fulfil their job description *within the framework of the agency and work hours/time frame* they do their work in order to protect the agency from any liability for work done without the agency having knowledge.

Staff will work with and meet with families within their assigned work hours, asking and receiving approval from their immediate supervisor if/when any deviation to the typical schedule or overtime should be considered due to worker's knowledge of family needs.

Staff should not provide personal resources or money to a family and share the information with the family. *Staff may contribute to a collection for a donation to a family as long as it remains anonymous.*

Staff providing services under another entity, *such as their church,* or other helping agency will clarify with their supervisor and the family in question under which organization they are providing specific support services. Staff should avoid situations that are potentially conflicts of interest and discuss them with their supervisor when unsure.

Staff will use caution in writing letters to caregivers and community partners about compromising issues or controversial subjects. If a letter is written it should be approved by the Content Area Expert, Supervisor or Executive Director depending on the subject and sensitivity of the issue before sending the letter.

Staff should not engage in smoking, eating food, using alcohol or an exchange of goods when engaging with families in their homes. Staff are expected to provide respectful answers to families' if/when they are questioned on any of this and should seek support from supervisors or content area team if support with language would be helpful.

Staff are encouraged to inform families of their scheduled work hours and share with them when and how they will respond to questions and messages received from families.

Supervision of Staff and Professional Boundaries:

Supervisors are responsible for mentoring and supervising the staff who report to them. Supervisors must maintain appropriate professional boundaries with staff. If a supervisor has had a personal relationship with a staff member, the supervisor should remove him/herself from any situation where a decision affecting the staff member's employment may be made.

Supervisors may not directly supervise any staff member with whom the supervisor has or has had a romantic relationship, marriage, partnership or otherwise. Supervisors are required to take every possible action that will allow them to remain objective about each employee's accountability and work performance.

TRAINING:

Staff shall be provided with the Professional Boundaries Policy on an annual basis. Staff working directly with families and community partners will receive Professional Boundaries Training and handout.

SAFETY:

At no time should a staff person put themselves, a community partner or volunteer in danger when working with a family where potential or actual issues within the home or neighborhood present a safety concern or hazard.

At no time should a staff person visit a domestic violence situation that is suspected of being imminent or in progress during or after work hours. This includes moving a parent out of their home or transporting them to another residence or shelter.

During work hours if a staff person receives a call or text regarding a suicide concern- there should be a conversation: Do they have suicidal thoughts? Do they have a plan? What is their location and have they phoned a crisis line? If the answer is yes, they have suicidal thoughts and they do have a suicide plan let the person know you will need to call 911. The staff person will call 911 and alert their supervisor immediately.

If this should occur after your work hours and you have left your work phone on, and you listen to a message or read a text- staff will need to call 911 and alert their supervisor.

MONITORING: **Following this policy, staff will be able to respond to diverse situations while maintaining professional conduct allowing staff to avoid putting themselves or the program in any compromising positions. When staff have doubts, they should discuss concerns with their immediate supervisor or another manager.**