

## **PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES**

The County of Sullivan (the County) strongly believes that a work environment where employees maintain clear boundaries between employee, personal, and business interactions is necessary for effective operations. This policy does not prohibit the development of friendships or romantic relationships between co-workers, but it does establish boundaries regarding relationships within the work environment, during working hours.

Individuals in supervisory or managerial roles, and those with authority over others' terms and conditions of employment, are subject to more stringent requirements under this policy due to their status as role models, their access to sensitive information, and their ability to affect the employment of individuals in subordinate positions.

Individuals providing services to clients are responsible to maintain appropriate boundaries in their professional relationship. It is the employee's responsibility to demonstrate that a client has not been exploited, or coerced, intentionally or unintentionally. Although employees in certain positions may need to exercise professional judgment in what this entails, it is expected that any action taken by an employee of the County will be consistent with industry or professional norms. Further, employees in a given profession are to adhere to any ethical obligations they may possess.

Employees are expected not to engage in dual relationships with clients of the County in which there may be a perception or possibility that the employee's professional judgment or actions could be questioned as potentially improper. Dual relationships include, but are not limited to:

- a. Accepting as a client anyone with whom you have had any prior personal relationship when the circumstances would make it difficult to separate the role of County employee with the relationship;
- b. Forming a sexual relationship with a current client or someone who has been your client;
- c. Treating clients to whom you are related by blood or legal ties;
- d. Taking action for one client but not providing the same relevant service to another client;
- e. Bartering with clients for the provision of services; and
- f. Entering into financial relationships with clients other than their paying for County services.

**Obligations and Expectations Under This Policy**

1. During working time and in working areas, employees are expected to conduct themselves in an appropriate, professional manner that does not interfere with others' work or with overall productivity.
2. At all times within or around the workplace, employees engaging in personal exchanges should observe an appropriate workplace manner to avoid offending other workers or putting others in an uncomfortable position.
3. Employees are strictly prohibited from engaging in physical contact that would in any way be deemed inappropriate in the workplace pursuant to County policy, whether during working hours or not.
4. Employees are expected to always put their professional responsibilities over personal relationships with co-workers.
5. Employee off-duty conduct is generally regarded as private, as long as such conduct does not have a nexus to the workplace. An exception to this principle, however, is romantic or sexual relationships between supervisors and subordinates or professional licensing requirements.
6. Any supervisor, manager, executive or other official in a sensitive or influential position with the County must disclose the existence of a romantic or sexual relationship with another co-worker. Disclosure may be made to the individual's immediate supervisor or the Commissioner of HR. The County will review the circumstances to determine whether any conflict of interest exists.
7. When a conflict-of-interest or potential risk is identified due to a County official's relationship with a co-worker, the County will work with the parties involved to consider options for resolving the problem. The initial solution may be to make sure the parties no longer work together on matters where one is able to influence the other or take-action for the other. Matters such as hiring, firing, promotions, performance management, compensation decisions and financial transactions are examples of situations that may require reallocation of duties to avoid any actual or perceived reward or disadvantage. In some cases, other measures may be necessary, such as transfer of one or both parties to other positions, shifts or departments. Employees are expected to cooperate in this process.
8. The provisions of this policy apply to all employees.

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9. Where doubts exist as to the specific meaning of the terms used above, employees should refer any questions regarding the meaning of the terms to the Commissioner of HR.
10. Any concerns about the overall administration of this policy should be addressed to the Commissioner of HR.