



Professional Boundaries Policy

Safe, warm and professional relationships

Assisting Parents with Children Affected by Mental Health
Registered Charity Number 1186256

Version	1.0
Adopted	March 2026
Approved by	The Board of Trustees, signed on its behalf by Lauren Ridley, Chair of Trustees
Policy owner	CEO
Next review	March 2027, or sooner if legislation or guidance changes
Applies to	All trustees, staff, volunteers, placement students and contractors

At a Glance

Warm and professional: APCAM's relationships with children, young people and families are warm, caring and built on trust. They are also professional relationships, with clear boundaries that keep everyone safe and make sure our support is about the family's needs, not our own.

- **Our role is time-limited and purposeful:** we are not friends, family or a substitute for statutory services.
- **No personal contact or social media connections** with service users.
- **No gifts, money, favours or private arrangements** beyond what this policy allows.
- **If in doubt, ask:** talk to your supervisor before, not after.

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1. Purpose

Professional boundaries are the limits that protect the space between a worker's power and a service user's vulnerability. They keep children, young people and families safe, protect staff and volunteers from allegations and burnout, and make sure APCAM's support is fair and consistent.

Boundaries can be especially hard to hold in community-based, relational work like APCAM's, where we support families over long periods, in their homes and in a close-knit community, and where many of us bring our own lived experience. This policy sets out what is expected.

2. Key Principles

- The relationship exists to meet the needs of the child, young person or family, not the needs of the worker.
- Workers hold more power in the relationship, even when it does not feel that way.
- Behaviour should be open, transparent and able to be explained to a manager.
- Boundaries apply in person, online and outside working hours.
- It is the worker's responsibility to hold the boundary, not the service user's.

3. Expected Standards

Area	What is expected
Contact	Use only APCAM phones, email and approved platforms. Do not share personal numbers, addresses or social media. Keep contact within working hours unless agreed for a specific reason.
Social media	No connections with service users, past or present, in line with the Social Media Policy.
Gifts	Small tokens of thanks, such as a card or chocolates under about £25 in value, may be accepted and recorded in the gifts register. Larger gifts, money or vouchers must be politely declined or passed to APCAM. Never give personal gifts to service users.
Money and favours	Never lend, borrow, buy, sell or hold money or property for service users, witness legal documents, or provide private services, such as paid tutoring or childcare.
Self-disclosure	Share personal information only when it clearly helps the person, and keep it brief. See the Lived Experience Policy.
Physical contact	Keep it appropriate, child-initiated or necessary for safety. Never in a way that could be misinterpreted.
Transport	Only in line with the Safeguarding Policy, with approval, insurance and consent.
Time and favouritism	Treat families fairly. Do not give extra time or attention because you like someone, or less because you do not.
Secrets	Never ask a child to keep a secret, and never promise to keep one.
Relationships	Romantic or sexual relationships with service users or their family members are strictly prohibited, during and after support.

4. Advocacy and Parent Support

Parent support and advocacy, including attending school meetings, EHCP reviews, housing and Early Help meetings, can blur boundaries because workers are acting on a family's behalf.

Workers must:

- support families to use their own voice, rather than speaking for them without agreement;
- act within their competence and not give legal, financial or medical advice. Signpost to specialist services such as SENDIASS, IPSEA or Citizens Advice instead;
- avoid promising outcomes;
- stay professional and respectful with schools and other agencies, even when challenging them;
- not take on tasks that belong to statutory services or that create dependency.

5. Dual Relationships

A dual relationship happens when a worker has another connection with a service user, for example as a relative, friend, neighbour, fellow school parent, member of the same club or faith group, or customer of their business. In a small community this is sometimes unavoidable.

Workers must:

- declare any existing connection to the CEO as soon as they become aware of it;
- not work directly with a family they know personally, unless agreed by the CEO with safeguards in place;
- never use their APCAM role to gain information about people they know personally.

Invitations to personal events, such as birthdays, weddings or funerals, must be discussed with a manager before being accepted.

6. Warning Signs

Boundaries usually erode gradually. Be alert to these signs in yourself and colleagues:

- thinking about a service user a lot outside work, or feeling you are the only one who can help them;
- giving out personal contact details or responding outside agreed times;
- keeping secrets with a service user, or not recording contact;
- sharing personal problems with a service user;
- feeling defensive about a relationship when it is discussed in supervision;
- treating one child or family very differently from others.

Noticing these signs is not a failure. Talk about them in supervision so that the boundary can be reset.

7. Ending Support Well

Endings matter, particularly for children and families who have experienced loss. Workers will plan endings in advance, prepare the family, explain any onward support, and not continue

contact once support ends. If a former service user makes contact, the worker should let their manager know.

8. Supervision, Reporting and Breaches

- Boundaries are a standing item in supervision for anyone working directly with families.
- Anyone concerned about a colleague's boundaries should raise it with their line manager, the CEO or under the Whistleblowing Policy.
- Low-level concerns will be recorded and addressed, in line with the Child Protection Policy.
- Breaches may lead to disciplinary action. Any breach that suggests a risk to a child will be referred to the LADO.

9. Monitoring and Review

The Board of Trustees will monitor how this policy is working through regular reports from the CEO, feedback from staff, volunteers and service users, and learning from any incidents or complaints. This policy will be reviewed annually by the policy owner, or sooner if legislation, statutory guidance or APCAM's services change.

10. Related Policies and Legal Framework

10.1 Related APCAM policies

- Safeguarding Policy 2026 (including WeGame)
- Child Protection Policy and Procedures 2026
- Social Media Policy 2026
- Lived Experience Policy 2026
- Lone Working Policy 2026
- Therapeutic Disclosures Policy 2026
- Confidentiality Policy 2026
- Whistleblowing Policy 2026
- Code of Conduct

10.2 Legislation and guidance

- APCAM Constitution (Foundation model CIO constitution, last amended 20 September 2019)
- Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026
- Sexual Offences Act 2003 (abuse of position of trust)
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- BACP Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions
- National Youth Agency: Ethical conduct in youth work

Approval

Approved by	The Board of Trustees, by resolution in line with clause 13 of the APCAM Constitution
Signed on behalf of the Board	Lauren Ridley, Chair of Trustees
Signature	
Date adopted	March 2026
Next review	March 2027
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