

# CareCertify LLC

## Behavioral Health Series

### BHS-023

# Boundaries, Ethics & Professional Conduct in BH Care

## Participant Guide

Group: Group 4: Advanced Topics | Credit Hours: 1.0

For Home Health Aides, CNAs, PCAs, DSPs & Direct Care Staff

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## Learning Objectives

Upon completing this course, you will be able to:

- Define professional boundaries and explain why they protect clients and caregivers
- Identify boundary violations and dual relationships
- Apply ethical decision-making principles in challenging situations
- Understand mandatory reporting and professional conduct obligations
- Recognize and respond appropriately to ethical dilemmas in home care

## Section 1: What Are Professional Boundaries?

Professional boundaries are the limits that define the appropriate therapeutic relationship between a caregiver and a client. They protect clients from harm and exploitation, and they protect caregivers from professional and legal consequences. In behavioral health home care, boundaries are especially important because the work is intimate and emotionally intense.

### Why Boundaries Exist

Boundaries protect clients from:

- Exploitation, manipulation, or harm by those in power
- Confusion about the nature of the professional relationship
- Dependency on a caregiver beyond what is appropriate

Boundaries protect caregivers from:

- Legal and professional liability
- Emotional exhaustion and burnout
- Being drawn into unhealthy or exploitative dynamics

## Section 2: Types of Boundary Violations

Boundary violations exist on a spectrum, from minor crossings to serious breaches. Many violations begin gradually — called "slippery slope" dynamics — and escalate over time.

### Examples of Boundary Violations

MINOR CROSSINGS (often gradual entry points):

- Sharing personal information about your own life
- Accepting gifts from clients
- Using terms of endearment beyond professional norms

SERIOUS VIOLATIONS:

- Financial transactions with clients
- Social media connections with clients

- Sexual contact or romantic relationships
- Providing care outside scheduled hours without authorization
- Making decisions for the client that override their autonomy

Dual Relationship: a situation where you have a personal relationship with a client in addition to the professional one.

### Section 3: Ethical Decision-Making

Ethical dilemmas occur when two or more values are in conflict and there is no clear "right" answer. A systematic approach to ethical decision-making helps caregivers navigate these situations.

#### Ethical Decision-Making Steps

1. Identify the ethical issue — what values are in conflict?
2. Gather relevant information — what do you know about the situation?
3. Consider your obligations — what does your role require?
4. Consider client rights and autonomy
5. Consult your supervisor before acting
6. Document the dilemma and how it was resolved

#### SCENARIO

Your client, an elderly woman with depression, asks you to help her draft a letter leaving her home to you in her will. She says you are the only person she trusts.

Response: Decline clearly but kindly: "I am so honored that you trust me — and because I care about you, I cannot accept anything like this. It would not be appropriate for our relationship." Do not accept. Report the situation to your supervisor immediately. This is a serious boundary and potential legal matter.

### Section 4: Professional Conduct Standards

Professional conduct encompasses the standards of behavior expected of home care workers in all settings. These standards protect clients, the agency, and the profession.

✓ DO	✗ DON'T
Maintain confidentiality about client health information at all times	Discuss clients with family members, friends, or on social media
Document honestly and accurately	Accept money, gifts, or personal favors from clients

Report concerns, incidents, and boundary violations to your supervisor	Provide care outside your scope of practice
Show up on time, prepared, and professionally presented	Use your phone excessively during client visits
Treat all clients with dignity regardless of their diagnosis or behavior	Engage in romantic, sexual, or personal financial relationships with clients

### Section 5: Ethical Dilemmas in Behavioral Health Home Care

Behavioral health home care presents specific ethical tensions that are more complex than in other care settings. Understanding these prepares you to navigate them thoughtfully.

- Client autonomy vs. safety: the right to make choices that may be harmful
- Confidentiality vs. mandatory reporting: when safety requires disclosure
- Professional distance vs. therapeutic connection: warmth without boundary violation
- Client requests vs. scope of practice: managing expectations within your role
- Personal values vs. professional obligations: serving clients regardless of personal beliefs

### Quick Reference Summary

<b>Boundary Violation Examples</b>	Gifts, personal disclosure, social media, financial dealings, romantic contact
<b>Ethical Decision Steps</b>	Identify issue, gather facts, consider obligations, consult supervisor, document
<b>Dual Relationship</b>	A personal relationship that overlaps with the professional one
<b>Professional Conduct Core</b>	Confidentiality, honest documentation, punctuality, dignity, scope of practice
<b>Slippery Slope</b>	Gradual boundary erosion that begins with small crossings