

Eleven Guidelines for Preserving Boundaries

To Counsel or Not to Counsel

- Do not attempt to counsel anyone unless you are trained as a counselor.
- Do not attempt to counsel victims or survivors of abuse or abusers without special training in this area. Refer them to an appropriate care provider with specialized training.

Setting Limits

- Avoid counseling in any setting that might suggest dating or other social interaction.
- Limit the length and number of sessions in advance.

Sexual Feelings

- Be aware of any sexual feelings toward congregants, clients, employees, students, staff, etc. (Expect to have these feelings.)
- Acknowledge these feelings to yourself, to a supervisor, and/or in consultation session—not to the individual who is the object of those feelings nor to any other congregant or staff member.

Sexualized Behavior

- Do not attempt to sexualize any professional relationship.
- If a congregant or staff member engages in sexualized behavior towards you, do

not respond in kind. Rather maintain your role as spiritual leader and consult with a colleague, consultant, or supervisor.

Stress Management and Self-care

- Provide for your own physical, psychological, and spiritual self-care with recreational times, time off to care for self or family, retreats, educational leave, etc. To assess how you are doing with this, list activities you engage in outside of your congregation. (Institutions have an obligation to support individuals' self-care efforts through financial support and generous leave policies.)

Dual Relationships

- Do not enter into a dual relationship in which you are both spiritual leader and lover or partner to a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, etc. If you and one of these persons agree to pursue an intimate relationship, end your role as spiritual leader.
- Try to avoid dual relationships with congregants, clients, employees, students, staff, etc., in which you relate to an individual in two capacities.
- Try to avoid dual relationships in which you are both spiritual leader and friend.
- If a dual relationship is unavoidable (for example, if you work in a small community,

supervise employees and serve as their spiritual leader, or serve as priest in a seminary where you also teach), discuss the inherent problems and possible consequences with the individuals involved, establish whatever boundaries you can to limit the duality, mutually decide upon strategies for protecting the relationship you have as the other's spiritual leader, and be open about the duality.

Personal Relationships and Intimacy Needs

- Attend to your personal and familial relationships. Maintain and nurture them.
- Assess whether you are meeting your needs in this area by listing the relationships you have with people who are not members of your congregation.

Workaholism and Burnout

- Be clear about your job description and the accompanying expectations. (Obviously, institutions must take the first step by providing job descriptions and specifying expectations.)
- When you encounter situations beyond your expertise, consult and refer. If your workload seems unreasonable or unmanageable, discuss this with a supervisor or consultant and see what can be done to improve the situation.

Supervision and Evaluation

- Ask a supervisor to meet with you periodically to review your position and work if your supervisor does not do this on his/her own initiative.

Isolation

- Maintain contact with colleagues.
- Consult regularly with peers, friends, and supervisors.

Spiritual Practice

- Engage in regular prayer and meditation.

—adapted from Marie M. Fortune, *Clergy Misconduct: Sexual Abuse in the Ministerial Relationship*