Professionalism

Professionalism means working in a professional way, or always doing your best. As a professional you show pride in yourself and your work. You show professionalism in the way you look, talk, and act.

Professionalism is important in any type of work setting, but it is especially important and perhaps more challenging in the home care profession due to the nature of the work and being in a client’s home as a guest and to provide care, and the balance of the two roles.

Having a good relationship with home care clients can be rewarding. Providing care in a setting that enables one- to- one care offers opportunities for the client to be able to stay in their home and for the In-home aide to build strong relationships with the client and family.

These relationships can feel rewarding to both the client and the In-home aide. While having that positive and caring relationship is important to the client’s care, it is also important to remember that as an employee of an agency and as a home care provider in the home, certain standards need to be upheld. These standards help you to maintain a professional relationship with the client and family. It is possible to have a caring helpful relationship and maintain professional boundaries with clients and families. It is important to remind yourself each day that you are a professional and professional relationships with clients are important for both you and the client. Most agencies will have policies about maintaining professional relationships with clients.

The policies will most likely address issues such as receiving gifts from clients, changing the assigned tasks at the client or family’s request without checking with the supervisor, not reporting changes in the client’s condition, discussing the client’s care outside of the allowed discussions under privacy laws (such as with friends, family, church members, Facebook or other social media). Policies may also address a certain dress code that you need to follow in order to maintain a professional appearance (including wearing a name badge to identify yourself) and treating clients with dignity and respect.

How you appear by the way you dress and speak sets the tone for a caring, professional relationship and first impressions are important. Professional attire sends the message that you are serious about your job.

These policies are in place for a reason and help to protect you in a situation where there could be a misunderstanding, such as accepting money, jewelry, and other valuable items from a client as a “bonus” which could later be considered by others as stealing from the client. Adhering to your agency policies helps protect your good name as an aide, which is a gift not only to others, but to yourself! If you are required to handle a client’s money for shopping, be sure to know your agency policies regarding handling clients’ money and obtaining receipts. These policies are in place to help protect you and the client.

Ethics deal with right and wrong. It is having a sense of duty and responsibility toward others and situations and guides us to do what we should do.

Always act in the best interest of the client!
**Aspects of Professionalism in Home Care**

**Competence**- Being competent means properly or sufficiently qualified or capable or efficient. If you are competent, you have the necessary ability or skills to do something. (vocabulary.com dictionary). Being aware of your learning needs and communicating those to your agency supervisor is a professional responsibility.

Being competent for all assigned tasks is part of professionalism. As an In-home aide, your education and training may not have covered every task you might encounter in your work. As an example, you may have learned basic information about Hoyer lifts, but, if you do not use the lifts regularly, you may need a refresher in how to use them safely for client transfers. Hoyer lifts are different and are not all alike, add that to the client’s environment, (e.g. crowded space to use a lift), a person’s physical size (relative to the size of the lift), along with other safety factors, and this is one example of how important it is that you are competent and confident in this skill. You can transfer this concept to other skills as well, especially related to client transfers or other tasks that could potentially be dangerous for the client or yourself. Notify your supervisor for ongoing educational needs.

**Communication**- Open communication with your supervisor is an important component of professionalism. Communication must be a two-way process between you and your supervisor. As an In-home aide, you should ask questions and seek clarification for any assigned tasks or other issues that you need to discuss with your supervisor (i.e. safety issues in the home, situations that make you uncomfortable in the home, etc). You may also need help from your supervisor in maintaining boundaries. Please don’t hesitate to reach out for help. Good communication skills and using professional language are important and go a long way in helping us avoid “boundary” problems with clients and families.

**Social Media**- Most people use some form of social media - Facebook, Instagram, snap chat, and others. Keep in mind that it is a Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) law violation to post any information or pictures about your clients (even if you don’t use the client’s name in a description, it can be figured out who the person is). Never post pictures of clients or pose with clients for pictures on social media. Sharing pictures or selfies from your client’s homes, with identifiable information in the picture is another way to breach confidentiality (even if it’s not a picture of the client or with the client, it is possible to see information in the background that can identify the client). Do not mix your personal and professional life with social media. Common myths with social media are that a post is private and accessible only to whom it was sent to (in reality, the content once posted can be sent to others). There is also a mistaken belief that content deleted from a site is no longer accessible (in reality, once posted it lives on a server). In NC and federally, the definition of abuse includes abuse facilitated or enabled through the use of technology (and abuse is a reportable allegation).

**Overstep of responsibilities**- Most people who are in the business of caring for others are by nature caring and compassionate people who want to make a difference in the lives of those to whom care is provided. As an In-home aide, providing caring, quality and competent care according to the client’s plan of care is your responsibility. There may be times when your caring extends to areas outside of your responsibility and that is when professional boundaries may get crossed. As an In-home care provider, you will see needs of the clients you care for in other areas of their life such as social (relationships with friends, family, spouse), environmental (house repairs needed, pests in home, etc.), economic (if there is enough money for food, medications, housing, etc.). As an In-home caregiver, you may want to help your clients in these areas. As a professional, the way to help a client with issues you observe in the home are to report client needs to your supervisor. With the client’s permission there are ways your agency can help by making referrals and coordinating other services to meet the client’s needs. There are services that can help with home repairs, pest eradication, help with buying medications, food, counseling and other types of assistance programs.
Let your client know that you must follow your agency policies if you are asked to do anything outside of what you have been assigned to do. It is ok to let a client know that you must speak to your supervisor first. Notify your supervisor if you feel like the client or family member is asking you to do anything that is not allowed in agency policy or according to the plan of care, or if you are unclear about your agency policy.

What kinds of relationships are appropriate for you to establish with your home care clients?

- **Respectful relationships** for the client and their home and belongings as well as respect for yourself as a home care provider in wanting to provide quality home care services
- **Friendly relationships** with your clients in which you are able to build a caring relationship and provide care that is appropriate and that involves the client’s wishes and is part of the plan of care and your assignment
- **Dependable relationships** in which you arrive at the client’s home when you are assigned to arrive, or you notify your supervisor or the client according to your agency policy
- **Trusting relationships** in which you properly protect the client’s health information and privacy and their belongings

From the onset, the **in-home aide supervisor and the in-home aide** must define the relationship with the client as **professional** and based on common goals as defined in the plan of care. Boundary crossings are actions or interactions **outside a professional relationship**. The distinction is often difficult to make. Be aware of your feelings and behaviors and always act in the best interest of your clients. Good communication skills and using professional language are important and go a long way in helping avoid boundary problems.

**Examples of Crossing the Professional Boundary**

- Giving personal information about yourself (excessive self-disclosure, discussing personal problems with your client, discussing financial problems with your client)
- Running errands for the client on your days off
- Calling clients and/or their family for personal reasons not related to your duties
- Lending personal items or **taking loans** from the client
- Giving or **receiving gifts** (many clients forget that they have given a gift or sold something to those working in their home. When they discover a “missing” item, clients may accuse the home care aide of stealing that object). At times you may want to give a gift to a client for a special occasion such as a birthday or holiday, think of gifts that do not cost anything monetarily, such as helping to write a letter, reading a story, listening to stories of the “good old days”, helping the client to put on special clothes, and other ways to acknowledge the client on a special day.

As an In-home aide, there is a partnership between you and your employer (agency). You are part of the home care agency team and an asset to your agency and clients. You can expect certain rights as an employee. As an employee, you have a right:

- to be paid for the work you perform
- to a safe working environment
- to be supervised and to have access to your supervisor anytime you are in a client’s home
- to be evaluated regarding your performance and informed of the results of your evaluation
- to receive information regarding your agency’s personnel policies, job description, and code of behavior
- to be treated with respect
- to receive needed education and training for the work you are required to perform