

Setting boundaries for volunteers

March 2017

This Tip Sheet is designed to give guidance to organisations about how to develop safe and respectful workplaces for both volunteers and clients.

Why are boundaries important in volunteering?

Volunteers add so much value to organisations. Some volunteer roles, however, can involve close contact with the clients of an organisation. They might develop close relationships through roles such as:

- a) Home visiting
- b) Mentoring
- c) Befriending
- d) Counselling
- e) Advice and support

Setting boundaries is important, particularly in roles where a close relationship or bond can be formed. Boundaries are important to give structure to the volunteer role. Boundaries also help protect both the volunteer and the client.

It is particularly important to have clear boundaries where volunteers may be giving services or contacting with children or vulnerable adults - see our [Fact Sheet on Background Checks](#) for more information on this topic.

Boundaries for volunteers and clients

Volunteering Tasmania has some tips to promote respectful relationships between volunteers and clients.

Be clear about the relationship

- a) Give clear guidelines on the purpose of the volunteer role.
- b) Give the volunteer specific instructions on the tasks in the volunteer Position Description.

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Be clear about the relationship (contd)

- c) Make sure the volunteer is aware of any policies or procedures that give guidance to interacting with clients.
- d) Have clear grievance and conflict resolution procedures for both the volunteer and the client to use if they feel uncomfortable with the relationship.

One-way relationship

Boundaries are important as they help make sure the relationship is a one way relationship. Make sure the volunteer knows they are there to support the needs of the client – not to establish a friendship.

Limit the time

It is important to be clear with both the volunteer and the client that the length of the relationship is limited to the length of time the services are required by the client. The volunteer/client relationship ends when the contact with the client is over.

Crossing the line

Even with good practice in place, there may be occasions where you feel a volunteer or client has crossed a boundary. See our [Tip Sheets](#) for advice around conflict resolution or parting ways with a volunteer.