

# UNIT 4



Youth Art by Matthew Prebeg

# SAFETY

## BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are a set of guidelines, rules or limits that a person creates to help themselves identify safe and permissible ways for other people to behave around them and how they will respond when someone steps outside those limits.<sup>25</sup> They are built out of a mix of beliefs, opinions, attitudes, past experiences and social learning. **Boundaries define who we are as individuals through helping us to create ownership and protection of ourselves.**

**Our boundaries are fluid and may change day to day, or hour to hour.** It is important to check in with ourselves because, for example, one day we may be uncomfortable with giving a hug and we may feel totally fine with hugs the next day.

As peer support workers, there is a responsibility to set boundaries which will positively impact yourself and the individual that you're working with and keep you professional. **Our boundaries allow us to not only take better care of ourselves, but also allow us to be more effective and compassionate peer workers.** We are also bound by the boundaries of our workplace, which includes things like confidentiality and a duty to report.

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Some boundaries are implied as social norms (e.g. don't eat someone else's food without permission) and some we must be explicit with (e.g. please don't stand in between me and the door in this small office as it makes me nervous). If we explicitly state our boundaries and someone crosses them, that is a breach and that means it's time to reach out to our supervisor or a colleague to talk about what to do next to keep everyone safe.



In this journal entry, reflect on boundaries in your own life that keep you safe and comfortable with the people in your life.

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Reflect on the following scenarios and think about what your boundaries are for each example.

Would you...

Spend time in your home with your peer?

Talk about sex with your peer?

Lend your peer money?

Ask your peer to lend you their belongings?

Discuss your personal information with your peer?

Hug a peer?

Phone your peer late at night?

Hang out with your peer outside of work?

Follow your peer on social media?

Explain:  
Yes/No/  
Maybe  
because...

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**Especially because peer support workers are close to clients in both age and some experiences, the lines can start to become blurred between friendship and peer support.**

**In groups of 2-4, brainstorm a list of guidelines for friends.**

Some examples include:

- Don't talk behind your friend's back.
- If a friend asks you for help, do what you can for them.
- Be respectful and show up on time for meetings.



**After completing the list, highlight or underline which guidelines apply to youth peer support work. For the guidelines that do not apply, consider how you would change or reword it. Some guidelines might not work at all no matter how you change it.**

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# CONFIDENTIALITY

When something is confidential, it means that you are being trusted with private information.

**When something is confidential, it means that you are being trusted with private information.** Your work may require you to collaborate with other professionals to support clients. Confidential practice means you must obtain explicit consent from your client before communicating any information on their behalf with others. Many agencies provide standard forms for clients to sign and acknowledge their personal health information (PHI) is being collected and/or shared. In Ontario, you must obtain a client's permission and consent to collect, use, and share personal information. You can inform yourself on your and your client's privacy rights by visiting the Privacy Commissioner of Ontario's website.

There are going to be times when your peer tells you something that they maybe have never told anyone else. Confidentiality is a cornerstone of peer relationships because it builds trust. Confidentiality is also important when it comes to this training and the story telling that will take place within it. The places that you will work as peer support workers will also have their own confidentiality policies. As someone working in the field of mental health, you do have a duty to report for certain things that may require a breach of confidentiality.

**There are certain situations where you are legally required to breach confidentiality without the client's explicit consent in the interest of keeping everyone safe.** These are called limits to confidentiality.

There are certain situations where you are legally required to breach confidentiality in the interest of keeping everyone safe. These are often referred to as the limits to confidentiality and may require the peer support worker to report what you've heard to an authority, such as your agency or a government body, like child protection services. If you think you have heard something that you may need to report, be sure to contact your agency supervisor immediately.

**A useful way of keeping trust between you and your peer while also upholding your own duty to report is by being very transparent about your ability to keep secrets.** At the beginning of working with someone, remind them of the limits to confidentiality so there are never any surprises should you have to break confidentiality. Saying something like "Of course, always feel free to speak about whatever you're comfortable with, however in the case of... I will need to let someone else know what's going on."



# Limits to Confidentiality

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For peer support work, the limits to confidentiality are the following:

**often referred to as “The Limits...”**

**If the individual you're working with says anything that makes you feel they are a risk to themselves or others;**



**If the individual you're working with says anything that leads you to believe that a child or a vulnerable adult is being or will be abused or neglected**



**If you are subpoenaed to testify in a court case or a court order is issued for your records**



**keeping trust**  
being very transparent about your ability to keep secrets. Saying something like...



**“You can tell me things if you need, I won't say anything unless...”**

**If you think you have heard something that you may need to report, be sure to contact your agency supervisor immediately.**

**· F O U N D R Y ·**

## BREACHING CONFIDENTIALITY

Relationship and trust are central to peer support work. It's very likely that the ability to build strong, supportive relationships with youth in your community was a major motivator that led you to this work. Since you are closer in age with peers, or share experiences with them, youth may be more likely to share personal or private experiences with a peer support worker than a doctor or someone that feels like they have more professional distance. This can be one of the most fulfilling parts of the work, and something that helps us to see and feel the value in what you do.

There may come a time during a conversation with a young person where you may be required to break confidentiality and report elements of your conversation. This could be related to something they disclose and/or related to the age of the person you are supporting. **Things like violence in the home, vulnerability to sexual exploitation, lack of basic needs like food and shelter, etc., are safety issues for youth and as mentioned above there is a legal duty to report if your client shares something like this with you.**



In 2018, the age of protection in Ontario was raised to include youth up to 18 years old. Youth who are 16 and 17 years old are now eligible to receive protection services from Children's Aid Societies. While reporting for 16 and 17-year old youth is not mandatory, people are encouraged to contact local Children's Aid Society if you have concerns for a youth.<sup>26</sup> It can be stressful to feel like you have to go "behind your client's back" or involve a service like Children's Aid (CAS) even if they might not understand why, or if they would prefer that you wouldn't.

Having the confidentiality of a conversation breached can be very intimidating or scary for youth clients. Often they may worry that a call to CAS could create conflict in their home, or that police may be involved which could create a feeling that their problem is getting bigger or outside of their individual control. Some people may have had previous experiences with these agencies and are fearful of their involvement. They may feel as though you are going against their wishes, or as though you are making decisions for them. As peer support workers - often with personal experiences with trauma - empathizing with these feelings and understanding them is supported by our own lived experience. It can be very challenging to feel like you have to make a decision that could upset a peer, or potentially affect the trust that you have been building with young people in your community.

In these cases, it is always important to remember why these services exist. Not having access to a supportive home or being exposed to potential violence are safety risks for youth we work with. As peer support workers, empathetic and understanding conversations and providing clients with resources and methods to support themselves can be helpful. However, there is a limit when it comes to actually intervening or providing things like housing or in-home advocacy to youth. Structures like CAS - though imperfect - exist to explore safer options for the young people in our communities, and have access to resources beyond our capacity to provide.

**It is also important to recognize clients as capable, resilient, and autonomous individuals.**

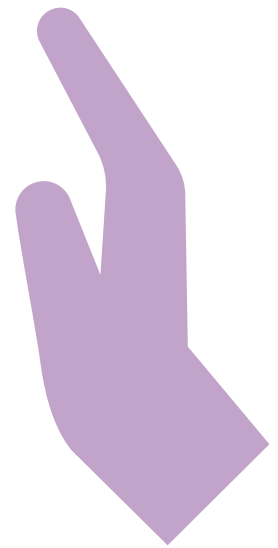
Many of us can think of times in our own lives when we have felt powerless, or as though people are making decisions for us. This can be incredibly stressful, and - especially for youth from marginalized populations - can recreate feelings of violence and a lack of personal control over how we are treated by support services. Of course, this is not something you want to make peers feel, and so there can be a delicate balancing act between wanting to respect our clients as capable of making their own decisions while also recognizing when they have so much on their plate that they may require assistance and intervention beyond what they can reasonably provide for themselves.

Something that may be helpful could be to think about these interactions in terms of consent. While they may have a legal obligation to report certain things, we do have an opportunity to prevent youth from feeling as though things are being “sprung” on them, or as though they don’t understand why certain things are happening. **A practice that may be helpful for you would be to begin a first meeting with a new client by explaining what sorts of topics and disclosures may require a duty to report.**

This is a good opportunity to explain why certain things may require the involvement of another entity, as well as to allow your youth to ask questions about what would happen if you had to call CAS, for example, or if they disclosed to you that they were actively suicidal. **Giving our clients an opportunity to learn about the limits of confidentiality, as well as the reasoning behind this, gives them the power to act autonomously and make an informed decision about sharing or disclosing certain things.**

As peer support workers, we are in a unique position of being able to support youth through these processes. Depending on the policy and practice of your individual agency, it could potentially be a relationship-preserving measure to involve the youth in a CAS or crisis services call, or to offer to accompany them to the hospital for intake. So often, our clients can feel as though they are being shuttled around to faceless organizations, and having a consistent, trustworthy support who is open to talking about what is happening and why could potentially be a major source of comfort for them.

This is a great opportunity for you as a peer support worker to learn about duty to report, as well as to familiarize yourself with the services and agency representatives in your own community. The Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies as well as the Privacy Commissioner of Ontario provide thorough detail around our duties to report and limits to confidentiality.<sup>27</sup> As we discussed, often we do not have a choice when it comes to breaching confidentiality. However, we do have an opportunity to educate ourselves about the processes attached to a duty to report, and to build relationships with people in these agencies so that we can competently help our clients as this process begins for them.





**What do you do if...**

**Reflect on the following scenarios and think about how you would respond in terms of maintaining confidentiality.**

*Your peer tells you that they relapsed but they don't want anyone else to know but you.*

*Your peer tells you that they have started self-harming again, but ask you to promise never to tell?*

*If your peer discloses that a family member has threatened their safety?*

*Your roommate asks you to tell them about your peer and what they are going through right now?*

*Your peer discloses they have been sexually assaulted?*

**When might you have to tell someone what your peer has told you?**

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# BURNOUT

Burnout is commonly defined as **job related stress** that often shares symptoms with depression, anxiety and chronic fatigue syndrome. It is fairly common for people working in the mental health field to experience burnout as they are working in positions that can be highly stressful and demanding.

Burnout is like a breaking point of absolute exhaustion. When someone who has put so much of themselves into their work, but is highly stressed and not receiving what they need in terms of acknowledgement, respect, autonomy, gratification, time for self-care or satisfaction in their job, they may experience burn out. This can lead to exhaustion in response to these demands and stressors leading to chronic fatigue, short temper, and feeling sick along with other unpleasant reactions.

## Burnout includes three main categories:

1. Exhaustion: feeling drained, tired, depressed, foggy and unmotivated especially at work.
2. Depersonalization or cynicism: detaching from your workplace, coworkers and clients adopting a negative attitude towards them.
3. A lack of accomplishment or efficacy: sense of low self- confidence in the work that you're doing. Doubting that you're even doing a good job.



Burnout is complex and confusing and very difficult to experience. **It is important to note that it is never your fault for being burnt out.** It often happens when people care so much about their work but aren't feeling validated or supported in dealing with the stressors of their workplace.

Even with these precautions in mind, it is possible to experience burnout. It happens to the best of us. If you find yourself experiencing burnout it is important to talk to your supervisor about it and make a care plan for yourself that will support you in re-charging and finding purpose, passion and meaning in your work again.

Sometimes you might need time off, maybe you just need to vent or maybe you need to discuss some serious changes to be made within your workplace. This plan of action will look different for each individual in different situations. Practicing self-care on a daily basis may help to prevent feelings of burnout.

Remember to be kind to yourself through the experience. **You've been working so hard and it is ok to need a break!** Burnout can turn the most hardworking, passionate and committed employees resentful and unpleasant to be around. But it is not a permanent state. It is a sign of someone who needs a break and who needs something to change in their workplace to better support them. So work with your supervisors and managers to figure out how you can be best supported. **Ask for help and know that burnout won't last forever.**

# Burnout

Burnout might be caused by a lot of things in life and/or work.

Burnout doesn't mean you can't handle your job... but that you may have important needs that aren't being met... such as:

- support
- boundaries
- resources
- coping skills
- validation
- appreciation

**Burnout is not your fault**

**Signs of Burnout...**

emotional exhaustion - harder to bounce back from challenges

not feeling much pleasure in life

compassion fatigue, lacking empathy, feeling numb, or disconnected from others

trouble sleeping/sleeping more

difficulty focusing, skimming articles, flicking through channels

feels like you're working harder with less satisfaction

How can you return the care you extend to others, back to replenish yourself?

It is the employer's responsibility to provide appropriate resources and support to employees

**Preventing, reducing, or recovering from burnout**

prioritizing self-care

remind yourself why you care about your work

communicate your needs

consistent check-ins

what boundaries, & coping skills can you hold for yourself?

If you're experiencing burnout, talk to your supervisor. You can get support to make a care plan for yourself, that will allow you to re-charge, connect to your purpose, passion, and meaning in your workplace again.