

Healthy Boundaries in the Client-Caregiver Relationship

The senior-caregiver bond is complex. On the one hand, as a paid service, it is a business transaction. On the other hand, it is highly personal, and it is only natural for a strong relational bond to develop between client and caregiver.

It's important for seniors and their families to understand how to strike the right balance by setting and maintaining appropriate boundaries.

Why Boundaries Are Necessary

A bond of companionship between a client and his or her caregiver is to be expected, and even treasured. Yet clients may begin to view their caregivers as family. There are several reasons this type of connection can cause pitfalls in the relationship:

- 1. Refusal of a Replacement Caregiver:** If the client's caregiver becomes ill or needs time off for personal reasons, the client may refuse a replacement caregiver. This leaves the client potentially vulnerable to a fall, improperly taken medications, missed meals, etc.
- 2. Client May Become Accepting of Inferior Service:** If the client enjoys the company of the caregiver, he or she may disregard inferior service, such as the caregiver not keeping the home as clean as the client would normally like.
- 3. Inappropriate Gifting:** Overcompensation and inappropriate gifting of family heirlooms or cash gifts can occur, as the client feels the need to express gratitude for the caregiver's time and attention.



Establishing Healthy Boundaries

It's important to set realistic boundaries at the onset of services. This can be accomplished by getting answers to the following types of questions from your home care provider:

- Will I be paying the caregiver directly for services, or is that handled through your office?
- Is the caregiver trained on what is and is not appropriate in the relationship (i.e., accepting tips, bonuses, gifts, etc.)?
- How can we express our appreciation to the caregiver for exceptional service?
- Is it acceptable to celebrate the caregiver's birthday or other important milestones?
- Can the caregiver join the client for meals?
- How should the client respond if the caregiver asks for something that is outside of established boundaries—such as borrowing the client's car or requesting extra money?

Ideally, the home care provider you select will have carefully vetted and trained their caregivers, so you can feel confident in the caregiver's integrity, dedication, and skill level.

How to Appropriately Show Caregiver Appreciation

Clients and family members can show their appreciation for their caregivers appropriately by:

- Contacting the home care agency's main office and letting them know. Most home care providers are delighted to hear positive feedback about their staff, and will make sure the caregiver is rewarded.
- Telling the caregiver what a great job he/she is doing, either verbally or in a written card or note.
- Giving the caregiver a small token of gratitude. Clip a bouquet of fresh flowers from the garden and tie with a pretty ribbon, or a bake a batch of the caregiver's favorite cookies, for instance.

At CareWorks Health Services, it's our goal to employ only the most compassionate and highly skilled caregivers. We're always happy to know that our caregivers are forming strong bonds with the clients they serve, and we're here to help ensure that the relationship is healthy, thriving, and appropriate. Contact us at CareWorks Health Services with any questions or to learn more about how our caregiving services can enhance lives in the Orange County area.