

**PEOPLE'S PLACE II, INC.
DUAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Dual Relationships is a term which refers to professionals who have two specific types of relationships with a client or former client with whom they work. As an example, a therapist is seeing a client who also happens to be a friend. The ethics committees of the various mental health disciplines (psychiatry, psychology, social work, etc) discourages these types of relationships primarily because there is a risk to the non-professional (in this case the friend).

Relationships between professionals, including para-professionals, are hierarchical in nature. One person has more authority, knowledge, expertise than the other. One person typically has greater access to confidential or private information than the other. Imagine that you meet someone who wants to be your friend. Later you find out they had done a background search and have much more information about you than you do about them. How would you feel about their approaching you or even continuing in the relationship? You might feel you were taken advantage of, or you might want the tables reversed so you would have as much information about them as they have about you. You would probably think the friendship never started out 'fair'. It was lopsided.

If you then get hurt by the relationship will you believe (or accuse) the professional of having taken advantage of you? When a relationship starts out as a professional relationship, i.e. professional – client, certain rules of conduct for the professional, in particular, are assumed. The professional will keep the client's best interest at heart, the professional has the right and often obligation to inquire about private matters of the client without disclosing similarly sensitive information about themselves. The needs of the professional (helper) are qualitatively different than the needs of the one being helped.

When there is a conflict regarding dual relationships and the non-professional (the client) brings an ethical complaint or lawsuit against the professional, the courts tend to side with the non-professional, i.e. that the non-professional is in a more vulnerable position to be taken advantage of given the nature of the relationship. The Courts assume professionals and para-professionals are aware of the vulnerability of their clients and are duty bound to protect clients, not take advantage of them. The 'good intentions' of the professional do not replace the fact that a dual relationship existed and placed the client in harm's way.

When in doubt about the relationship you might have with a particular client or former client, or are thinking of forming, always ask for supervisory assistance, i.e. a consult. The Courts do take into account if the professional made the decision on their own (and erred) or, because they were aware of potential problems or conflicts, at least sought out the advice of a colleague. Ignorance of the possible harm professionals can cause clients is not a legal defense. It is your responsibility and not the client's to keep the client's best interests first and foremost and avoid dual relationships.

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(SUPERVISOR/SUPERVISEE RELATIONSHIPS)

The relationship between a supervisor and an individual s/he supervises is very specific. The supervisor is responsible to give feedback, education, criticism and support to the supervisee so that the person being supervised can do the best job they are able. Some of the roles a supervisor plays are more difficult than others. It is usually more difficult for a supervisor to offer criticism or a verbal warning than to offer education and support to the person s/he is supervising. Supervisors need to be aware of any bias in their relationship or feedback to a supervisee, since bias (positive or negative) will distort the way a supervisor relates to the individuals under their supervision.

A dual relationship between a supervisor and the individual they supervise exists when in addition to providing supervision, the supervisor plays another role with the supervisee, i.e. friend, bowling partner, roommate. Since dual relationships have the potential to create bias on the part of the supervisor for the supervisee, People's Place discourages dual relationships for Supervisors. Individual Supervisors who have questions about the nature of their relationship with the individuals s/he supervises should ask for clarification from their respective Director.