

Pope (1989, cited in Celenza 2007:73) offers several recommendations for educators and supervisors in an effort to prevent boundary violations: (1) maintain the student's interests as primary; (2) remain aware of the deleterious effects of boundary transgressions on a student's training needs; (3) appreciate the effects of educator-student intimacies on the safety and openness of the learning environment; (4) appreciate the potential compromise of the evaluative function; (5) appreciate the potential exploitation of the power differential, especially with regard to future job placement, recommendations, fellowship placements, and so forth; and (6) appreciate the vulnerability of the training program to class-action lawsuits or misconduct complaints.

Practitioners are obligated to avoid engaging in sexual relationships not only with colleagues over whom they exercise professional authority but also with any colleague with whom a potential conflict of interest exists. The next case illustrates how this can be done.

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#### CASE 2.11

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A social worker employed by a state human services agency was responsible for overseeing a contract between the department and a large community mental health center that was providing clinical services to teenage parents. As part of her duties the social worker met periodically with the agency's director to discuss the program's services, goal attainment, and budget. Over time the two individuals became attracted to each other and began dating. When it appeared that the two were embarking on a sexual relationship, the social worker notified her supervisor, informed her of the evolving relationship, and suggested that the supervisor assign another staff person in the office to assume responsibility for oversight of this contract.

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#### PHYSICAL CONTACT

Not all physical contact is explicitly sexual, although sometimes it carries sexual overtones. Practitioners must be careful to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate physical contact with clients. Most professions' codes of ethics do not comment on this phenomenon explicitly. An exception is the *NASW Code of Ethics* (2008): "Social workers should not engage in physical contact with clients when there is a possibility of psychological harm to the client as a result of the contact (such as cradling or caressing clients).