



The College of Naturopaths of Ontario

# Standard of Practice:

## Therapeutic Relationships and Professional Boundaries



### Introduction

The intent of this standard is to advise Members on how to establish and maintain appropriate therapeutic relationships and professional boundaries with patients.

### Definitions

**Mandatory Report:** Under the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991*, it is mandatory that a report be made by a regulated health professional who, in the course of practicing his/her profession, acquires information leading to reasonable grounds to believe that another regulated health care professional sexually abused a patient.

**Family Member:** For the purpose of this standard, “family member” means a Naturopathic Doctor’s spouse or partner, parent, child, sibling, grandparent or grandchild; a parent, child, sibling, grandparent or grandchild of the Naturopathic Doctor’s spouse or partner.

**Close Personal Relationship:** For the purpose of this standard, “close personal relationship” means a relationship in which the Naturopathic Doctor has personal or emotional involvement with an individual that may render the Naturopathic Doctor unable to exercise objective professional judgment in reaching diagnostic or therapeutic decisions.

**Minor Condition:** Generally, a non-urgent, non-serious condition that requires only short-term routine care and is not likely to be an indication of, or lead to, a more serious condition.

**Emergency:** Exists where an individual is apparently experiencing severe suffering or is at risk of sustaining serious bodily harm if intervention is not promptly provided.

## 1. Appropriate Therapeutic Relationships and Boundaries

*The Member fosters appropriate therapeutic relationships with his/her patients in a transparent, ethical, patient-centred manner with respect for diversity of beliefs, values and interests.*

### Performance Indicators

The Member:

- recognizes the position of power the Member has over the patient within the therapeutic relationship;
- does not exploit these relationships for any form of non-therapeutic or personal gain, benefit or advantage;
- never enters into a sexual relationship with a current patient or someone with whom the patient has a significant personal relationship (e.g., child’s parent);
- does not enter into a sexual relationship with a former patient unless it can be reasonably established that sufficient time has elapsed since the professional relationship ended or was terminated and it can be demonstrated that there is no longer a power imbalance between the Member and the patient;

- never enters into a sexual relationship with a former patient where counselling was a significant part of treatment;
- does not enter into a therapeutic relationship and/or accept a patient with whom the Member already has a personal relationship and where professional boundaries may not be sustained;
- takes immediate steps to address and rectify a boundary violation when it occurs; and
- accepts responsibility for boundary crossings and violations when they occur.

## 2. Consent

*The Member understands that patient consent is never a defence against a boundary violation.*

### Performance Indicators

The Member:

- develops and maintains practices and procedures to explain to the patient that consent does not permit a non-therapeutic relationship or allow for a personal relationship with the patient; and
- when appropriate, clearly and diplomatically explains why patient consent does not justify a boundary violation.

## 3. Personal Relationships

*The Member does not provide naturopathic services to his/her own family members or another individual with whom they have a close personal relationship except for minor conditions or in the event of an emergency.*

### Performance Indicators

The Member:

- maintains practices and procedures that clearly demonstrate that provision of naturopathic services to an individual with whom the Member has a personal relationship may be inappropriate as outlined in legislation and/or if professional boundaries may not be sustainable;
- clearly, sensitively and consistently explains why the service cannot be provided; and
- does not treat a person with whom they are having a sexual relationship, except in an emergency.

## Related Standards and Guidelines

Consent

Internal Examinations

Conflict of Interest

## Legislative Framework

[Professional Misconduct Regulation](#)

[Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991](#)

College of Naturopaths of Ontario Patients Relations Program

### Disclaimer

*In the event of any inconsistency between this standard and any legislation that governs the practice of Naturopathic Doctors, the legislation shall govern.*