

8

Role clarity, boundaries and support



Supports conversations about responsibilities, boundaries, escalation and shared responsibility.



Reflection statements



8.1 Role expectations, decision-making limits, documentation requirements and escalation pathways are clear for workers.



8.2 Supervisors and leaders regularly check whether workers are carrying responsibility that sits outside their role, authority or control.



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Why role clarity matters

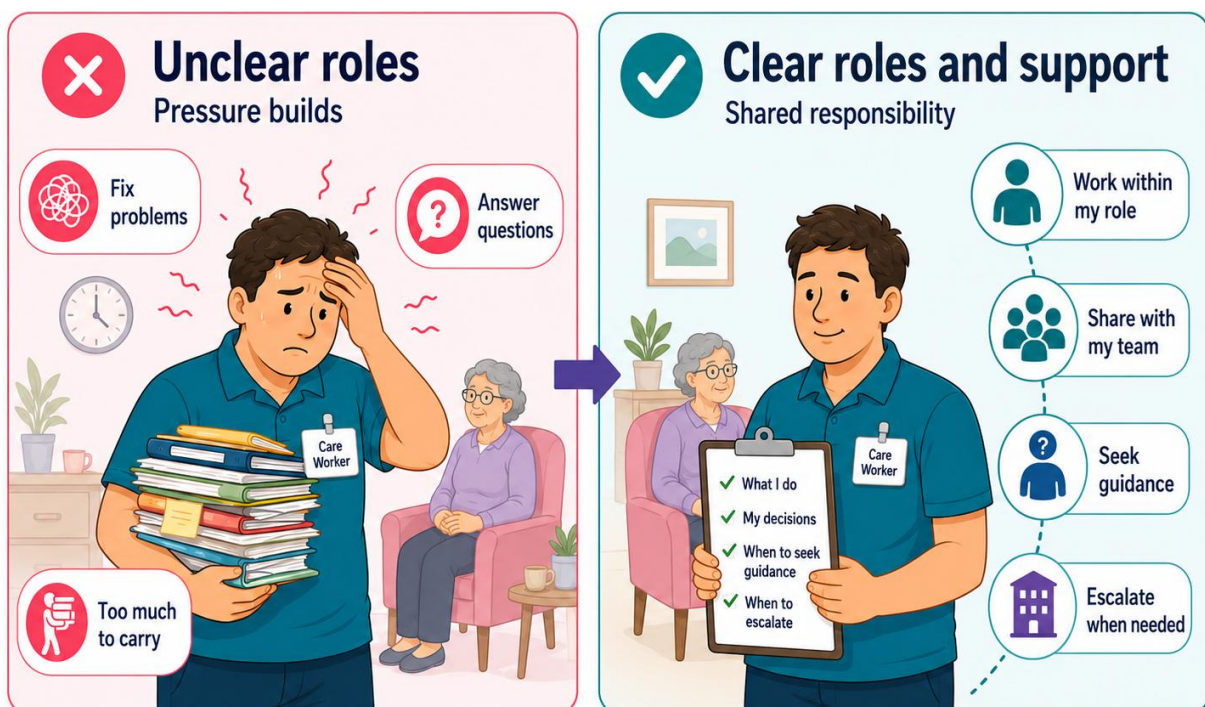
Aged care workers are committed and care deeply about the people they support. This commitment is one of the strengths of the industry, but it can also create pressure when workers feel responsible for needs, decisions or system limits they cannot control.

Caring deeply does not mean carrying responsibility alone.

Role clarity, boundaries and support help protect workers from carrying pressure that should sit with a team, leader, organisation or system. They also support safer, more consistent and person-centred care.

Workers are better able to provide safe, respectful and consistent care when they understand what sits within their role, what sits outside their role, what decisions they can make, and when they need to seek guidance or escalate a concern. When roles are unclear, workers may feel pressure to fix problems, answer questions, absorb distress, make promises or make decisions that sit outside their authority, training or expertise. They may also feel pressure to take on more work than can be done safely or sustainably.

Role clarity is not about caring less or doing less. It helps workers understand their responsibilities, work safely within their role, and know when a concern needs to be shared with a team, leader or organisation. Clear roles support good care while reducing the pressure that can build when one person is left carrying too much.



Sorting what is yours to do, share or escalate

When pressure builds, it can help to pause and ask where the responsibility should sit. Actions that are clearly within role can continue as part of usual care. Concerns that are repeated, unclear, unsupported or outside a worker's control may need to be shared with a peer, supervisor or team leader. Documentation remains important and should follow the organisation's procedures, the level of risk and what has happened.

Depending on the situation, the next step may also include escalation, review or additional support. The purpose is to help workers and leaders recognise when something should not be held informally or carried by one person alone. It supports clear documentation, appropriate escalation and shared responsibility, rather than leaving concerns unresolved or dependent on individual effort.



Boundaries are part of safe work

Boundaries help workers provide care without taking on responsibility that should sit elsewhere. They protect worker wellbeing and support consistent, person-centred care. Healthy boundaries can help workers stay clear about their role and provide honest communication. They also help workers avoid making promises they cannot keep, recognise when something needs escalation, and share concerns instead of holding them alone.

Boundaries are especially important when workers are supporting people through distress, grief, conflict, uncertainty or complaints. In these situations, workers may feel pressure to reassure people, provide answers, absorb distress or fix problems quickly. Clear boundaries help workers stay compassionate without carrying responsibility that is outside their role or control.

What this can look like in aged care

Role clarity, boundaries and support are especially important when workers are asked to explain service limits, package levels, eligibility decisions, delays or changes they did not decide and cannot control.

They are also important when workers are expected to provide answers before information is clear, manage frustration, distress or pressure about delays and service limits, or take on work outside their role, training or expertise.

Workers may also need support when they are unsure whether a concern should be documented, handed over or escalated, or when they are expected to manage distress without debriefing or support. Role clarity and boundaries are especially important when workers are repeatedly staying back, checking messages after hours, or carrying unresolved concerns from one visit or conversation to the next.



What this should prompt

If workers are regularly carrying responsibility outside their role or control, the response should not be to leave them to manage it alone.

Teams and leaders may need to:

- clarify roles
- review escalation pathways
- use consistent language
- strengthen supervision
- provide debriefing
- identify systems changes

Clear roles and boundaries do not reduce care. They help make care safer, more consistent and better supported.

This resource is a starting point for noticing patterns and prompting review. It does not replace work health and safety advice, psychosocial risk assessment, supervision, consultation, training or organisational processes.

