



# Professional Practice Guidelines: Discontinuing or Declining to Provide Care

Personal Support Workers (PSWs) – 2026

## Purpose

These Professional Practice Guidelines provide guidance for Personal Support Workers (PSWs) on when and how to appropriately decline, discontinue, or withdraw from providing care, while ensuring client safety, dignity, ethical conduct, and professional accountability.

## Scope

These guidelines apply to PSWs working in all settings, including but not limited to:

- Home and community care
- Long-term care homes
- Retirement homes
- Hospitals
- Group homes and supported living environments
- Private or agency-based care

## Guiding Principles

PSWs must ensure that decisions to decline or discontinue care are:

- Client-centred and safety-focused
- Ethically justified
- Within scope of practice
- Legally compliant
- Professionally communicated
- Properly documented

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## Acceptable Reasons to Decline or Discontinue Care

A PSW may decline or discontinue care when one or more of the following conditions exist:

### 1. Client or PSW Safety Risks

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- Threats of physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual abuse
- Unsafe environment (violence, weapons, severe neglect, infestation, substance misuse)
- Risk of harm without appropriate supports or equipment

## **2. Care Outside Scope of Practice**

- Requests to perform controlled acts or medical procedures
- Tasks requiring delegation or training not received
- Tasks not included in the Plan of Care

## **3. Lack of Required Training or Competency**

- Insufficient training for specialized care (e.g., advanced behavioural support, complex medical devices)
- No orientation, delegation, or supervision provided when required

## **4. Ethical or Professional Boundary Concerns**

- Requests for illegal, unethical, or inappropriate actions
- Financial exploitation or personal favour requests
- Boundary violations or conflicts of interest

## **5. Discrimination or Harassment**

- Racism, harassment, bullying, or discriminatory behaviour directed at the PSW

## **6. Health or Capacity of the PSW**

- Illness, injury, fatigue, or impairment affecting safe care delivery
- Mental or physical inability to safely continue care

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# **PSW Responsibilities When Declining or Discontinuing Care**

When a PSW determines that care cannot continue, they must:

## **1. Ensure Immediate Client Safety**

- Do not abandon a client in an unsafe situation
- Remain until alternative support is arranged, if required



## **2. Communicate Clearly and Respectfully**

- Inform the appropriate supervisor, employer, care coordinator, or family
- Use professional, non-judgmental language

## **3. Follow Organizational Policies**

- Adhere to employer or agency protocols for withdrawal of care
- Escalate concerns through proper reporting channels

## **4. Document Thoroughly**

- Record objective facts, observations, and reasons
- Avoid personal opinions or emotional language
- Document who was notified and when

## **5. Participate in Safe Transition of Care**

- Support handover to another worker or provider where applicable
- Provide relevant information to maintain continuity of care

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## **Prohibited Actions**

PSWs must not:

- Abandon a client without notice or handover
- Discontinue care as punishment or retaliation
- Discriminate against clients
- Continue care when it is unsafe or outside scope
- Ignore or conceal safety, ethical, or legal concerns

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## **Employer / Organization Responsibilities**

Organizations should:

- Provide clear policies and reporting pathways
- Support PSWs who raise safety or ethical concerns
- Ensure alternative care arrangements

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- Offer training, supervision, and debriefing when care is declined or discontinued
  - Protect PSWs from retaliation
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## **Legal and Ethical Considerations**

- PSWs are legally accountable for practicing within their scope and competence
  - Refusal or withdrawal of care must be reasonable, justified, and documented
  - Client rights, dignity, and continuity of care must be respected at all times
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## **Education and Competency**

PSWs should receive education on:

- Professional boundaries
  - Conflict resolution
  - Abuse recognition and reporting
  - Ethical decision-making
  - Documentation standards
  - Occupational health and safety
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## **Review and Compliance**

- These guidelines are reviewed regularly to reflect legislative and sector changes
  - Failure to comply may result in disciplinary or professional consequences
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## **Effective Date**

**January 1, 2026**

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## **Key Resources (2026)**

- Ontario Personal Support Workers Association (OPSWA) — Code of Conduct, Scope of Practice, Professional Accountability
- Canadian Support Workers Association (CANSWA) — National Ethical Practice & Professional Standards
- Occupational Health and Safety Act (Ontario) — Right to refuse unsafe work; workplace violence protections
- Regulated Health Professions Act (Ontario) — Scope of practice and delegation limits
- Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021 — Resident safety and continuity of care requirements
- Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA) — Privacy and documentation during care transitions
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety — Workplace violence prevention and worker safety