

CITY OF SULTAN
WASHINGTON
RESOLUTION 15-14

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF SULTAN, WASHINGTON
ESTABLISHING A PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES POLICY

WHEREAS, citizens and customers of the City of Sultan interact staff; and

WHEREAS, these Professional Boundaries and expectations are unwritten; and

WHEREAS, it is in the best interest of the citizens and customers of the City of Sultan to have these rights and expectations clearly defined and in writing; and

WHEREAS, it is incumbent upon the City of Sultan to define these professional boundaries.

NOW, THEREFORE, THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SULTAN, WASHINGTON, DOES RESOLVE TO ADOPT THE ATTACHED PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES POLICY.

PASSED BY THE CITY COUNCIL AT A REGULAR MEETING THEREOF ON THE 5th DAY OF NOVEMBER, 2015.

CITY OF SULTAN



Carolyn Eslick, Mayor

ATTEST/AUTHENTICATED:



Laura Koenig, City Clerk

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

Public professions rely on the fostering of positive relationships between adults and children and young people. Public settings are places where all staff can have significant influence in the lives of children and young people because the relationship involves regular contact over relatively long periods of time. These features make it extremely important that staff understand how to foster positive relationships in ways that do not compromise children and young people's welfare.

The professional boundaries outlined in these guidelines apply beyond public facilities and work places and beyond specific cohorts of children and young people. For example, where staff are participating or have participated in interschool sport events or combined school trips or camps, they are expected to respect professional boundaries with all the children and young people involved in those activities.

The following examples will assist staff in establishing and maintaining expected boundaries. This list is not exhaustive.

Communication

- Inappropriate comments about a child/young person's appearance, including excessive flattering comments
- Inappropriate conversation or enquiries of a sexual nature (e.g. questions about a child or young person's sexuality or his/her sexual relationship with others)
- Disrespectful or discriminatory treatment of, or manner towards, young people based on their perceived or actual sexual orientation.
- Use of inappropriate pet names
- Vilification or humiliation
- Jokes or innuendo of a sexual nature
- Obscene gestures and language
- Facilitating/permitting access to pornographic material
- Facilitating/permitting access to sexually explicit material that is not part of endorsed curriculum
- Failing to intervene in sexual harassment of children and young people
- Correspondence of a personal nature via any medium (e.g. phone, text messages, letters, email, internet postings) that is unrelated to the staff member's role. This does not include class cards/bereavement cards etc.

Personal disclosure

- Discussing personal lifestyle details of self, other staff or children and young people unless directly relevant to the learning topic and with the individual's consent

Physical contact

- Unwarranted or unwanted touching of a child or young person personally or with objects (e.g. pencil or ruler)
- Corporal punishment (physical discipline, smacking, etc)
- Initiating, permitting or requesting inappropriate or unnecessary physical contact with a child or young person (e.g. massage, kisses, tickling games) or facilitating situations which unnecessarily result in close physical contact with a child or young person
- Inappropriate use of physical restraint

Place

- Inviting/allowing/encouraging children and young people to attend the staff member's home
- Allowing children and young people access to a staff member's personal internet locations (e.g. social networking sites)
- Attending children and young people's homes or their social gatherings
- Being alone with a child or young person outside of a staff member's responsibilities
- Entering change rooms or toilets occupied by children or young people when supervision is not required or appropriate
- Transporting a child or young person unaccompanied
- Using toilet facilities allocated to children and young people
- Undressing using facilities set aside for children and young people, or in their presence (**without the site leader's authority*)

Targeting individual children and young people

- Tutoring (outside education sector's directions or knowledge)
- Giving personal gifts or special favors
- Singling the same children and young people out for special duties or responsibilities
- Offering overnight/weekend/holiday care of children and young people as respite to parents (unless a family day care educator, or employed by a respite organization and with the site leader's knowledge)

Role

- Adopting an ongoing welfare role that is beyond the scope of their position or that is the responsibility of another staff member (e.g. a counselor) or an external professional, and that occurs without the permission of senior staff
- Photographing, audio recording or filming children or young people via any medium when not authorized by the site leader to do so and without required parental consent
- Using personal rather than city equipment for approved activities, unless authorized by the site leader to do so.

Possessions

- Correspondence or communication (via any medium) to or from children and young people where a violation of professional boundaries is indicated and where the correspondence has not been provided to the site leader by the staff member
- Still/moving images or audio recordings of children and young people on personal equipment or kept in personal locations such as car or home that have not been authorized by the site leader.
- Uploading or publishing still/moving images or audio recordings of children and young people to any location, without parental and site leader's consent

Violations

Professional boundary violations by a staff member represent a breach of trust, a failure to meet a duty of care to children and young people, and a failure to follow conduct requirements of the employer. When staff violate boundaries they risk:

- Harmful consequences for the child or young person
- Seriously undermining the learning process
- Seriously undermining their professional reputation and the confidence of the education or care community in their suitability to work with children and young people
- Formal directions or other disciplinary action from their employer or registering/regulating authority

Any concern a staff member has about whether a situation may compromise or breach a professional relationship should be discussed with the site leader and an approved plan of action developed and followed.

Guidance for staff in managing professional boundaries

Working in country/local communities

Staff working in local communities face additional challenges in managing professional boundaries. They are more likely to have social relationships with the parents of the children and young people with whom they work and are, therefore, more likely to share social and sporting events or membership at various community clubs or associations.

This means they will have legitimate reasons, on occasions, to attend social events with the children and young people with whom they work, to visit their homes or to be visited by them in the company of their parents. These social engagements are an important part of community life and a positive contribution to the well being of staff working in country and local communities. Following the advice below will assist staff to enjoy these social engagements without compromising their professional responsibilities.

The guiding principles in managing these situations are that:

- Social contact should be generated via the relationship the staff member has with the parents of children and young people or by an event (such as a sporting event)
- Staff should avoid being alone with children and young people in these situations
- Staff should conduct themselves in a way that will not give others reason to question their suitability to work with children and young people and that will not create discomfort for children and young people in their learning relationship with them. Consuming alcohol in these situations may lessen a staff member's capacity to judge when a professional boundary is at risk
- Staff should politely refuse to discuss matters relating to the workplace and should not discuss children and young people's learning or social progress other than at times specifically set aside for that purpose
- Any concern a staff member has about whether or not a situation may be compromising or breaching a professional relationship should be discussed with the site leader and an approved plan of action followed. For example, a staff member may want advice about transporting a friend's child to and from the site or how to manage his/her own child's enrollment at the site.

Using social networking sites

Staff working for the city and in public settings are expected to model responsible and respectful conduct to the children and young people with whom they work. Staff need to consider the electronic social environments they utilize as part of this community and employer expectation.

The internet does not provide the privacy or control assumed by many users. Staff must appreciate that no matter what protections they place around access to their personal sites, their digital postings are still at risk of reaching an unintended audience and being used in ways that could complicate or threaten their employment. Staff should be aware of the following expectations in considering their use of social networking sites:

- They have considered the information and images of them available on their sites and are confident that these represent them in a light acceptable to their role in working with children and young people
- They do not have children or young people in their education community as 'friends' on their personal/private sites
- Comments on their sites about their workplace, work colleagues or children or young people, if published, would not cause hurt or embarrassment to others, risk claims of libel, or harm the reputation of the workplace, their colleagues or children and young people.

Working one-to-one with children and young people

The following summary of expectations applies to all situations where staff (teachers, support staff, professional service providers, counselors, pastoral care providers, mentors, volunteers, etc) are providing one-to-one learning assistance or feedback, behavior assistance/monitoring, counsel, testing or assessment.

Make it public

- The more visible, public and busy the location the better
- Use the site's authorized IT systems. Do not use personal email or websites to communicate with children and young people

Make it authorized

- Parents should be informed/give consent
- Activity must be authorized by the site leader

Make it timely

- As far as possible, provide support during normal work hours, and do not conduct excessively long sessions

Conducting home visits

Staff must ensure they follow specific home visiting protocols that apply to their sector or service. The key principle is that a home visit should place no one at unreasonable risk and that identified minor risks are consciously managed. A summary of general expectations is provided below.

Inform

- Home visits must be authorized and documented by the site leadership and the site must have information about when and where visits are being undertaken and the expected return times. Inform parents of intended visit, where appropriate

Prepare

- All available information about the safety of the proposed visit must be considered and risks managed

Protect

- Mobile phones must be taken, ID should be visible
- Inform parents of intended visit, where appropriate
- Do not enter the house if parents are not at home
- Speak with the student where the parent is present or clearly visible; do not interview students in their bedrooms
- Have a colleague accompany if problems are anticipated
- Document the visit

Staff responsibilities in responding to behavior

Behavior of staff towards children and young people

Inappropriate behavior

Staff may also observe behaviors in other adults that they view to be inappropriate rather than abusive or that sit on the border of violating a professional boundary. Staff must ensure, through their supervisor, that the adult concerned is made aware of the potential of his/her actions to impact negatively on children and young people, and on themselves. Professional advice of this kind may be particularly valuable to young or newly appointed staff. The manager should document what is discussed.

All staff must take action if children and young people disclose information about inappropriate behaviors of other adults on the site. It is not acceptable to minimize, ignore or delay responding to such information. For the well being of all members of the education or care community, the site leader must be informed as a matter of urgency and a report made to the Child Abuse Report Line, if appropriate.

Behavior of children and young people towards staff

Should a child or young person engage in inappropriate behavior of a sexual nature, then immediate respectful steps must be taken to discourage the child or young person. The matter should be reported and documented promptly with the manager and a plan of action developed to support the child or young person and relevant staff member. Depending on the age/developmental capacity of the child or young person and contextual information, this plan of support may involve:

- Communication with parents
- Referral to and liaison with specialist counseling
- Formalized support within the site, which may include closer monitoring or supervision of the child or young person in his/her interactions with other children and young people
- Referral to and liaison with an appropriate agency with disability-specific expertise

Sometimes, the inappropriate sexual behavior of younger children towards staff can elicit a suspicion that the child in question has been sexually abused. In these situations, staff must:

- Make a mandatory notification to the appropriate authorities
- Consider the safety of other children and young people whom the child has contact
- Develop and document a plan of action and communication with all relevant parties (including other agencies)

Some children and young people may actively seek a relationship with a staff member that would constitute an inappropriate relationship. In such circumstances, staff are advised to immediately report the information to the manager and seek assistance from a senior staff member, school counselor or pastoral care coordinator to actively manage the situation in a way that *respects the emotional well being of the child or young person and provides support to the staff member.*

Examples of behaviors that should be reported and addressed are:

- Receiving gifts of an inappropriate nature or at inappropriate times (e.g. not as part of end of the year gift giving that some children and families follow)
- Flirtatious gestures and comments
- Inappropriate social invitations
- Inappropriate touching or invasions of personal space
- Inappropriate postings using any medium
- Correspondence or communication that suggests or invites an inappropriate relationship

The staff member and site leader should document the incident that initially prompted the concern and the plan of action that has been established. Contact with parents is recommended unless there are reasonable grounds to believe that this will create serious risks for the child or young person.

Sexual harassment – via any medium at any time or place – or assault of a staff member by a child or young person should be dealt with following normal behavior management protocols, with the involvement of parents and, where appropriate, police. Along with this response, consideration must also be given to the most appropriate counseling and support that can be provided to the child or young person and family. It is important to use these incidents as opportunities to organize meaningful intervention that address early sexual and other offending behaviors.