**Staff and Volunteer Handbook**

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**1. Introduction**

**Aim**

To ensure that all staff and volunteers in **{organisation name}** are aware of and implement an appropriate Code of Conduct relating to their practice when working with children and young people.

**Objectives**

* To identify and ensure appropriate professional standards for staff working with children and young people
* To ensure staff behave appropriately when working with children and young people and for this handbook to provide a reference point for them
* To support staff in making appropriate judgements regarding professional boundaries
* To encourage workers to assess situations and take appropriate action
* To provide guidelines to support the safeguarding of young people and staff including minimising the risk of allegations of misconduct.

The nature of youth work relies on the quality of the relationship between a youth worker and a young person and it is therefore essential that all staff are clear on their professional boundaries when working with young people in any context and behave with professionalism and integrity in all circumstances. This policy intends to enable staff to be clear about their role and make appropriate judgements and decisions when working in what can often be challenging circumstances. This policy applies to all staff working with **{organisation name}** whether as a paid employee or volunteer.

# 2. Principles and Values

The following principles and values underpin this policy:

* Youth work will focus on the young person or group of young people, addressing their needs within the framework of the Children and Young People’s Plan, Service Plans and national government initiatives.
* As informal educators all youth work practice is underpinned by the principles of equality of opportunity, participation, empowerment and education.
* Youth workers/volunteers will act with integrity in accordance with responsibilities and duties, and will maintain the boundaries between their professional and personal life.
* Youth workers/volunteers will ensure that they manage their own values, thereby maintaining objectivity in their work and enabling young people to make informed choices.
* Youth workers/volunteers need to recognise their personal and professional limitations and refer or seek guidance as appropriate.
* Youth workers/volunteers will strive to ensure that young people’s voices are heard, involve them in service design, delivery and evaluation, and advocate on their behalf where appropriate.

# 3. Policies and Guidelines

Youth workers/volunteers should ensure that they are familiar with all policies and guidelines and know where to locate them for reference. Staff should ensure all reporting procedures are adhered to in line with the relevant policy.

# 4. Safety

The nature of youth work requires youth workers/volunteers to be constantly aware of their own safety and that of the young people. It is important, therefore, that they carry out appropriate risk assessments according to the circumstances at any given time and act accordingly. Youth workers/volunteers need to be able to strike a balance between avoiding unnecessary risk whilst permitting and encouraging young people to participate in challenging educational activities.

Youth workers/volunteers should ensure that all staff leading specialist activities are appropriately qualified and/or experienced within their field, and in line with legal requirements where applicable.

# 5. Accountability

It is important that youth workers/volunteers recognise the need to be accountable to young people, their parents or guardians, employers, funders and wider society. Youth workers/volunteers therefore should be aware of and implement performance management guidelines, ensuring all staff are working to the appropriate standards and should ensure that they can evidence their work, from a needs analysis to evaluation

All actions undertaken by youth workers/volunteers should be in accordance with the Law.

## 6. Confidentiality

Youth workers/volunteers may have access to confidential information about children and young people in order to undertake their responsibilities. In some circumstances they may have access to or be given highly sensitive or private information. These details must be kept confidential at all times and only shared when it is in interests of the child or young person to do so. Such information must not be used to intimidate, humiliate, or embarrass the child or young person concerned.

If a youth worker is in any doubt about whether to share information or keep it confidential they should seek guidance from a senior member of staff or designated child protection officer. Any actions should be in line with information sharing protocols.

Whilst youth workers/volunteers need to be aware of the need to listen and support children and young people, they must also understand the importance of not promising to keep secrets. Neither should they request this of a child or young person under any circumstances.

Additionally, concerns and allegations about adults should be treated as confidential and passed to a senior manager without delay. Youth workers/volunteers:

* should be clear about when information can be shared and in what circumstances it is appropriate to do so
* are expected to treat information they receive about children and young people in a discreet and confidential manner
* should seek advice from a senior member of staff if they are in any doubt about sharing information they hold or which has been requested of them
* need to know to whom any concerns or allegations should be reported

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## 7. Making a Professional Judgement

This guidance cannot provide a complete checklist of what is, or is not appropriate behaviour for youth workers/volunteers in all circumstances. There may be occasions and circumstances in which workers have to make decisions or take action in the best interests of the child or young person which could contravene this guidance or where no guidance exists. Individuals are expected to make judgements about their behaviour in order to secure the best interests and welfare of the young people in their charge. Such judgements, in these circumstances, should always be recorded and shared with a manager. In undertaking these actions individuals will be seen to be acting reasonably. Youth workers/volunteers should always consider whether their actions are warranted, proportionate and safe, and applied equitably.

This means that where no specific guidance exists youth workers/volunteers should:

* discuss the circumstances that informed their action, or their proposed action, with a manager
* report any actions which could be misinterpreted to their senior manager
* always discuss any misunderstanding, accidents or threats with a senior manager
* always record discussions and reasons why actions were taken
* record any areas of disagreement about course of action taken and if necessary refer to a higher authority.

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## 8. Power and the Position of Trust

A relationship of trust can be described as one in which one party is in a position of power or influence over the other by virtue of their work or the nature of their activity. It is vital for all those in positions of trust to understand the power this can give them over those they care for and the responsibility they must exercise as a consequence of this relationship. As a result of their knowledge, position and/or the authority invested in their role, all youth workers/volunteers are in positions of trust in relation to the young people in their care.

Youth workers/volunteers are in a unique and privileged position to work with young people. The relationship in most cases is entirely voluntary on the part of the young person and the youth worker is there to meet the needs of the young people. Youth work is not about meeting the needs of the adults who carry out the work. With this privileged position comes a professional responsibility which must be adhered to at all times.

Relationships which form between the young person and the youth worker are based on trust, a trust which the young person should be able to expect and rely upon. Often their contact with a youth worker is at times of distress and vulnerability, when they are in need of support. There is clearly an imbalance of power in the adult/young person relationship, and it is for the youth worker to ensure that this balance is not abused and the appropriate boundaries and standards are maintained.

A relationship between a youth worker and a child or young person cannot be a relationship between equals. There is potential for exploitation and harm of vulnerable young people. Youth workers/volunteers have a responsibility to ensure that an unequal balance of power is not used for personal advantage or gratification.

Youth workers/volunteers should always maintain appropriate professional boundaries and avoid behaviour which might be misinterpreted by others. They should report and record any incident with this potential.

Where a person aged 18 or over is in a specified position of trustwith a child under 18, it is an offence for that person to engage in sexual activity with or in the presence of that child, or to cause or incite that child to engage in or watch sexual activity. This means that youth workers/volunteers should not:

* use their position to gain access to information for their own or others’ advantage
* use their position to intimidate, bully, humiliate, threaten, coerce or undermine children or young people
* use their status and standing to form or promote relationships which are of a sexual nature, or which may become so.

## 9. Physical Contact

## Youth workers/volunteers should not enter into physical contact with a young person, or encourage young people to develop affectionate relationships with them. Workers should act with extreme care and integrity when young people instigate physical contact, recognising the limitations of their role whilst being mindful of the young person’s feelings when dealing with the situation. All situations should be judged according to circumstances and therefore it is not appropriate to say that physical contact will never happen, for example when comforting young people in extreme distress or physically guiding someone to ensure their own safety. However appropriate safeguards do need to be in place and norms of behaviour in respect of this should not be allowed to develop. When working with young people with learning difficulties physical contact can be unavoidable, or in situations where physical restraint is required, however standards of behaviour need to be in place, appropriate project policies developed and shared, and work should be done with young people and staff to ensure the safety of all concerned.

## 10. Infatuations

Occasionally, a child or young person may develop an infatuation with a youth worker who works with them. Youth workers/volunteers should deal with these situations sensitively and appropriately to maintain the dignity and safety of all concerned. They should remain aware, however that such infatuations carry a high risk of words or actions being misinterpreted and should therefore make every effort to ensure that their own behaviour is above reproach.

A youth worker who becomes aware that a child or young person is developing an infatuation, should discuss this at the earliest opportunity with a manager so appropriate action can be taken to avoid any hurt, distress or embarrassment. The youth worker should:

* report and record any incidents or indications (verbal, written or physical) that suggest a child or young person may have developed an infatuation with an adult in the workplace
* always acknowledge and maintain professional boundaries.

## 11. Propriety and Behaviour

All youth workers/volunteers working with children and young people have a responsibility to maintain public confidence in their ability to safeguard the welfare and best interests of children and young people. It is therefore expected that they will adopt high standards of personal conduct in order to maintain the confidence and respect of the public in general and all those with whom they work.

There may be times when an adult’s behaviour or actions in their personal life come under scrutiny from local communities, the media or public authorities. This could be because their behaviour is considered to compromise their position in the workplace or indicate an unsuitability to work with children or young people. Misuse of drugs, alcohol or acts of violence would be examples of such behaviour.

Adults in contact with children and young people should therefore understand and be aware that safe practice also involves using judgement and integrity about behaviours in places other than the work setting.

The behaviour of a youth worker’s partner or other family members may raise similar concerns and require careful consideration as to whether there may be a potential risk to children and young people in the workplace. Youth workers/volunteers therefore should not:

* behave in a manner which would lead any reasonable person to question their suitability to work with children or act as a role model
* make or encourage others to make, unprofessional personal comments which scapegoat, demean or humiliate, or which might be interpreted as such.

Youth workers/volunteers should:

* be aware that behaviour in their personal lives may impact upon their work with children and young people
* understand that the behaviour and actions of their partner (or other family members) may raise questions about their suitability to work with children and young people.

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## 12. Dress and Appearance

A person's dress and appearance are matters of personal choice and self-expression. However youth workers/volunteers should dress in ways which are appropriate to their role and this may need to be different to how they dress when not at work.

Youth workers/volunteers should take care to ensure they are dressed appropriately for the tasks and the work they undertake. Those who dress in a manner which could be considered as inappropriate could render themselves vulnerable to criticism or allegations.

Youth workers/volunteers should wear clothing which:

* is appropriate to their role
* is not likely to be viewed as offensive, revealing, or sexually provocative
* does not distract, cause embarrassment or give rise to misunderstanding
* is absent of any political or otherwise contentious slogans
* is not considered to be discriminatory and is culturally sensitive

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## 13. Personal Living Space

No child or young person should be invited into the home of a youth worker who works with them unless the reason for this has been firmly established and agreed with managers.

Under no circumstances should children or young people assist with chores or tasks in the home of a youth worker who works with them. Neither should they be asked to do so by friends or family of that youth worker. Youth workers/volunteers should:

* be vigilant in maintaining their privacy and mindful of the need to avoid placing themselves in vulnerable situations
* be mindful of the need to maintain professional boundaries
* refrain from asking children and young people to undertake personal jobs or errands.

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## 14. Gifts, Rewards and Favouritism

The giving of gifts or rewards to children or young people should be part of an agreed policy for supporting positive behaviour or recognising particular achievements. In some situations, the giving of gifts as rewards may be accepted practice for a group of young people, whilst in other situations the giving of a gift to an individual child or young person will be part of an agreed plan, recorded and discussed with a manager.

Any gifts should be given openly and not be based on favouritism. Adults need to be aware however, that the giving of gifts can be misinterpreted by others as a gesture either to bribe or grooma young person.

Youth workers/volunteers should exercise care when selecting children and/or young people for specific activities or privileges to avoid perceptions of favouritism or unfairness. Methods and criteria for selection should always be transparent and subject to scrutiny.

Care should also be taken to ensure that adults do not accept any gift that might be construed as a bribe by others, or lead the giver to expect preferential treatment.

There are occasions when children, young people or parents wish to pass small tokens of appreciation to adults e.g. on special occasions or as a thank-you and this is acceptable. However, it is unacceptable to receive gifts on a regular basis or of any significant value. Youth workers/volunteers should:

* be aware of their organisation’s policy on the giving and receiving of gifts
* ensure that gifts received or given in situations which may be misconstrued are declared
* only give gifts to an individual young person as part of an agreed reward system
* ensure that all selection processes which concern children and young people are fair and that wherever practicable these are undertaken and agreed by more than one member of staff.

**15. Social Networking Sites**

Personal pages on Social Networking (Facebook etc) sites should not be used to communicate with young people, regardless of the context. Official sites, known to others and monitored by more than one person can be used to communicate with young people, however all the principles and practices contained in this handbook should be adhered to.

**16. Mobile Texting**

Mobile texting can be a very valuable way of communicating with young people; however texting should only occur in relation to youth work activities. Relationship should not be developed that go beyond the scope of the youth worker/young person professional relationship.

**17. Transporting Young People**

On occasions when a young person and the worker need to attend a meeting/event public transport should be used. Where this is not feasible, transport by taxi is the next option.

It is not general practice that a worker would transport young people alone. However, in the exceptional circumstance when the most appropriate method is by the youth worker’s car, procedures outlined in the Lone Working Policy should be followed. The lone worker must:

* Have agreement from club leaders
* Have car insurance which includes for business use.
* Obtain parental/guardian consent for transport of the young person - unless it is an emergency.
* Be aware of gender/religious issues and appropriateness of singly supervised journeys.
* Know and be acquainted with the background of the young person/people, significant issues such as violence and abuse, and only transport if there is no issue of concern.
* Arrange for a **‘key contact’**.
* If there is more than one car involved, the cars should travel in convoy and the workers must have the mobile phone numbers of the other workers in the convoy for contact in the event of an emergency.

**Driving Alone – Safety Measures**

* Provide your club leader with details of your car registration, make and colour and ensure that your travel arrangements for the day are known. (Office diary)
* Take your mobile phone.
* Ensure your car is regularly serviced to minimise risk of breakdown.
* Regularly check tyre pressure, oil and water levels.
* Make sure you have adequate fuel.
* In the car – keep first aid kit, and where possible towrope, jump leads and torch.
* Ensure breakdown recovery membership is in place.
* Avoid travelling in severe weather, i.e. fog or snow. If you have to travel, dress accordingly.
* Check that no one is inside the car before getting in.
* Whilst travelling and when you leave your car – lock the doors.
* If stopped whilst travelling, do not get out of the car unless you feel comfortable with the situation. Talk through a small gap in the window and if in doubt drive to the nearest point of safety e.g. Police Station.
* On site – park safely, facing the direction you intend to leave. Be aware of hazards like nails, glass etc.
* Do not leave valuables on show. Lock them away out of sight.
* Do not park your car immediately adjacent to venue. Park in lit area.
* Carry on your person money to provide for an emergency taxi (£20).

# Parking in Isolated Car Parks

* Have keys to hand with a light (on key ring).
* Park near entrance (away from bushes).
* Carry a hand held alarm.
* Leave venue in pairs where possible.
* Keep winter kit (ice defroster, key heater).
* Park together if you are with colleagues.
* Reverse into parking spaces. Doors become a barrier.
* Check the back seat.
* Allow time for visitors to leave.
* Consider if it would be safer to park in the main road.
* Carry mobile phone.
* Consider sensor light on the building that you regularly leave at night.
* Know the route to the car and any obstacles such as potholes.

**18.** **Contacts**

If staff are in doubt about any aspect of this policy or they wish to discuss issues that fall outside of the content of this policy they should contact their Line Manager/Club Leader in the first instance. Any issues should be escalated to the management committee for further discussion if they remain unresolved or there is need for further discussion and/or guidelines to be issued.