

## Introduction

SEA programs must have reasonable safeguards in place to prevent adults from engaging in, or creating the perception that they are engaging in, inappropriate conduct with participants<sup>1</sup>. Due to the intensive, long-term nature of SEA programs, staff members develop close, trusting relationships with participants. These relationships are designed to serve as protective factors that help youth overcome challenges in their lives, but when professional boundaries are hazy or are crossed, these relationships can cause harm to our participants and organizations. Programs must have in place, and educate staff on, clearly established professional boundaries.

## Overview

This document provides guidance to programs as they determine and educate staff on appropriate professional boundaries with participants. Topics addressed include:

- General Guidelines
- One-on-One Interactions with Participants
- Physical Touch
- Language/Communications
- Locker Rooms
- Transportation
- Personal Technology Interactions
- Participant Privacy on the Internet
- Personal Relationships
- Dress Code
- Drug & Alcohol Use

## General Guidelines

Organizations should never place participants under the supervision of a staff member or a volunteer who has not been through a thorough screening process and who has not been trained in appropriate interactions with participants. Below are three overarching guidelines for staff and volunteers to remember in order to protect themselves, the organization, and participants.

- Boundaries:** Staff members must establish and maintain clear professional boundaries in all interactions with participants.

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<sup>1</sup> “Participant” is defined as a member of the Afterschool Program or College and Alumni Success Program who is currently receiving services from the program, whether or not he/she is still a minor. Past participants who have completed the College and Alumni Success Program and are no longer receiving services from the program are not included in this definition.

- ❑ **Behaviors:** Staff members must avoid behaviors that cross, or could be misconstrued as crossing, professional boundaries.
- ❑ **Situations:** Staff members should minimize situations where they are alone with a participant in a private space, as discussed in greater detail below.

## **One-on-One Interactions with Participants**

Staff members should avoid one-on-one interactions with participants behind closed doors or outside of regular program hours. Meetings with participants should, whenever possible, be within visual and/or hearing supervision of other staff members. If a staff member needs to meet with a participant individually, he/she should follow the guidelines below.

### **One-on-one meetings within program hours**

If a staff member anticipates a conversation about a sensitive topic and believes added privacy is important to the outcome of the meeting, he/she should inform his/her supervisor prior to the meeting and should additionally consider:

- ❑ asking another staff member or the participants' parent to join the conversation;
- ❑ using a room with windows and, if it is in the participants' best interest or requested by the participant or participants' guardian, facing the participant away from windows so that people passing by cannot see the participant's face; and/or
- ❑ only partially covering the windows in a way that does not obstruct someone else from being able to see what's happening in the room.

### **One-on-one meetings outside of regular program hours**

Staff members should not make a habit out of meeting an individual participant outside of the regular program. If a staff member needs to meet individually with a participant outside of regular programming hours (to review a college application, for example), he/she should:

- ❑ inform his/her supervisor, the Program Director, or the Executive Director of the meeting;
- ❑ inform the participants' parents of the meeting;
- ❑ meet in a public space; and
- ❑ never meet alone in the building, a staff member's or a participant's home, or any other private space.

## **Physical Touch**

Staff should be aware that everyone has different levels of comfort with physical touch (hugs, pats on the back, handshakes, etc.). Some forms of touching are acceptable as long as they are respectful and appropriate. Below are some guidelines for appropriate touching.

- ❑ Never touch a participant in a manner that a reasonable person could interpret as inappropriate.
- ❑ Any appropriate touching should be in response to the need of the participant, not the need of the adult.
- ❑ Touching should not occur without the participant's permission. Resistance to touching must be respected.
- ❑ Touching must never include the breasts or any area between the waist and knees including the buttocks or groin.
- ❑ Appropriate touching should be done in the open, not in private.
- ❑ Appropriate touching should have a brief, limited duration.
- ❑ Do not wrestle or spar with a participant, even in jest.
- ❑ Do not encourage physical altercations or inappropriate touch between participants.
- ❑ The use of corporal punishment (hitting, spanking, etc.) is prohibited.

## **Language / Communication**

Staff members should be aware of ways that they communicate, verbally and nonverbally, with participants and other staff members, and of how participants communicate amongst themselves. Below are some guidelines for appropriate communications with, and among, participants.

- ❑ Do not condone or make any abusive or inappropriate statements such as statements that are humiliating, belittling, bullying, threatening, and/or degrading.
- ❑ Do not condon or make inappropriate statements regarding race, ethnicity, religion, disability, national origin, gender, gender identity or expression, age, sex, or sexual orientation.
- ❑ Disciplinary measures should never include the threat of or actual failure to provide necessities of care, such as food or water, or the threat to do so.
- ❑ Do not condone or make sexual comments or remarks about a participant's body.
- ❑ Do not condone or make sexually suggestive gestures or facial expressions.
- ❑ Do not condone or make sexual or risqué jokes, or degrading comments.
- ❑ Do not share, or permit the sharing of, sexually-explicit or pornographic material with participants, or request that participants share this material with you.
- ❑ Do not threaten or bribe a participant or condone such behavior amongst participants.
- ❑ Do not discuss personal issues with participants or within earshot of participants, such as relationships, finances, gossip-type information, etc.

## **Locker Rooms**

Programs should be intentional about when and how the locker rooms are monitored, used, and accessed.

- ❑ If multiple participants are in the locker room, consider having a staff member or a designated volunteer (with appropriate screening and background checks) stay in the locker room with the participants. The need for privacy should be respected, especially when a participant is bathing or changing clothes. Staff should turn their back, provide a visual barrier, or step out of the room (but remain within hearing supervision).
- ❑ If there is only one participant in the locker room, or if the staff member is of the opposite gender of participants in the locker room, the staff member should stand directly outside the locker room, remaining within hearing supervision.
- ❑ Cell phones and other mobile devices with recording capabilities, including voice recording, still cameras, and video cameras, increase the risk of certain types of abuse or misconduct. As a result, use of a mobile device's recording capabilities in the locker rooms should be prohibited.

## Transportation

### General guidelines

- ❑ Staff should avoid transporting a participant alone except in emergency situations. Staff should seek to add an additional staff member or additional students to the vehicle to avoid being alone with a participant.
- ❑ If staff must transport participants alone, consider dash cams as a way to ensure greater transparency. Many dash cams start recording automatically when the engine is turned on, and have looped interval recording that, after a certain number of hours, records over prior content. Staff members should not turn off the dash cam at any time during the transportation of the participant.

### Personal vehicles

Staff members should not regularly transport participants in their own vehicles. If staff members do need to use their own vehicles, the program should ensure that:

- ❑ the program and the staff member have the proper liability insurance, and
- ❑ the vehicle is registered and properly maintained, and
- ❑ the staff member has undergone appropriate screening (background check, interviews, driver check, references, etc.), and
- ❑ the staff member has the appropriate vehicle endorsement on their license, as may be required by law, and
- ❑ the staff member understands and follows the program's policy concerning safe driving and distracted driving.

## Personal Technology Interactions

While new technology and social media have many benefits and make communication with participants convenient, there are risks to using these technologies. Below are some guidelines to safeguard communications with participants.

### General Guidelines

- ❑ Limit messaging and calls to participants to program-related topics.
- ❑ Do not socialize with participants via texts, calls, or mobile applications.
- ❑ Unless necessary to obtain important information, avoid having long conversations via text or social media. If a participant brings up a sensitive topic that requires further conversation, consider asking the participant to come into the office to meet with you and talk more.
- ❑ When possible, communicate with groups rather than individual participants.
- ❑ Consider adding another staff member to texts to individual students.
- ❑ Be aware of ways that your message could be misconstrued.
  - ❑ *Appropriate*: “Hey Jesse. Just a reminder that practice was moved to 3pm today. See you there.”
  - ❑ *Could be misconstrued*: “Hey Jesse. Just a reminder that practice was moved to 3pm today. I missed you yesterday. Looking forward to seeing you today.”
- ❑ Establish and communicate reasonable hours within which participants and staff can text or call each other (for example, 7:30am - 8:30pm), unless there is an emergency.

### Personal Social Media Guidelines

If social media is a program-approved way for staff members to communicate with participants, staff should abide by the following guidelines.

- ❑ Do not engage at all with students under the age of 13 on social media. (Youth under the age of 13 are not allowed to have Facebook or Twitter accounts.)
- ❑ Any social media interactions with students should be an extension of the staff members’ work at the program.
- ❑ When interacting with participants, staff members should use an account created by, and belonging to, the organization. Alternatively, staff may use an account created solely for this purpose, containing no personal details (ex: SquashWise Luke or SquashBusters Megan). Give supervisors access to this account.
- ❑ On your personal accounts, do not initiate or accept an invitations to connect with a participant via any social networking sites. For example, do not “friend” or accept friend requests from participants. Likewise, do not “follow” participants or ask/allow them to “follow” you on apps, blogs, or other interactive services.
  - ❑ Some staff members may be previously connected to participants on social

media. In these situations, consider restricting viewing access moving forward so that the participant cannot see personal information (no photos, posts, etc.), or transferring the relationship to your professional account. Staff must be transparent with their supervisor about their accounts and connections with participants. When these situations occur, the staff member must understand that he/she is viewed by the participant and their family as a representative of the organizations and maintain professional boundaries.

- ❑ Staff should never independently, without proper authorization, post photos of participants on their personal social media pages, nor should they tag or otherwise identify participants. Staff may only repost photos/videos/posts shared by their member program or SEA. (Organizations should only post photos/videos/posts with the permission of the participant's guardian or the permission of the participant if he or she is 18 years or older.)
- ❑ Do not use social media or other communication tools, such as Snapchat, that purposely do not maintain a record of communication.
- ❑ When using public social media account(s) or private accounts accessible to members of the SEA professional community:
  - ❑ Consider whether any posting may reflect poorly on you or your organization.
  - ❑ Avoid criticism of participants, your organization, your colleagues, or others within your professional community.
  - ❑ Avoid posting incendiary or discriminatory comments.
  - ❑ Make clear that the views expressed are your own and not that of SEA.

## Volunteers

Volunteers must be trained and supervised in their interactions with students, including social media. Consider the following two levels of volunteers when setting appropriate boundaries.

- ❑ **Fully Screened & Trained Volunteers:** Some SEA programs give volunteers sole supervisory responsibility over students and/or pair volunteers one-on-one as mentors to provide individual support. These volunteers must be screened, trained, and held to the same standards as staff members, including in their meetings and communications with students outside of the program.
- ❑ **All Other Volunteers:** All other volunteers (those who only undergo background checks and basic training) should be instructed to refrain from direct communication with participants over social media, the phone, or other forms of communication, and should never supervise students without a qualified staff member present.

## Participant Privacy on the Internet

Programs should respect the privacy and confidentiality of participant information when sharing information online.

- ❑ For participants under the age of 18:
  - ❑ A caregiver must sign a media release. If the caregiver does not sign the release, nothing about the student may be posted at all, and a photo in which they are present may not be used in media materials.
  - ❑ Do not post identifying information except for a participants' first name and grade/level of education.
- ❑ For participants ages 18 and older:
  - ❑ The participant must sign a media release. If the participant does not sign the release, nothing about the participant may be posted at all, and a photo in which they are present may not be used in media materials.
  - ❑ Staff may share participants' name and grade/level of education, and may post additional information about participants with their permission.
- ❑ Staff members and the organization should not tag or otherwise identify a student. Any such posts, by staff or others, should be removed immediately.

## Personal Relationships

SEA recommends that organizations enforce the following rules related to personal relationships with participants.

### General Guidelines

- ❑ Staff members must refrain from socializing with participants, except as part of activities sponsored or sanctioned by the program.
- ❑ Staff members are strictly prohibited from engaging in romantic or sexual conduct with any participant, including participants who have reached the age of consent and/or those who are employed by the program.
- ❑ Staff members should never single out participants for special treatment or otherwise show favoritism. This may include taking participants to engage in activities not sanctioned by the program and/or gifting personal squash racquets or other items to participants.
- ❑ When participants share personal information with staff members, staff members should be thoughtful about what information they have a responsibility to share with other staff members, and within what timeline. For example, disclosures and abuse or neglect must be shared immediately. Information about challenging home situations should be shared with a supervisor, and potentially other staff. Whenever information is shared with other staff, it should be shared thoughtfully - balancing the desire to protect student privacy with the goal of most effectively supporting

students as a whole program.

- ❑ Staff members are required to promptly report known misconduct and questionable behavior on the part of fellow staff or volunteers.

### **Self-Disclosure**

Staff members should be mindful and intentional about what personal information they share with participants. Below are some guidelines around staff self-disclosure.

- ❑ Staff should refrain from revealing detailed personal information about themselves to participants. The content of conversations with participants should be limited to participants' academic and athletic performance, and mental, social, physical, and emotional health.
- ❑ When staff members do choose to disclose personal information, they should be purposeful with those disclosures.
  - ❑ Do not share personal information in order to make connections with or feel closer to participants. There are more effective ways to build rapport and express empathy.
  - ❑ Do build rapport over things like movies, books, sports, and music, if authentic.
  - ❑ When in doubt about whether or not to share something, do not share. You can always go back to someone with more information later, but you cannot take it back.

### **Ambiguous Situations**

In situations in which employees have prior relationships with participants, employees are still expected to set and maintain appropriate boundaries, reflecting the difference in power and authority between staff members and participants. Employees are encouraged to seek guidance when they encounter ambiguous situations regarding socializing or relationships with participants.

### **Dress Code**

Staff members should choose their attire with care, remaining fully clothed in front of participants at all times and refraining from clothing that exposes the buttocks, belly, or breasts. Staff should also refrain from wearing clothes with alcohol advertisements, messages or images of a sexual nature, or other statements or images that might send a message that conflicts with the mission of the program.

### **Alcohol and Drug Use**

Inappropriate drug and alcohol use poses a significant threat to the safety, health, and well-being of employees and participants. Member programs must commit to ensuring a

substance-free work environment, and should explicitly prohibit:

- ❑ The use, possession, solicitation for, or sale of narcotics or other illegal drugs, alcohol or prescription medication without a prescription on program premises, while supervising children, or while acting on behalf of the program in any capacity, and
- ❑ Consuming or being under the influence of prohibited substances while at work, while on the program premises, or while acting on behalf of program in any capacity. “Prohibited substances” include illegal drugs, alcohol, or prescription drugs not taken in accordance with a prescription given to the employee.

*This guide was written by Becky Silva at the Squash and Education Alliance, with support from the 2018 SEA Safety Taskforce and the 2019 Social Work Committee.*