

GUIDELINES FOR PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOUR

Context

The Education Act (1998) and the Education Welfare Act (2000) place a duty of care responsibility on schools.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child points to the following:

- Children have rights to a minimum standard of health, education, social security, physical care, family life, play, recreation, culture and leisure and an adequate standard of living
- Children have the right to be safe from discrimination, physical abuse, exploitation, substance use, injustice and conflict
- Children have the right to a name and identity, to be consulted and taken account of, to have access to information, to have freedom of speech and opinion and to challenge decisions made on their behalf

Children First emphasises that the needs of the child are paramount. It has been adopted as national guidelines to support and guide all who come into regular contact with children in identifying and reporting child abuse.

Teacher-student relationships should be:

- Open, positive and encouraging
- Defined by a mutually agreed set of goals and commitments
- Respectful of the creativity and autonomy of students
- Carried out in a context where students are protected and their rights promoted
- Free from verbal, physical, emotional or sexual abuse or any threat of such harm
- Respectful of the needs and developmental stage of the student
- Aimed at the promotion of individual progress
- Governed by a code of ethics and good practice that is agreed and adhered to by all members of the school community (and included in the induction programme for employees and volunteers)
- Respectful, but not unquestioning of authority
- Mindful that students with disabilities may be vulnerable

Good practice:

- The school should devise policies on countering 'bullying' behaviour, harassment and sexual harassment that are known and understood by all members of the school community
- Attendance records should be kept for each element of the students' educational experience
- Student complaints have a right to be heard and should be investigated through fair and responsible procedures
- Teachers should never physically punish or verbally abuse a student. Prudent behaviour and correct procedures that protect the professional reputation of the teacher should guide interactions with 'difficult' students. Agreed school procedures, including referral, should be understood and adhered to.

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- An accident book/record should be kept in which details of any accident are kept. Reports here should include place, time, context, what happened, who was involved, what was said (if significant), any injuries (person or property), how responded to / resolved
- An incident report book/record should be kept on all instances of disruptive behaviour that require teacher intervention and put at risk the safety and well being of others (details recorded should be as for accidents)
- All activities should have constant adult supervision
- Teachers/supervisors should be respectful of the privacy of young people in dormitories, changing rooms, showers and toilets. In all circumstances the overriding factor to be considered in such sensitive areas is the safety of students.
- Planning for school trips should be mindful of safety, insurance, management consent, parental consent, adequate supervision (number and gender), telephone contact, medical concerns, sleeping arrangements (separate male and female quarters),
- The roles and responsibilities of teachers participating in extra-curricular/ over-night trips should be clearly defined,
- Teachers should, while fostering and maintaining friendly relationships, maintain an 'arms-length professionalism' in their relationship with students (instances of being alone with one pupil should be avoided; where this is unavoidable, doors should be left open; other members of staff should be informed of one-to-one educational contact with students
- Teachers / volunteers should avoid taking children alone in their car
- Employees / volunteers should avoid making sexually suggestive comments or telling jokes of a sexual nature to students
- Where students' emotional or personal problems come to the attention of a teacher the assistance of the Guidance Counsellor should be sought. However, when there are concerns about child protection issues, appropriate reporting procedures must be followed (as specified in the Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary Schools)
- Teachers should be familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and understand their responsibilities in child protection. This includes an awareness of what constitutes abuse, the name and role of the Designated Liaison Person for the school, the importance of confidentiality and how to write / make a report to the DLP.
- Parents should be aware of the school commitment to implement the Child Protection guidelines, the identity of the DLP and where to access further information
- Students should be aware of the Child Protection guidelines, the commitment of the school to their welfare, how to seek help and the responsibility of the school if they do seek help.

(These draft good practice guidelines have drawn on 'Guidelines for Professional Behaviour for Teachers' (ASTI); 'Our Duty to Care' (Department of Health and Children); Child Protection for the Youth Work Sector (Department of Education and Science) and Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport (The Irish Sports Council)).