

STAFF/STUDENT INTERACTION POLICY

As of January 1, 2018, a new California regulation requires all schools to have a written policy regarding staff/faculty and student interactions. The purpose of the policy is to provide a guideline in maintaining appropriate boundaries with students. In the course of operating Westmark School, we are committed to enforcing all required State and Federal regulations. Of course as always, our students are our first priority; ensuring their continued growth and progression is our on-going focus. For easy access to this policy, it may be found on the Westmark School website-parent portal.

If you have any questions regarding this policy, please feel free to contact us.

Staff/Student Interaction

Purpose

It is the purpose of this policy to provide additional specificity to the standards of conduct embodied in current School ethics-related rules and regulations so that the staff of the School will better understand the prohibitions and behavior boundaries incumbent upon them.

Some activities may seem innocent from a staff member's perspective, but can be perceived as flirtation or sexual insinuation from a student or parent point of view. The objective of the following lists of acceptable and unacceptable behavior is not to restrain positive relationships between staff and students, but to prevent relationships that could lead to, or may be perceived as, sexual misconduct.

Staff must understand their own responsibility for ensuring that they do not cross the boundaries as written in this policy. Disagreeing with the wording or intent of the established boundaries will be considered irrelevant for corrective/disciplinary purposes. Thus, it is crucial that all employees learn this policy thoroughly and apply the lists of acceptable and unacceptable behavior to their daily activities. Although good-natured, heartfelt interaction with students certainly fosters learning, student/staff interactions must always be guided by appropriate boundaries regarding activities, locations, and intentions.

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THE DIFFERENCE IS BRILLIANT

The rules of conduct set forth in this policy are not intended to serve as an exhaustive list of requirements, limitations, or prohibitions on staff conduct and activities established by the School. Rather, they are intended to:

- Alert staff to some of the more sensitive and often problematic matters involved in faculty/staff-student relationships;
- Specify boundaries related to potentially sexual situations and conduct that is contrary to accepted norms of behavior and in conflict with duties and responsibilities of staff; and
- Provide staff with clear guidance in conducting themselves in a manner that reflects high standards of professionalism.

It is important for the School to maintain a School-wide culture in which students and staff members understand their responsibility to report misconduct without fearing retaliation from students, staff, or administration. In order to prevent abuse and/or exploitation, students and staff must know that the administration will support them when they report possible misconduct.

Although this policy gives clear direction regarding appropriate conduct between staff and students, each staff member is obligated to avoid situations that could prompt suspicion by parents, students, colleagues, or School leaders. One helpful standard that can be quickly applied when assessing whether your conduct is appropriate is to ask yourself, "Would I be doing this if the student's family or my colleagues or family were standing next to me?"

Boundaries

For the purpose of this policy, the term "boundaries" is defined as acceptable professional behavior by staff members while interacting with a student. Crossing the boundaries of a student/teacher relationship is deemed an abuse of power and a betrayal of public trust.

Unacceptable Behaviors

The following non-exhaustive list of behavior shall be considered violation of this policy:

- Giving gifts to an individual student that are of a personal and intimate nature
- Kissing of any kind
- Any type of unnecessary physical contact with a student in either a public or private situation
- Being alone with a student on campus or away from the School unless necessary for educational reasons and no other staff member/teacher is available to join you
- Making, or participating in sexually inappropriate comments
- Sexual jokes, stories, or jokes/comments with sexual innuendo
- Seeking emotional involvement with a student for your benefit
- Discussing inappropriate personal troubles or intimate issues with a student
- Becoming involved with a student so that a reasonable person may suspect inappropriate behavior
- Inappropriate use of social media with or about students
- Excessive attention toward a particular student
- Sending emails, text messages or letters to students of a personal nature if the content is not about school activities
- Failing to keep parents informed when a significant issue develops about a student
- Driving a student in your own car

Acceptable and Recommended Behaviors

- Getting a parent's written consent for any after-School activity
- Obtaining formal approval to take students off School property for activities such as field trips or competitions
- Emails, text, phone, and instant messages to students must be very professional and pertaining to School activities or classes (and communication should be limited to School technology)
- Keeping the door open when alone with a student
- Keeping reasonable space between you and your students
- Stopping and correcting students if they cross your own personal boundaries
- Keeping parents informed when a significant issue develops about a student

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- Keeping after-class discussions with a student professional and brief
- Asking for advice from fellow staff or administrators if you find yourself in a difficult situation related to boundaries
- Involving your supervisor if conflict arises with the student
- Informing your supervisor about situations that have the potential to become more severe
- Making detailed notes about an incident that could evolve into a more serious situation later
- Recognizing the responsibility to stop unacceptable behavior of students or co-workers
- Asking another staff member to be present if you will be alone with any type of special needs student
- Asking another staff member to be present when you must be alone with a student after regular School hours
- Giving students praise and recognition without touching them
- Pats on the back, high fives, and handshakes are acceptable
- Keeping your professional conduct a high priority

Duty to Report

When any employee becomes aware of another staff member crossing the boundaries specified in this policy, he/she must speak directly to this staff member if the violation appears minor, and/or report the matter immediately to the School administration. If the observed behavior appears significant, it is the duty of every staff member to immediately report the matter to the School administration. It is the duty of the School administration to thoroughly investigate and remediate the situation as necessary. Employees must also report to the administration any awareness or concern of student behavior that crosses appropriate boundaries, or where a student appears to be at risk of sexual abuse.

Ten Risky Behaviors

By Robert J. Shoop (March 2006). Exploitation: Prevention and Protection; *educator's Guide to Controlling Sexual Harassment and abusive behavior*

1. Do not be alone with a student in your classroom, outside of the regular School day, without informing your supervising administrator. Do not be alone with a student behind a closed door. If your classroom door does not have a window, request that one be put in.
2. Do not purchase gifts for individual students. Do not send students non-School-related e-mail messages.
3. Do not make a habit of meeting students outside of School for a meal, a soft drink, or a cup of coffee. Regardless of the motivation, seldom is there justification for such regular contact.
4. Do not counsel your students in non-academic matters. Teachers, although well meaning, are not trained counselors. Teachers must consider the potential risk in discussing personal matters with students. If a teacher believes that a student is in some type of trouble, the student should be referred to the School's "student at risk" team.
5. Do not regularly transport students in your own vehicle or allow students to have access to your vehicle.
6. Do not give students hall passes to come to your classroom for non-School related business.
7. Do not allow students to engage you in conversations regarding their romantic or sexual activities. Don't discuss your personal problems with students.
8. Do not entertain students in your home unless it is a School-sponsored activity.
9. Do not make sexual comments, comments about their bodies, or share sexually oriented material with students.
10. Do not put your hands on your student in a manner that a reasonable person could interpret as inappropriate. Don't brush against their bodies, touch their hair, and rub their necks, shoulders, or backs. Don't tickle, wrestle, poke, pat, punch, or spank students.