

# STAFF AND STUDENT PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES POLICY

THE KING DAVID SCHOOL



## Purpose

King David School Staff hold a unique position of influence, authority, trust and power in relation to students at the School. As such, it is their duty, at all times, to maintain professional boundaries with students.

The following policy and guidelines are designed to raise awareness of situations where professional boundary violations may occur and some strategies to minimise the risk of boundary violations.

A breach of Staff and Student Professional Boundaries may, in some circumstances, be a criminal offence.

The practice of protective behaviours at all times will also reduce the possibility of vexatious claims being brought against Staff.

## Scope

This Policy applies to:

- School Council Members;
- The School Principal and Senior Leadership;
- All Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff;
- Contractors;
- Volunteers;
- External Education Providers.

For the purposes of this Policy only they will be collectively referred to as "Staff" or "staff members". Staff and Student Professional Boundaries apply in all School environments. School environments include, physical, virtual and online environments used during or outside school hours, as well as any environment (including those outside the School's grounds) where School-related activities are occurring.

Teachers registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) must also comply with principles set out in The Victorian Teaching Profession's Code of Conduct (VIT Code of Conduct).

## Policy

The King David School is committed to providing a safe and supportive environment for students where they are respected and treated in a professional and caring manner; and they are protected from abuse, harm, neglect, and the threat of harm.

It is our policy that:

- Staff exercise their responsibilities in a way that recognises professional boundaries with regard to their relationships with students at all times
- Staff identify, discourage and reject any advances of a sexual nature initiated by a student
- Staff interaction with students is professional at all times, including inside and outside of school hours
- Conflict of interest issues must be reported to the Principal, or the Assistant Principal / Chief Child Protection Officer, as soon as practicable
- Equal learning opportunities are given to each student without discrimination
- Appropriate consequences will be applied to Staff who breach professional boundaries.

FILENAME	LAST UPDATED	LAST REVIEWED	PAGE
Staff & Student Professional Boundaries Policy	June 2022	April 2023	1 of 7
Signature of Principal:		Dated:	

***It is the School's policy that any breach of Staff and Student Professional Boundaries is a child safety incident that must be reported internally***

***Any breach that meets the threshold for external reporting must also be reported to the relevant external authority.***

## **What are Professional Boundaries?**

Professional boundaries are parameters that describe the limits of a relationship in circumstances where one person (a student) entrusts their welfare and safety to another person (a staff member), in circumstances where a power imbalance exists.

The fact that Staff are in a unique position of trust, care, authority and influence with students means that there is always an inherent power imbalance that exists between them. It also means that professional boundaries must be established, maintained and respected at all times.

In most cases this power imbalance is clear, however, sometimes it may be more difficult to recognise especially for younger Staff who may only be a few years older than their students.

The following guidelines are not exhaustive, and given that sometimes 'grey areas' may occur, it is expected that all Staff (no matter their age or experience) use their own good judgment, think very carefully about the implications and potential consequences of engaging in certain behaviours with students, and always err on the side of caution.

When unsure about whether professional boundaries are being, or have been, breached, ask yourself:

- Would I modify my behaviour if a colleague was present?
- How would I feel about explaining my actions at a staff meeting, to the Principal, or to parents/carers?
- Am I sharing information for the student's benefit, or for my benefit?
- Am I dealing with this student differently from others in similar circumstances?
- Is my language or demeanour different from normal when dealing with this particular student?

## **Intimate Relationships**

Staff must not initiate or develop a relationship with any student that has, or can be misinterpreted as having, a romantic or sexual, rather than professional, basis. This is regardless of whether the relationship is consensual, non-consensual, or condoned by parents/carers.

Such relationships have the potential to cause serious psychological harm to a student; negative impact on the teaching and learning of students and colleagues; and may carry a serious reputational risk for the staff member and, in turn, the School.

The professional relationship of Staff and students may be breached by:

- flirtatious behaviour or dating
- development of an intimate personal relationship
- sexual relations
- the use of sexual innuendo, inappropriate language and/or material with students
- unwarranted and inappropriate touching
- unwarranted and inappropriate filming or photography
- deliberate exposure to sexual behaviour of others (e.g. pornography)
- having intimate contact without a valid context via written or electronic means (e.g. email, letters, telephone, text messages, social media sites or chatrooms)
- going out, whether alone or in company, to social events such as the movies or dinner
- exchanging gifts of a personal nature that encourages the formation of an intimate relationship.

FILENAME	LAST UPDATED	LAST REVIEWED	PAGE
Staff & Student Professional Boundaries Policy	June 2022	April 2023	2 of 7
Signature of Principal:		Dated:	

## Relationships with Former Students

The imbalance of power and authority that exists in the Staff/student relationship does not suddenly disappear after the student finishes their schooling. Staff should not assume that they will be protected from disciplinary action by claiming that a relationship began only after the student left the School as there may be a reasonable belief that the emotional intimacy of the relationship developed while the Staff/student relationship existed.

For registered teachers, it is a breach of the VIT Code of Conduct for a teacher to have a sexualised relationship with a former student:

- within two years of the learner completing their senior secondary schooling or equivalent; and
- in all circumstances, the former student must be at least 18 years old before a relationship commences.

In addition, if any staff member engages in a romantic/sexual relationship with a person who was previously a student at the School, this may generate concerns that the staff member previously crossed professional boundaries while the former student was under the care of the staff member. In particular, concerns may arise that the staff member engaged in grooming behaviour while the person was still a student.

The School will investigate any complaint that a staff member has abused their position and acted unprofessionally by engaging in a relationship with a former student.

In considering whether there has been a breach of professional boundaries, the School may take the following factors into account:

- the nature of the relationship, including its closeness, dependence and significance the length of the relationship while the former student was attending the School any conduct the staff member undertook which gives cause for concern
- the length of time that has passed between when the person was a student at the School and the commencement of the relationship.

By ensuring that their relationships with King David School students do not breach Staff and Student Professional Boundaries, a staff member who subsequently forms a relationship with a former student will be less likely to be considered to have breached professional boundaries in relation to that former student. This is on the provision that the former student is at least 18 years old and at least two years have passed between the time when the former student concluded their senior secondary schooling and the commencement of the relationship.

## Personal Relationships

Staff must not initiate or develop a relationship with any student that is or can be perceived or misinterpreted as having a personal rather than professional element. This is regardless of whether the relationship is consensual, non-consensual, or condoned by parents or carers.

It is the student's perception of staff behaviour and not the intention of the staff member that is important.

An established and expected professional relationship between Staff and students may be compromised by Staff:

- acting inappropriately at any parties or social events with students in attendance outside of organised School events (without parental/carers permission)
- sharing personal details about their private lives with students
- meeting with students outside of school hours without permission from the School. Staff must recognise at all times that their role is not to be a "friend" or "parent" to a student.

FILENAME	LAST UPDATED	LAST REVIEWED	PAGE
Staff & Student Professional Boundaries Policy	June 2022	April 2023	3 of 7
Signature of Principal:		Dated:	

## Fair Learning Opportunities

The focus of teaching is effective student learning and as such teachers are expected to support their students with their professional expertise so as to offer them the best education in their individual circumstances. The quality of teaching and learning between teachers and students characterises their relationship.

Teachers should demonstrate their commitment to student learning by:

- maintaining a safe and challenging learning environment that promotes mutual respect recognising and developing each student's abilities, skills, and talents by catering to their individual abilities and respecting their individual differences
- encouraging students to develop and reflect on their own values
- interacting with students without bias
- not engaging in preferential treatment
- not discriminating against any student on the basis of race, sex, sexuality, disability or religious or political conviction
- always making decisions in students' best interests.

## Electronic Communications between Staff and Students

It is expected that all Staff at the School will adhere to the following guidelines:

- all use of technology should be for educational purposes or for the organisation of co-curricular activities
- all communication between Staff and students should be via the School's approved ICT systems and reflect a professional Staff/student relationship
- Staff should not give out their personal telephone numbers or social media contact details
- Staff are not to accept or request students as 'friends' on social media or otherwise use social media to communicate in any way that is not condoned or approved by the School
- Staff should not exchange personal pictures with a student
- any student personal contact numbers or other personal contact details made available to the School should only be used for School communications.

## Physical Contact with Students

All Staff should be aware that situations may arise that can be perceived in a manner that was not intended. For this reason, all Staff at the School should adhere to the following guidelines for contact with students both in and outside of School grounds:

- Staff should avoid unnecessary physical contact with students
- Minimal, non-lingering, non-gratuitous physical contact in the context of the situation is acceptable (e.g. congratulatory pat on the back, high-5, or handshake). Specifically,
  - Preschool – Staff may have physical contact with students to assist with changing clothes, toileting or to comfort a distressed child.
  - Junior School – Staff may have physical contact with students to assist with changing clothes, or to comfort a distressed child.
  - Years 3-4 -Staff may have physical contact with students to comfort a distressed child. It is advisable to ask the student; (for example; do you want a hug?).
  - Years 5-12 Staff should not normally have physical contact with students.
  - Handshakes, 'high fives' or similar hand to hand contact is acceptable at any age.

FILENAME	LAST UPDATED	LAST REVIEWED	PAGE
Staff & Student Professional Boundaries Policy	June 2022	April 2023	4 of 7
Signature of Principal:		Dated:	

- Contact for sport, drama and dance instruction is acceptable in a class situation. If physical contact is required for specific technical instructions, it must be brief and only with the consent of the student, and be very careful not to touch near any private areas. This should only occur when other students or staff are present and/or in physical spaces that are clearly observable at all times. (Note that a student may withdraw consent for this contact either verbally or gesturally and Staff must remain vigilant while engaging in necessary contact situations. Once consent has been withdrawn no further contact can be or should be made).
- For individual music lessons, when an adult is alone with a student they must ensure that the student is positioned in the room so that they can be seen through the window. Lessons should only be held in a room where there is a window in the door or alternatively the door is left open.

## Off-Campus Excursions and Camps

During off-campus excursions or camps, the same physical contact guidelines apply as well as the following:

- checking of sleeping arrangements, or supervising of students changing should be done, where possible, with another staff member present and always in a manner that respects students' privacy and personal space
- always knock and advise of presence prior to entering a bedroom or dormitory
- ensure that while in a bedroom or dormitory a strict Staff/student relationship is upheld and that inappropriate behaviour, such as sitting on a student's bed, is not undertaken.
- Staff may not sleep in a room alone with a student or students. If the accommodation is such that students and staff must sleep in the same area, there should be a minimum of 2 staff and 2 students in the room at all times.
- Staff may not use the same bathroom as a student if there are students present. Staff should not enter a student bathroom without another staff member being present, or at least 2 students are in the room.
- When students need to use a public toilet on a camp or excursion please follow the procedure below
  - escort the student(s) to the toilet (Junior School students should be in a pair)
  - ask the students to wait outside, quickly check the bathroom for strange individuals or dangerous items
  - if you are comfortable with the situation please ask the students to enter and wait outside

## Managing Conflicts of Interest

Where personal relationships with students such as family relationships and close friendship networks exist, questions of conflicts of interest may arise.

This may be more prevalent in our community as professional boundaries may be tested due to the nature and size of the Melbourne Jewish community. In these circumstances, Staff need to be far more diligent in developing and maintaining these boundaries.

Where a staff member feels that a conflict of interest may exist, they should notify the Principal, or the Chief Child Protection Officer if the conflict involves the Principal. Arrangements should be implemented to avoid the conflict situation if possible. For example, the teaching of students by a staff member with a conflict should be avoided.

Any significant decisions relating to these students in the School (such as the appointment of classes or selection in sports teams) should be referred to another staff member and endorsed by a supervisor.

FILENAME	LAST UPDATED	LAST REVIEWED	PAGE
Staff & Student Professional Boundaries Policy	June 2022	April 2023	5 of 7
Signature of Principal:		Dated:	

## Declarations of Staff/Student Interactions

To enable the School to be aware of appropriate and inappropriate interactions between Staff and students, it is King David School's policy that all Staff are encouraged to declare any interactions with students outside the School context. These interactions may include situations where the staff member is:

- related to the student
- friends with the student's parents or family
- given parental consent to interact with the student for academic purposes outside of school hours and the parent/carer has notified the School.

Staff are to declare any relationship or situation which has the potential of violating the School's Child Protection and Safety policies or guidelines. For example, transporting students to and from school,

King David School maintains records of all declarations made by staff members related to their interactions with students, or relationships with students, that exist outside of school hours or School premises. These records are made available to the parents/carers of a student on request.

## Staff Responsibilities

All Staff must:

- follow the guidelines as set out in this Policy
- immediately report any conflicts of interest
- remove themselves from decision-making where a conflict has been identified.

## Consequences for Breaching the Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy

Where a staff member breaches this Policy, the School may take disciplinary action that may include (depending on the severity of the breach):

- remedial education
- counselling
- increased supervision
- the restriction of duties
- suspension or
- in the case of serious breaches, termination of employment, contract or engagement.

## Implementation

These guidelines are implemented through a combination of:

- staff training and development in professional conduct
- student and parent/carer education and information
- effective management of teachers engaging in inappropriate relationships with students
- effective management of conflicts of interest
- effective communication and incident notification procedures
- effective record keeping procedures
- initiation of corrective actions where necessary

FILENAME	LAST UPDATED	LAST REVIEWED	PAGE
Staff & Student Professional Boundaries Policy	June 2022	April 2023	6 of 7
Signature of Principal:		Dated:	

## Report Any Concerns

### Staff

Our Child Safety and Protection Program includes information for Staff, Volunteers and Contractors about how to identify key indicators of child abuse or other harm and how to report child safety concerns internally. It also contains detailed procedures about when and how to report child safety incidents or concerns to relevant authorities. For more information, refer to our Child Protection Policy.

### Students

The School provides students with information about and encourages them to use multiple pathways to raise child safety concerns about or at the School, including breaches of the Staff and Student Professional Boundaries. These include informal and formal ways, an 'anonymous' way, and through external child advocacy or child safety organisations. For more information, refer to Child Protection & Safety Guidelines for Students.

### Parents/Carers, Family Members or Other Community members

Parents/carers, family members or other community members who witness or suspect that there has been a breach of Professional Boundaries, or have concerns that a child or young person associated with the School may be subject to abuse or harm from a member of Staff, a Volunteer or a Contractor, should contact:

- the School's Senior Child Safety Officer David Opat, by phoning 0414 504 006 or emailing [david.opat@kds.vic.edu.au](mailto:david.opat@kds.vic.edu.au) or the Principal ; or
- if the concern relates to the Principal, the Vice-Principal or Chief Child Protection Officer.

Communications will be treated confidentially on a 'need to know basis'.

***Whenever there are concerns that a child or young person  
is in immediate danger,  
the Police should be contacted on 000.***

FILENAME	LAST UPDATED	LAST REVIEWED	PAGE
Staff & Student Professional Boundaries Policy	June 2022	April 2023	7 of 7
Signature of Principal:		Dated:	