

## **POLICY FOR WORKING ALONE**

(with children or young people)

### **1 Scope**

This document provides advice for all teaching and support staff who regularly, or on an occasional basis, work alone with children, young people or adults. Working alone occurs in a wide range of different circumstances and it is recognised that it can present particular difficulties and concerns. The purpose of this advice is to alert both managers and staff to the issues involved and to assist them in dealing with situations in ways that minimise any potential risks. It identifies good practice and working arrangements when working alone with children and young people, which aims to ensure an appropriate professional environment and the application of necessary safeguards through risk assessment to address any potential vulnerability.

The focus of this guidance does not relate to staff working alone -- for further advice on staff working completely alone on site, see Occupation Health & Safety guidelines.

### **2 Definition**

Working alone with children relates to situations where a member of staff is on their own and is working with or supervising one child or young person.

It occurs onsite and offsite, both within and outside normal working hours. This will include, for example, 1:1 sessions, extra-curricular activities, home visits, transporting students, parent evenings and interviews.

Working alone often forms part of the normal working pattern for special educators and as such may not be regarded as particularly significant or even distinct. Through management support and guidance and through personal awareness it is important that staff appreciate and understand the nature of the activity, the potential risks and what is required to minimise them.

The Principal or Deputy Principal should ensure that staff are kept informed of where advice and guidance on working alone can be found and accessed on site. As and when new documentation or advice becomes available, the school will ensure that staff are made aware. It is the responsibility of the Principal to determine appropriate and reasonable working arrangements, including those for working alone (with children) and to provide guidance and support to staff.

It is important that the Leadership team are clear as to when such situations will or may arise and what practice and working arrangements will be appropriate having regard to the nature of the event and the particular circumstances.

A risk assessment should be undertaken in conjunction and discussed fully with the members of staff concerned to ensure that there is a clear understanding of what is required.

### **3. Guidance on Working Alone Risk**

Planning should be undertaken involving leadership and staff, to prepare for known events and to consider arrangements and good practice for addressing the unknown.

- a. Staff new to situations (new staff, casual relief staff etc.) will be briefed in these arrangements as part of the induction process prior to commencing.
- b. Existing staff will have a review of agreed arrangements, taking account of any new or changed situations annually through the professional learning program.

In some situations the risk might be considered too great for working alone to be permitted. During the actual event an individual member of staff is ultimately reliant on his/her professional judgement and common sense for dealing with the particular circumstances that arise.

### **4. Specific Strategies to Employ**

#### One to one situations:

These can be planned, unplanned, on-site or off-site events. The planning process will need to identify their purpose, need and the working arrangements and procedures to be followed. The frequency will also be a factor.

Strategies include:

- Ensure Deputy Principal (or Principal in the case of a Deputy Principal) is aware of the class or planned event start/finish times and exact location.
- Ensure you are as visible as possible e.g. window with curtains open, door kept ajar or areas where there is visible pedestrian traffic flow.
- If a student is particularly vulnerable e.g. distressed, emotional or of primary school age, ensure there is another adult present or close by.
- Where possible 1:1 work should take place in designated areas within each campus so that other staff know that this activity is taking place.
- Think carefully about seating arrangements (e.g. avoid placing yourself between the student and door).
- The "Protective Practice Guidelines for Staff (Appendix 1) should be considered.
- When organising and attending extra-curricular activities (examples of which are lunchtime sessions, sport practice sessions or after school clubs) planning and preparation including risk assessment will need to take account of any relevant factors.
- Supervision of changing for PE or swimming can be a particular concern with primary aged students given their greater potential need for support from the supervising member of staff and where a teacher is supervising students of the opposite gender. Where possible, this situation should be avoided through the assignment of both male and female staff to the activity. This will likely require a collaborative approach with staff from our partner schools.

### Home visits

Through the planning process, identify whether these are necessary (consider alternatives) and if so, the visit should be conducted by two colleagues. Information about the family and any potential risks is required for an effective assessment before deciding on the visit. The visit should not take place if the risk is deemed too great.

### Transportation of Children

Staff undertaking the transportation of children must comply with any statutory requirements and hold appropriate vehicle insurance cover. The Principal/Team Leader should ensure that staff assigned meet these requirements and are made aware of their responsibilities when carrying out transportation activities.

There will be occasions when children need to be transported in emergency situations. Examples of these are the transport of sick students or those with behavioural problems and usually involve car journeys from school to home. In the latter category the behaviour may necessitate more than one member of staff. Where it is only feasible or justifiable to use one member of staff it may be helpful if that person is the same gender as the child being transported. This may not be possible especially where, for example, a Team Leader or another senior member of staff needs to undertake the trip.

Other considerations in emergency situations are:

- Where possible, students will travel in the back seat
- Attempt to arrange collection by a parent, approved carer or ambulance in an emergency as a first resort.

### School trips including residential trips

Anyone undertaking a school trip must refer to the "Camps & Excursions Policy".

The nature of these events will involve a range of working alone situations for the staff supervising the activity who may be supplemented by approved adult volunteers. The gender of the supervision team ideally need to comprise males and females for dealing with sensitive matters that will arise. In residential situations it is recommended that the staff work in pairs to avoid any potential compromising situation. There is a requirement for a minimum of two adults to be present when travelling.

### Support for very young children and children with complex needs

When dealing with these children, staff will necessarily be involved in assisting them with a variety of issues. This will include 1:1 assistance, which will sometimes, depending on the nature of the need, involve care and personal contact. For example, assisting with hygiene problems, toileting, undressing children for swimming, bathing or undertaking, where necessary, particular intimate tasks, assisting children with disabilities or dealing with distress.

Strategies include:

- Where possible, use verbal directions rather than touch, though it is considered culturally acceptable to tap a deaf child on their shoulder to gain their attention. For example, ask a child or young person to move in a particular way or complete an action, rather than physically place the child or young person in the required position.
- Ensure another staff member is in physical proximity.
- Save for point one above, seek children and young people's permission to touch (keeping in mind that a highly distressed child or young person may be incapable of expressing their wishes).
- Avoid being with a child or young person in a one-to-one, out of sight situation, and never touch a child or young person in such a situation.
- Develop a toileting plan in cooperation with the parent for students identified as needing assistance.

## **Appendix 1**

### **PROTECTIVE PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR STAFF: Boundary Example of violation**

#### **Communication**

- Inappropriate comments about a child/young person's appearance, including excessive flattering comments
- Inappropriate conversation or enquiries of a sexual nature (eg questions about a child or young person's sexuality or his/her sexual relationship with others)
- Disrespectful or discriminatory treatment of, or manner towards, young people based on their perceived or actual sexual orientation
- Use of inappropriate pet names
- Vilification or humiliation
- Jokes or innuendo of a sexual nature
- Obscene gestures and language
- Facilitating/permitting access to pornographic material
- Facilitating/permitting access to sexually explicit material that is not part of endorsed curriculum
- Failing to intervene in sexual harassment of children and young people
- Correspondence of a personal nature via any medium (eg phone, text message, letters, email, internet postings) that is unrelated to the staff member's role. This does not include class cards/bereavement cards etc

#### **Personal disclosure**

- Discussing personal lifestyle details of self, other staff or children and young people unless directly relevant to the learning topic and with the individual's consent

Boundary Example of violation

#### **Physical contact**

- Unwarranted or unwanted touching of a child or young person personally or with objects (eg pencil or ruler)
- Corporal punishment (physical discipline, smacking etc)
- Initiating, permitting or requesting inappropriate or unnecessary physical contact with a child or young person (eg massage, kisses, tickling games) or facilitating situations which unnecessarily result in close physical contact with a child or young person
- Inappropriate use of physical restraint

#### **Place**

- \*Inviting/allowing/encouraging children and young people to attend the staff member's home
- Allowing children and young people access to a staff member's personal internet locations (eg social networking sites)
- \*Attending children and young people's homes or their social gatherings
- \*Being alone with a child or young person outside of a staff member's responsibilities
- Entering change rooms or toilets occupied by children or young people when supervision is not required or appropriate

- \*Transporting a child or young person unaccompanied
- Using toilet facilities allocated to children and young people
- Undressing using facilities set aside for children and young people, or in their presence (\*without the site leader's authority)

### Targeting individual

- Tutoring (outside education sector's directions or knowledge) children and young
- Giving personal gifts or special favours people
- Singling the same children and young people out for special duties or responsibilities
- Offering overnight/weekend/holiday care of children and young people as respite to parents (unless a family day care educator, or employed by a respite organization and with the site leader's knowledge)

### Role

- Adopting an ongoing welfare role that is beyond the scope of their position or that is the responsibility of another staff member (eg a counsellor) or an external professional, and that occurs without the permission of senior staff
- Photographing, audio recording or filming children or young people via any medium when not authorised by the site leader to do so and without required parental consent
- Using personal rather than school equipment for approved activities, unless authorized by the site leader to do so

### Possessions

- Correspondence or communication (via any medium) to or from children and young people where a violation of professional boundaries is indicated and where the correspondence has not been provided to the site leader by the staff member
- Still/moving images or audio recordings of children and young people on personal equipment or kept in personal locations such as car or home that have not been authorised by the site leader
- Uploading or publishing still/moving images or audio recordings of children and young people to any location, without parental and site leader's consent

*Adapted from Protective practices for staff in their interactions with children and young people © 2011 Government of South Australia, Department of Education and Children's Services*

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