

Personnel

Staff/Student Non-Fraternization

This policy applies to Academy employees, dorm parents, volunteers, student teachers, and independent contractors and their employees who interact with students or are present on school grounds. For purposes of this policy, such individuals are referred to collectively as adults.

All adults shall be expected to maintain professional, moral, and ethical relationships with Academy students that are conducive to an effective, safe, learning environment. This policy addresses a range of behaviors that include not only obviously unlawful or improper interactions with students, but also precursor grooming, and other boundary-blurring behaviors that can lead to more egregious misconduct.

The Board of Trustees directs that all adults shall be informed of conduct that is prohibited and the disciplinary actions that may be applied for violation of Board policies.

This policy is not intended to interfere with appropriate pre-existing personal relationships between adults and students and their families that exist independently of The Academy or to interfere with participation in civic, religious, or other outside organizations that include Academy students.

For purposes of this policy, legitimate educational reasons include matters or communications related to teaching, counseling, athletics, extracurricular activities, treatment of a student's physical injury or other medical needs, school administration, or other purposes within the scope of the adult's job duties.

The Head of School or designee shall annually inform students, parents/guardians, and all adults regarding the contents of this policy through employee and student handbooks.

Independent contractors doing business with The Academy shall ensure that their employees who interact with students, or are present on school grounds, are informed of the provisions of this policy.

Adults shall establish and maintain appropriate personal boundaries with students and not engage in any behavior that is prohibited by this policy or that creates the appearance of prohibited behavior.

Prohibited Conduct

Romantic or Sexual Relationships

Adults shall be prohibited from dating, courting, or entering or attempting to form a romantic or sexual relationship with any student enrolled at The Academy, regardless of the student's age. Students of any age are not legally capable of consenting to romantic or sexual interactions with adults.

Prohibited romantic or sexual interaction involving students includes, but is not limited to:

1. Sexual physical contact;
2. Romantic flirtation, propositions, or sexual remarks;
3. Sexual slurs, leering, epithets, sexual and/or derogatory comments;
4. Personal comments about a student's body;
5. Sexual jokes, notes, stories, drawings, gestures, pictures, and/or links to inappropriate websites;
6. Spreading sexual or romantic rumors;
7. Touching a student's body or clothes in a sexual or intimate way;
8. Accepting massages, or offering, or giving massages other than during injury care administered by an athletic trainer, coach, or health care provider;
9. Restricting a student's freedom of movement in a sexually intimidating or provocative manner; and/or
10. Displaying or transmitting sexual objects, pictures, or depictions.

Social Interactions

To maintain professional boundaries, adults shall ensure that their interactions with students are appropriate.

Examples of prohibited conduct that violates professional boundaries include, but are not limited to:

1. Disclosing personal, sexual, family, employment concerns or other private matters to one or more students;
2. Exchanging texts, emails, or other communications of a personal nature with a student;
3. Giving personal gifts, cards, or letters to a student without written approval from an administrator, excluding graduation cards;
4. Touching students without a legitimate educational reason;
5. Singling out a particular student or students for personal attention or friendship beyond the ordinary professional adult-student relationship;
6. Taking a student out of class without a legitimate educational reason;
7. Being alone with a student behind closed doors without a legitimate educational reason;
8. Initiating or extending contact with a student beyond the school day or outside of class times without a legitimate educational reason;
9. Sending or accompanying a student on personal errands;
10. Inviting a student to the adult's home;
11. Going to a student's home without a legitimate educational reason;
12. Taking a student on outings without prior notification to and approval from both the parent/guardian and the Administration;
13. Giving a student a ride alone in a vehicle in a nonemergency situation without prior notification to and approval from both the parent/guardian and the Administration;
14. Addressing students or permitting students to address adults with personalized terms of endearment, pet names, or otherwise in an overly familiar manner;
15. Telling a student personal secrets or sharing personal secrets with a student;
16. For adults who are not guidance/counseling staff, psychologists, social workers or other adults with designated responsibilities to counsel students, encouraging students to confide their personal or family problems and/or relationships. If a student initiates such discussions, the student should be referred to the appropriate school resource;
17. Furnishing alcohol, drugs or tobacco to a student or being present where any student is consuming these substances;
18. Engaging in harassing or discriminatory conduct prohibited by other District policies or by state or federal law and regulations; and/or
19. Creating or sharing any inappropriate Internet material or messages.

Electronic Communications

For purposes of this policy, electronic communication shall mean a communication transmitted by means of an electronic device including, but not limited to, a telephone, cellular telephone, computer, computer network, and/or personal data assistant. Electronic communications include, but are not limited to, emails, instant messages, and communications made by means of an Internet website, including social media and other networking websites/apps.

As with other forms of communication, when communicating electronically, adults shall maintain professional boundaries with students.

Electronic communication with students shall be for legitimate educational reasons only. When available, Academy-provided email or other Academy-provided communication devices shall be used when communicating electronically with students. The use of Academy-provided email or other Academy-provided communication devices shall be in accordance with policies and procedures.

Exceptions

An emergency or a legitimate educational reason may justify deviation from professional boundaries set out in this policy. The adult shall be prepared to articulate the reason for any deviation from the requirements of this policy and must demonstrate that he/she has maintained an appropriate relationship with the student.

Under no circumstance will an educational or other reason justify deviation from the "Romantic and Sexual Relationships" section of this policy.

There will be circumstances where personal relationships develop between an adult and a student's family, e.g., when their children become friends. This policy is not intended to interfere with such relationships or to limit activities that are normally consistent with such relationships. In addition, adults and students may have a professional relationship outside of The Academy, such as hiring a student as a babysitter. It is contingent on the adult that they maintain professional boundaries even in situations when a student works for the adult. Adults must maintain professional boundaries appropriate to the nature of the activity.

It is understood that many adults are involved in various other roles in the community through non-Academy-related civic, religious, athletic, scouting, or other organizations and programs whose participants may include Academy students. Such community involvement is commendable, and this policy is not intended to interfere with or restrict an adult's ability to serve in those roles; however, adults are strongly encouraged to maintain professional boundaries appropriate to the nature of the activity regarding all youth with whom they interact during their community involvement.

Dorm parents in the boarding environment must always maintain professional boundaries. If there are questions or concerns about how this policy relates to the boarding environment, please speak with an administrator.

Reporting Inappropriate or Suspicious Conduct

Any person, including a student, who has concerns about, or is uncomfortable with, a relationship or interaction between an adult and a student, shall immediately notify an administrator.

All Academy employees, independent contractors, and volunteers who have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is the victim of child abuse or knows of any action, inaction, or conduct which constitutes sexual abuse or exploitation of sexual misconduct shall immediately report the suspected abuse or misconduct in accordance with applicable law regulations and Board policy.

It is a violation of this policy to retaliate against any person for reporting any action pursuant to this policy or for participating as a witness in any related investigation or hearing.

Investigation

Allegations of inappropriate conduct shall be promptly investigated in accordance with the procedures utilized for complaints of harassment.

It is understood that some reports made pursuant to this policy will be based on rumors or misunderstandings; the mere fact that the reported adult is cleared of any wrongdoing shall not result in disciplinary action against the reporter or any witnesses.

If as the result of an investigation any individual, including the reported adult, the reporter, or a witness is found to have intentionally provided false information in making the report or during the investigation or hearings related to the report, or if any individual intentionally obstructs the investigation or hearings, this misrepresentation may be addressed as a violation of this policy and other applicable laws, regulations, and Academy policies. Obstruction includes, but is not limited to, violation of "no contact" orders given to the reported adult, attempting to alter or influence witness testimony, and destruction of or hiding evidence.

Disciplinary Action

An Academy employee who violates this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination, in accordance with all applicable disciplinary policies and procedures of The Woodstock Academy. Depending upon the violation, the action may be reported the police, DCF, and/or the State Department of Education in accordance with state law.

A volunteer, student teacher, or independent contractor, or an employee of an independent contractor who violates this policy may be prohibited from working at The Academy for an appropriate period, or permanently, as determined by the Head of School.

Further, Academy employees shall provide no assistance to an employee in finding another job, beyond the routine transmittal of personnel or administrative files, if the employee engaged in sexual misconduct with a minor or student in violation of the law (ESEA, 20 U.S.C. 7926(a)).

Legal Reference:

Connecticut General Statutes

10-53a-71 Sexual assault in the second degree: Class C or B felony.

10-151 Employment of teachers. Definitions. Notice and hearing on failure to renew or termination of contract. Appeal.

PA 15-205 An Act Protecting School Children.

17a-106 Cooperation in relation to prevention, identification, and treatment of child abuse/neglect.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by ESSA, 20 U.S.C. 7926(a),
Prohibition on aiding and abetting sexual abuse (aka "don't pass the trash")

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The Woodstock Academy

Woodstock, Connecticut