VALLEY CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS™
Quest for Excellence
"Do it heartily as to the Lord." Col. 3:23

VCS Student-Staff Interaction Policy

In accordance with California law, below are excerpts from applicable Valley Christian Schools ("VCS") policies concerning the expectations for staff as it relates to interactions with students and other related issues.

Christian Role Model

As a part of the qualifications of ministering to students at VCS, teachers, and staff are expected to serve as a Christian role model in judgment, dignity, respect, and Christian living. Consistent with this standard, VCS expects all employees to exercise sound judgment as well as maintain professional standards and ethical boundaries in any interactions with students, both on and off- campus.

Communications

Staff are expected to exercise appropriate judgment and adhere to VCS' conduct standards in any communications with students or parents/guardians.

Professional Correspondence Expectations

E-mail is the preferred means VCS uses to communicate with parents/guardians and students outside of class. When engaging in email communications, the following guidelines should be followed:

- Parents/guardians and students should be able to tell from the communication that it was sent by a professional, Christian educator or staff member. As a result, communications should refrain from overly friendly tones, such as use of pet-names, nick-names, or other content that gives the appearance to a reasonable person there has been a crossing of the professional teacher/staff member, student relationship
- Teachers and staff should use the school email to communicate with students and parents/ guardians, except as otherwise permitted (i.e., group or other approved messages). Teachers and staff with VCS provided email accounts should not use a personal email to communicate with students and parents. Staff, such as some coaches, who do not have a VCS provided email, may use a personal email to communicate appropriate team-related communications with students but must retain all such communications.
- Communication should only be about appropriate matters, relative to school matters or its mission.
- Teachers and staff should pause and consider the content of the communication before hitting send.

Failure to understand professional boundaries can lead a teacher or staff member to make serious mistakes in the management of the teacher-student or adult-child relationship. As Christians, teachers or staff may be eager to offer support and encouragement to students; however, it is important to remember that teachers or staff are not in the role of the primary educator. Instead, since VCS partners with parents/guardians in the educational process, it is a teacher's or staff member's responsibility generally to notify parents/guardians first of activity that might be damaging or harmful to the student. However, exceptions may be necessary, as required by law, such as mandatory reporting guidelines or where circumstances do not permit.

Sometimes as a teacher or staff member, you may learn details about a student's life through essays or confiscated notes/cell phones. If a teacher or staff member is in this situation, absent extenuating circumstances, the teacher or staff should contact a counselor or administrator and share the information as soon as possible upon discovery. Remember, VCS' goal is to get help and support for the student. VCS cannot provide the same follow up as the parents or other professional counselors

Mandatory Reporting Obligations

The law requires VCS administrators, teachers, coaches, aides, employees whose duties require direct contact and supervision of children and other employees who are mandated reporters to report known or suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. If child abuse or neglect is reasonably suspected or if a student shares information with a mandated reporter leading that person to reasonably suspect abuse or neglect has taken place, a report must be made. Even if an employee is not a mandatory reporter, and they have information indicating child abuse or neglect is reasonably suspected, they should make a report. An appropriate law enforcement agency may be a Police or Sheriff's Department or County Child Protective Services.

Child abuse or neglect can include: A physical injury inflicted on a child by another person other than by accidental means; The sexual abuse, assault, or exploitation of a child; The negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child by a person responsible for the child's welfare under circumstances indicating harm or threatened harm to the child's health or welfare; The willful harming or endangerment of the person or health of a child, any cruel or inhumane corporal punishment or any injury resulting in a traumatic condition.

An employee who reasonably suspects abuse or neglect of a child should inform the Principal or Assistant Principal of their campus or the Superintendent, if possible. However, the report should be made promptly over the telephone and should be followed up in writing within 36 hours. If a

report cannot be made promptly over the telephone, then an initial report may be made via email or fax. A copy of the report should be forwarded to the school office for information and retention.

Anti–Harassment

Valley Christian Schools respects, cherishes and protects students of all cultures and backgrounds on our campus. Any form of prohibited harassment, including sexual harassment, racial slurs, and derogatory comments or bullying is absolutely prohibited. Any incident of possible harassment should be brought immediately to the attention of an administrator who will thoroughly investigate the matter

in confidence. After reviewing all the facts, Valley Christian Schools will make a determination concerning whether reasonable grounds exist to believe that prohibited harassment has occurred. Disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, will be taken against any employee or student who is found to have engaged in harassment.

Sexual harassment includes unwanted sexual advances such as making or threatening reprisals after a negative response to advances, visual conduct such as leering, making sexual gestures, and displaying sexually suggestive objects/pictures. In reference to verbal conduct: making or using derogatory comments, epithets, slurs and jokes; verbal abuse of a sexual nature; graphic verbal commentaries about an individual's body; sexually degrading words used to describe an individual; suggestive or obscene letters, notes or invitations both in person and through social media, texting or emailing. In relation to physical conduct: touching, assault, impeding or blocking movement.

Racial harassment is treating someone unfavorably because he/she is of a certain race or because of personal characteristics associated with race. Race harassment also can involve treating someone unfavorably because the person is friends with a person of a certain race or color.
Harassment can occur when the victim and the person who inflicted the harassment are the same race or color. Examples can include: racial slurs, offensive or derogatory remarks about a person's race or color, or the display of racially-offensive symbols.

Inappropriate employee conduct includes, but is not limited to:

1. Any conduct that endangers students, staff, or others;
2. Engaging in harassing or discriminatory behavior towards students, parents/guardians, staff, or others;
3. Ignoring harassing or discriminatory behaviors by students or staff toward others;
4. Physically abusing, inappropriately touching, neglecting or otherwise willfully harming or injuring a child;
5. Inappropriate socialization or fraternization with a student or encouraging, promoting, or maintaining inappropriate written, verbal, electronic, or physical relationship with a student;
6. Using profane, obscene, course, or abusive language;
7. Using tobacco or alcohol while on campus or supervising students;
8. Using illegal or other unauthorized substances;
9. Divulging confidential information to persons not authorized to receive the information;
10. Driving with an individual student. The 2:1 rule must be followed;
11. Messaging an individual student in violation of VCS standards;
12. Promoting or encouraging students to violate VCS standards or engage in inappropriate conduct.
13. Meeting with an individual student either in or outside of school hours and without following appropriate procedures for visibility; or
14. Otherwise failing to adhere to VCS' standards of professionalism and conduct requirements.

Social Media, Text or Other Messaging
Social media, as well as text messaging, creates an easy method of disseminating information and staying connected. VCS has established basic guidelines for the protection of VCS, VCS employees, students, and parents/guardians.

For VCS employees, online interactions are to be viewed no differently from interacting with individuals from the school community face-to-face. As a result, VCS expects staff to apply the same conduct standards and protections in any social media interactions or messaging with students.

Group or individual messages (through a platform in which messages are retained and to which VCS administration has access) are permitted for required communications of an immediate and professional nature. All VCS employees should strive to use the approved VCS messaging app, where possible. **If it is necessary to communicate via text message with only one student outside the VCS messaging app, while using an appropriate messaging platform, the staff member should, at a minimum, include at least one other VCS employee, a student's parent or guardian or other students.** Finally, regardless of whether over social media, text messages, or another messaging platform, staff are always required to maintain the expected levels of judgment, dignity, respect, professionalism, and professionalism as a Christian role model. Employees may be disciplined for engaging in communications, whether in person, online or through a messaging platform that violates VCS' expected standards of conduct.

With respect to social media, staff and teachers must not submit, or initiate friend requests to current students nor accept friend requests on social media platforms from current students.

Teacher/Staff Student Interactions

Teachers and staff must be careful that their own behaviors do not encourage inappropriate relationships. Behavior that should be avoided so that the line between teacher/staff and a student does not become blurred include the following:

- Giving gifts or money to students
- Writing or exchanging individual text or other messages in violation of VCS policies.
- Driving individual students to or from school or to another location
- Inviting an individual student to your home. If a legitimate group meeting is appropriate for at least 3 students to visit a staff members home, such as a group of students gathering for a Bible study or a coach inviting a team for a team gathering, the staff member should alert their supervisor and obtain approval and also make sure that at least one parent/guardian of any student attending is aware and approves, and at all times, appropriate safeguards of visibility and transparency are maintained and that the staff member abides by expected conduct standards.
- Going to visit a student at home or other, off-site location
- Exchanging individual messages with a student in violation of VCS standards and the 2:1 rule.
- Giving one student undue attention
- Being alone with a student in violation of VCS standards or without appropriate visibility. In most situations, there should be a 2:1 ratio (two teachers/staff members to one student or at least two students to one teacher/staff member) even at events off-campus or when driving to an event or for some other purpose. On occasion it may be necessary to meet with a student individually. If a meeting with an individual student is necessary, the door should never be locked. The staff member must maintain visibility by others and during an appropriate time in a room with an open door or a door with a window/glass panel that provides visual access.
- Sharing your own personal problems with students

- Initiating or allowing physical contact, other than a handshake, fist bump, side-hug, etc.
- Other conduct, communications, or interactions that give the appearance of an inappropriate relationship or lack of professionalism, judgment, and discretion by the teacher or staff member.

In summary, VCS forbids inappropriate contact or personal interactions between staff and students, which includes, but is not limited to inappropriate physical contact, inappropriate interactions, sexual harassment and inappropriate communications from a staff to a student or parent whether written or verbal (i.e. email, text messages, Instant Messaging, or other Digital messaging) even if the inappropriate communication or advance was first initiated by the student. If an employee received inappropriate communications from a student, they should promptly alert their supervisor, campus principal or member of the executive leadership team.

Staff who have a concern in relation to any aspect of staff student interactions should inform their director or campus administrator.