

<b>POLICY TITLE:</b>	<b>Professional Relationship Boundaries</b>
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<b>Policy Owner:</b>	Katie Dorrian – Head of Safeguarding
<b>Ratified by:</b>	Katie Dorrian Head of Safeguarding
<b>Responsible signatory:</b>	Jane Stone – Director of Risk and Governance
<b>Outcome:</b>	<p>This policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides a Code of Practice that will assist all colleagues in establishing and maintaining professional practice and boundaries with children and young people, colleagues, other professionals and partner agencies.</li> <li>• Should be read in conjunction with the guidelines of the Aspris Children Services Employee Handbooks and any professional bodies that colleagues are registered with.</li> </ul>
<b>Cross Reference:</b>	<p>AHR01.4 Practising Privileges for Therapists, Teachers and Other Health Professionals            AHR01Safer Recruitment and Selection            AHR11 Use of Social Media by Colleagues            AHR17Relationships at Work            ALE02 Combatting Bribery Fraud and Corruption            ALE03 Data Protection            ALE06 Confidentiality            AOP06 Safeguarding Children in Education            AOP06A Safeguarding Children in Education - Wales            AOP06.1 Child Protection (Scotland)            AOP08 Safeguarding Adults            AOP08A Safeguarding Adults - Wales            AOP08.3 Adult Support and Protection (Scotland)            AOP25 Children and Young Persons Funds            Aspris Children services</p>

**EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STATEMENT**

Aspris is committed to the fair treatment of all in line with the Equality Act 2010. An equality impact assessment has been completed on this policy to ensure that it can be implemented consistently regardless of any protected characteristics and all will be treated with dignity and respect.

This policy covers all parts of Aspris Services – The Care and Education Divisions; Central services and our Fostering service. For the Fostering service and the 2 operational divisions, there are local procedures that relate to some of these policies, where necessary.

In order to ensure that this policy is relevant and up to date, comments and suggestions for additions or amendments are sought from users of this document. To contribute towards the process of review, email on [AsprisGovernanceHelpdesk@Aspris.com](mailto:AsprisGovernanceHelpdesk@Aspris.com)

## PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP BOUNDARIES

### 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document is intended to provide a code of practice which will assist all colleagues in establishing and maintaining professional practice and boundaries with children, young people, colleagues, other professionals and partner agencies.
- 1.2 This guidance is intended to complement the Aspris Children Services Employee Handbooks and other corporate policies and procedures.

### 2 WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

#### 2.1 **Values and Principles Governing Individual and Team Practice with Children And Young People:**

- (a) It is the purpose of this section to establish a professional context for working with the Children, young people and people who use our services by describing the basic values and principles, which govern professional practice.
- (b) It should be acknowledged that as the people who use our services are dependent on support staff in order to receive their required level of support and care, the staff can therefore be perceived as having "power" and influence over them.
- (c) There are many ways in which colleagues could deliberately or inadvertently influence the children, young people and people who use our services and it is therefore important that we consciously maintain professional relationships at all times.
- (d) Many of those who come to us for support, education and care are vulnerable. Therefore, it is not permissible for colleagues to enter into a non-therapeutic relationship with our Children, young people or their families. Nor is it permissible for any employee to have social contact, whether in person or via social media, with someone who has received, to the colleague's explicit knowledge, care or treatment from Aspris Children Services. Colleagues should approach their Head teachers (Education) or Home Manager if they feel concerned about any aspect of their relationship with a young person, regardless of whether they currently or previously have received services from Aspris or where they become aware that someone within their social network has commenced care or treatment within Aspris Children's services.

#### 2.2 **Professional Relationship with a person receiving our services** – It is a relationship formed between two people, one being the recipient of a defined service and the other a member of staff paid to provide part or all of the defined service:

- (a) The relationship is formed to meet the needs of the children or young person and not the service provider including any staff associated with the provider.
- (b) In remaining professional, the member of staff must depersonalise the issues and remain objective with the aim of achieving a positive and, hopefully, agreed outcome for the children or young person. It is not, and never can be, an equal relationship, but inherent within it is that both parties are treated fairly, with dignity and respect and as valued individuals.
- (c) A professional relationship should be maintained at all times. The children and young people who use our services should not feel in any way indebted to staff, or that they are the recipients of charity or goodwill. It should be appreciated that staff are paid to carry out their duties and overt gratitude should be discouraged and the reasons for this explained.
- (d) This should be achieved whilst recognising that good support delivery is based on the development of working relationships with the children and young people who use our services, not a cold mechanical approach.

#### 2.3 **Favouritism:** There should be no favouritism, or the *appearance* of favouritism, shown by colleagues towards particular children and young people who they are supporting/caring. Whilst colleagues may find some children / young people easier to work with than others, this

should not be reflected in the amount or quality of attention offered. Support offered should be:

- (a) Based on what the person wants and needs, as defined within their individual needs assessment, support plans/care plans and risk assessments and within the levels indicated in the service specification or statement of purpose/children and young peoples guide.

2.4 **Approach:** It is important to recognise the power-dynamic in colleague/ children and young persons relationships. Consideration should be given as to how to approach children and young people, to ensure interaction always takes place within a framework of respect. Colleagues should ensure that:

- (a) They do not present themselves as superior.
- (b) They use tact, empathy and diplomacy in all contacts and interactions.
- (c) They are careful not to influence children and young peoples with their own beliefs and values.
- (d) They adopt a flexible, non-regimented approach.
- (e) They are prepared to admit error or lack of knowledge.

2.5 **Rights and Choices:** The rights of the children and young people in our care must be given a high priority at all times. Throughout the supporting/treating/teaching process, they should be offered choice, and expressions of individual cultural and personal preference should be encouraged and catered for. (The exception to these points is when a young person requires treatment without their consent or when a person is at risk of immediate harm to self).

- (a) Colleagues must respect people's rights to privacy.
- (b) Colleagues should not enter a children and young persons's home/room without being invited or given permission.
- (c) The children /young people who use our services have the right to refuse support/treatment/care or not take advice. (In Supported Living services if someone is breaching their support agreement, there should be a review meeting to determine the appropriate course of action)
- (d) Colleagues should always be careful not to prejudge, label or stereotype individual people or groups of people

The Children /young people who use our services must, wherever possible, be involved in all decisions which impact on them either directly (i.e. via their support plan, care plan) or indirectly (i.e. changes or reviews in policy and procedure).

2.6 **Financial Transactions:**

- (a) No financial transactions, buying, selling, exchanging or bartering should take place between staff, children and young people.
- (b) Colleagues must not lend their personal money or possessions to children and young people.
- (c) Colleagues must not borrow personal money or possessions from children and young people
- (d) Colleagues must not give or accept personal presents from children and young people, except in the exceptional circumstances when it may be appropriate (Refer to ALE02 Bribery Act 2010 and the Employee Handbook).
- (e) Colleagues should not accept any offer, or elicit offers of labour from children and young people e.g. cleaning staff cars.
- (f) Colleagues should not use their own store loyalty card when shopping with children and young people, nor benefit from 'Buy one, get one free' offers. This could be considered fraud as it is obtaining financial gain through deception.

**NB:** Colleagues breaching the above may be referred to the local area safeguarding team for concerns regarding financial and material abuse (See AOPO6 and AOP08safeguarding policies)

2.7 **Relationships/Contact with Children and young people Outside of Work:**

- (a) Colleagues must not allow children and young people to visit their homes.
- (b) Colleagues must not encourage children and young people to develop relationships with their (the staff member's) friends or family members.

**Children's Services  
Operational**

- (c) Colleagues must not give children and young people their personal addresses, phone numbers or social media profiles/accounts.
- (d) The young persons social activities must be part of their overarching care plan and development programme. These should be agreed with site management and supported and facilitated by colleagues as part of their key task and accountabilities and employment contract.
- (e) Out of hours social contact should be kept to a minimum. Colleagues who 'bump into' out of hours should be pleasant and civil, but should generally discourage prolonged social contact. Where this does occur, a note of the encounter should be made in the individual's support/care records and brought to the attention of DSL/ Headteacher / home manager – the colleague should contact the service to ensure a note of the contact is recorded at the earliest opportunity.
- (f) Colleagues should never arrange out of hours contact with someone who uses our services.
- (g) Colleagues must not use social media or social networking sites, such as Facebook, Messenger, Snapchat, Twitter, Whatsapp or Instagram, to be 'friends' with current children and young people (Refer to AHR11 Use of Social Media by Colleagues). Where a young persons or their family members were, before admission, existing social media 'friends' or 'followers' of a staff member the staff member should inform their manager and take great care, consideration and responsibility in respect of any posted material (Refer to AHR11 Use of Social Media by Colleagues).
- (h) Colleagues should not to discuss their own personal details or problems with a service user.
- (i) Colleagues are advised to approach their head home teacher/home manager if they feel concerned about any aspect of their relationship with a someone who currently, or historically, uses our services. In the event that a young person initiates personal contact with a staff member, they should make no response other than to politely refuse that contact and promptly inform and discuss this with their manager. Where the young person is seeking advice or support they should be signposted to the appropriate individual or agency, for example their GP, Social services, community mental health team or a particular department of Aspris Children Services.

**2.8 Discussing Others/Gossip:**

- (a) Gossip or hearsay should not feature as an aspect of service culture and should be actively discouraged among both colleagues and children and young people.
- (b) Colleagues should never share personal details about other colleagues with children and young people.
- (c) Colleagues should never discuss other colleagues with children and young people except on issues relating to support.
- (d) Colleagues should never discuss a young person with other children and young people.

**2.9 Illegal Activities:**

- (a) Colleagues must not participate in any illegal activities e.g. buying stolen goods or allowing them to be kept on Aspris Children's services premises, or storing or using drugs on Aspris Children Services premises.
- (b) Colleagues must not collude with children and young people by turning a blind eye to illegal activities or, in shared accommodation, to breaches of house rules.
- (c) Colleagues should inform head teachers / Home managers immediately of any incidents of illegal activity within the service.

**2.10 General Relationship Issues:**

- (a) Colleagues should always ensure that children and young people are treated equitably and without favouritism.
- (b) Colleagues should never enter into anything but a professional relationship with the children and young people

- (c) Colleagues should not use inappropriate language in the workplace, with children and young people or colleagues e.g. referring to them by pet names, use offensive or discriminatory language, in terms of endearment, or in ways that are demeaning.
- 2.11 **Befriending/Counselling:** Colleagues should never overstep professional boundaries and confuse befriending with friendship.
- (a) A friendship meets the needs of both parties, whereas befriending is a professional relationship which meets the needs of the young persons.
  - (b) Colleagues should be aware of the difference between employing 'counselling skills' (active listening, empathy etc.) which are appropriate for colleagues to use, and 'being a counsellor', which is not an appropriate role for anyone who is not qualified and employed in this capacity.
  - (c) Colleagues should be aware of when they should refer a young person to another agency who can provide specialised support.
- 2.12 **Providing Advice:** All advice offered by colleagues should be as non-directive as possible and should provide options to enable the young persons to reach their own informed choice:
- (a) Colleagues should support people through a process of decision-making, which should be documented in their support/care records.
  - (b) Colleagues should maintain an awareness of areas where they are not qualified to give advice or they feel it is not appropriate to do so. In these circumstances they should inform the young person of this, making every effort to assist them in accessing appropriate/ qualified advice, for example contact with an advocacy service or a welfare rights centre.
  - (c) Generally, advice should only be given at the request of the young persons. If the staff member is concerned about some behaviour or activity on which advice has not been sought (e.g. a potentially exploitative relationship or a situation where there is the potential for danger), they should initially discuss their concerns with the head teacher / DSL or home manager who will consider whether it is appropriate to , follow safeguarding procedures.
- 2.13 **Respect:** Respect is the foundation of the relationship between the children and young people and staff and must be seen as a two-way process. Outlined below are issues that colleagues need to be conscious of when working with the children and young people, but it should not be forgotten that colleagues should also be treated with respect by the people who use our services and others.
- (a) Colleagues should address or refer to the people they work with by their chosen, preferred name.
  - (b) Patronising behaviour or remarks, that consciously or unwittingly, demean other people must not occur, and should be challenged if they do.
  - (c) Labelling or stereotyping should not occur.
  - (d) Racist, sexist, homophobic or any other discriminatory remarks or behaviour, from whatever source, must be challenged.
  - (e) Colleagues must respect everyone as individuals and for their differences.
- 2.14 **Confidentiality:** Colleagues should maintain service user confidentiality in line at all times (Refer to ALE06 Confidentiality and ALE03 Data Protection):
- (a) Information can, and sometimes should, be shared within Aspris Children Services. However, consideration should always be given to the necessity for disclosure of information.
  - (b) All colleagues must be clear on the limits of confidentiality and new colleagues should be made aware of these limitations at the induction stage.
  - (c) Children and young people must be given details about how the information they provide us with will be used and about when confidentiality might have to be breached (**AOP Form: 08** Using & Sharing Information About You should be given to all children and young people on admission).

- (d) Children and young people must be made aware that any information relating to illegal activity cannot be kept confidential.
- (e) Colleagues should not disclose other children or young persons names, whereabouts or occupancy details to any third party without their expressed permission, or prior agreement. This includes other children and young people, family, friends, etc.
- (f) Personal information about children and young people held by Aspris Children Services is subject to a legal duty of confidentiality (Data Protection Act 1998) and should not normally be disclosed without the consent of the organisation / person (s) who have parental responsibility for the child / young person. The law does however permit the disclosure of confidential information without permission if it is necessary to safeguard a child or children.

### **3 RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLEAGUES/TEAM WORKING**

- 3.1 For information regarding employment of colleagues working with relatives, friends or those in relationships refer to AHR01 Safer Recruitment and Selection including Prevention of Illegal Working and AHR17 Relationships at Work. For queries or advice, refer to Divisional or Central People Team.
- 3.2 In order to enable the delivery of high quality and effective services, the establishment and maintenance of professional, co-operative and open relationships with colleagues is essential. It is important to remember that individual colleagues have a responsibility to contribute constructively to effective team practices and procedures and that failure to communicate with, and support colleagues is a major contributory factor in instances of risk at work.
  - 3.2.1 In order to reduce risks it is recommended that relatives, friends and those in relationships are not engaged within the same unit where there may be collusion on confidential information or security, or where the activities of one may compromise the other. Employees should not report into or manage a relative, friend or someone they are in a relationship with or be engaged where one may have the authority to influence the discipline or payments made or the career development of another.
  - 3.2.2 If colleagues notice relationships developing which cause or could potentially cause concerns and could be to the detriment of the children and young people, this should be reported to their head teacher / home manager immediately. Further advice on handling these situations can be sought from the regional or Central People Team.
- 3.3 The following values and principles should underpin all aspects of practice in relationships, boundaries and professional practice with individual colleagues and the team.
  - 3.3.1 Systems and forums to assist in high quality communication such as handovers, daily support records, diaries, regular staff meetings and training are important in the maintenance of a cohesive team. These activities provide the opportunity for discussion and the resolution of issues that arise during the working day and help to prevent the spread of gossip and hearsay. All colleagues should understand the reason for, and respect the use of, these activities and be committed to actively support and participate in them.
    - (a) In services where colleagues are lone working in the community and do not see other colleagues on such a frequent basis, attention to the detail of written records is essential and thought must be given to other ways of maintaining regular contact, such as telephone calls.
    - (b) Staff supervision and team meetings should be used to highlight, discuss, monitor and review the issues raised in this document.

### **4 RELATIONSHIPS/CONDUCT WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND PROFESSIONALS**

- 4.1 The establishment and maintenance of professional relationships with partner agencies and individuals is essential to ensure that children and young people obtain the best possible range of services. Colleagues should:

- (a) Always remember that they are representing Aspris Children Services when working with partner agencies and professionals and therefore should conduct themselves in a professional manner.
- (b) Discuss only relevant information and ensure it is communicated in a concise and accurate way avoiding anecdotes and hearsay.
- (c) Dress appropriately for the working environment.
- (d) Ensure any issues that may impact on confidentiality are discussed with their line manager prior to meetings / events.
- (e) Never represent the service, Aspris Children Services or the people who use our services in a negative light. It is expected that colleagues will represent Aspris Children services and children and young people accurately, fairly and professionally, bearing in mind issues of confidentiality, contractual obligations to funders and partners, and this policy.
- (f) It is recognised that colleagues may have personal views on specific issues that may differ from the corporate approach. Colleagues are expected to present and support the corporate viewpoint, and not present personal views under Aspris Children Services name. Colleagues are required to seek clarification from their line manager if they are unclear about the corporate approach on particular issues and to use supervision to explore complicated issues they may be expected to respond to. (Refer to AOP28 Supervision)

## **5 FILMING, PHOTOGRAPHY OR VIDEO**

- 5.1 Unless expressly authorised in advance by Head teacher / Home Manager or another senior manager for purposes strictly connected with work, colleagues are not permitted to take pictures, film or record footage (using phones or other recording equipment) of any children or young persons or other colleagues whilst at work.
  - 5.1.1 This also applies to covert filming. If a colleague has concerns about the care or treatment of a children and young people, this must be reported to line management or via the whistleblowing helpline/mailbox [Whistleblowing@aspris.com](mailto:Whistleblowing@aspris.com) in accordance with AOP21 Whistleblowing (Protected Disclosure).
- 5.2 Anyone found taking pictures or recording footage of children and young people or colleagues either overtly or covertly, without the express permission of senior management for a legitimate work purpose (such as supervision or training) will be dismissed for gross misconduct. The matter is likely to be notified to the police, the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) and relevant regulatory, safeguarding and professional bodies.

## **6 IF BOUNDARIES HAVE BEEN OR ARE SUSPECTED TO HAVE BEEN BROKEN**

- 6.1 It is recognised that in practice it can be difficult to maintain professional boundaries and many situations/dilemmas will occur which are not specifically covered by this or any other policy. It is also appreciated that in the area of operations, colleagues are constantly being confronted with issues that require them to make quick decisions on complicated issues. Such situations require colleagues to exercise high standards of professional judgement in what is often a high-pressured environment.
- 6.2 Aspris Children Services is committed to providing support to colleagues in these situations but this can only be done if line management is made aware that difficulties exist. If colleagues find themselves in a situation where they feel there is the potential for a boundary to be broken, in order to manage a situation, the following steps can be taken:
  - 6.2.1 **Access Line Management:** Colleagues should let their head teachers / Home Managers / line manager know what they are doing or intend to do, preferably in advance, although it is accepted that this is not always possible. Similarly, if colleagues have concerns about the actions of a colleague then they should also advise their line manager / head teachers (Education)/ home managers (residential) of their concerns. If the manager is not available they should go to the next management tier for advice or access advice via supervision (refer to AOP28 Supervision).

- 6.2.2 **Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing): Aspris Children Services** has a 24 hour free-phone line 0800 409 6625 available, which is private and confidential, for colleagues to make reports of issues that they are not comfortable with taking to management. (See AOP21 Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing)).
- 6.2.3 **Involve Colleagues:** Other people in the team, particularly those likely to work with the young person concerned, should also be aware of where a boundary may have been blurred or crossed. This will enable colleagues to maintain a consistent approach and will also enable other opinions to be taken into account prior to any actions being taken.
- 6.2.4 **Keep a Record:** A written record of a broken or blurred boundary should be kept in an appropriate file or book (to be agreed with the Site/Service Manager) to ensure openness and consistency and assist in monitoring.
- 6.2.5 **Disciplinary Action:** It is worth noting that the breaking or blurring of boundaries and professional conduct is potentially a disciplinary offence and taking the steps outlined above not only constitutes good practice, but will also potentially serve to protect colleagues in the event of disciplinary action being taken. Employees could also be referred to safeguarding, their registering professional body and the Disclosure and Barring Service.

## 7 RESPONSIBILITIES

- 7.1 It is the responsibility of the Site/Service Manager/ Head Teacher/ Home Manager to ensure that this policy is implemented and of all colleagues to adhere to it on a day-to-day basis.
- 7.2 Professionals with practicing privileges should also adhere to this policy and could be reported to their professional body if they do not.

## 8 REFERENCES

- 8.1 NMC (2015) The Code: Professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses and midwives (updated 2018)  
NMC (2015) Guidance on Using Social Media Responsibly  
DfE (Current Version) Keeping Children safe in Education