

Professional Boundaries: Staff/Student Interaction Policy Ocean Charter School

Ocean Charter School (“School”) is a Waldorf-based learning community, providing wholistic nourishment, tailored to each child. When incorporating this model into our pedagogy, staff are to balance several nuanced factors including a student’s social development and each specific learning context to ensure that professional boundaries are upheld, and that students remain safe and appropriately supported. We recognize our responsibility to establish and uphold conduct policy rules, and the provided regulations governing student and employee behavior to foster the safest and most engaged learning-conducive environment possible.

Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment shall not be used as a disciplinary measure against any student. Corporal punishment includes the willful infliction of, or willfully causing the infliction of, physical pain on a student, and is expressly prohibited.

For purposes of this policy, corporal punishment does not include an employee’s use of reasonable force necessary to protect the employee, students, staff, or other persons from harm, or to prevent damage to property.

For clarification purposes, the following examples are non-exhaustive and offered for direction and guidance of School personnel:

A. Examples of PROHIBITED actions (corporal punishment)

1. Hitting, shoving, pushing, or physically restraining a student as a means of control;
2. Making unruly students do push-ups, run laps, or perform other physical acts that cause pain or discomfort as a form of punishment;
3. Paddling, swatting slapping, grabbing, pinching, kicking, or otherwise causing physical pain.

B. Examples of PERMITTED actions (NOT considered corporal punishment)

1. Stopping a student from fighting with another student;
2. Preventing a pupil from committing an act of vandalism;
3. Reasonable defense from physical injury or assault by a student;
4. Using reasonable force to remove a weapon or dangerous object from a pupil;
5. Encouraging an athletic team to participate in strenuous physical training activities designed to strengthen or condition team members or improve their coordination, agility, or physical skills;
6. Engaging in group calisthenics, team drills, or other physical education or voluntary recreational activities.

Acceptable and Unacceptable Staff/Student Behavior

This policy is intended to guide all School faculty and staff in conducting themselves in a way that reflects the high standards of behavior and professionalism required of school employees and to specify appropriate boundaries between students and staff.

Although this policy gives specific, clear direction, it is each staff member's obligation to avoid situations that could prompt suspicion by parents, students, colleagues, or school leaders. One viable standard that can be quickly applied, when you are unsure if certain conduct is acceptable, is to ask yourself, "Would I be engaged in this conduct if my family or colleagues were standing next to me?"

For the purposes of this policy, the term "boundaries" is defined as acceptable professional behavior by staff members while interacting with a student. Trespassing the boundaries of a student/teacher relationship is deemed an abuse of power and a betrayal of public trust.

Some activities may seem innocent from a staff member's perspective but can be perceived as flirtation or sexual insinuation from a student or parent point of view. The objective of the following non exhaustive lists of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors is not to restrain innocent, positive relationships between staff and students, but to prevent relationships that could lead to, or may be perceived as, sexual misconduct.

Staff must understand their own responsibility and self-monitor their conduct to ensure that they do not cross the boundaries as written in this policy. Disagreeing with the wording or intent of the established boundaries will be considered irrelevant for disciplinary purposes. Thus, it is crucial that all employees learn this policy thoroughly and apply the lists of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors to their daily activities. Although sincere, competent interaction with students certainly fosters learning, student/staff interactions must have boundaries surrounding potential activities, locations, and intentions.

Duty to Report Suspected Misconduct

When any employee reasonably suspects or believes that another staff member may have crossed the boundaries specified in this policy, he or she must immediately report the matter to a school administrator. All reports shall be as confidential as possible under the circumstances. It is the duty of the administrator to investigate and thoroughly report the situation. Employees must also report to the administration any awareness or concern of student behavior that crosses boundaries or where a student appears to be at risk for sexual abuse.

Examples of Specific Behaviors

The following examples are not an exhaustive list:

Unacceptable Staff/Student Behaviors (Violations of this Policy)

- (a) Giving gifts to an individual student that are of a personal and intimate nature.
- (b) Kissing of any kind.
- (c) Physical contact with students that is not appropriate to their age and capacity.
- (d) Intentionally being alone with a student away from the school.
- (e) Making or participating in sexually inappropriate comments.
- (f) Sexual jokes.
- (g) Seeking emotional involvement with a student for your benefit.
- (h) Listening to or telling stories that are sexually oriented.
- (i) Discussing inappropriate personal troubles or intimate issues with a student in an attempt to gain their support and understanding.
- (j) Becoming involved with a student so that a reasonable person may suspect inappropriate behavior.

Unacceptable Staff/Student Behaviors without Parent and Supervisor Permission

(These behaviors should only be exercised when a staff member has parent and supervisor permission.)

- (a) Giving students a ride to/from school or school activities.
- (b) Being alone in a room with a student at school with the door closed.
- (c) Allowing students in your home.

Cautionary Staff/Student Behaviors

(These behaviors may be permissible when enacted in concert with thoughtful and professional discretion in support of the Waldorf method and pedagogy. All staff should use caution, keeping in mind how their conduct may appear to a reasonable and prudent person who would objectively interpret their actions in the context of the supportive learning environment curated by the School. Staff members should inform their supervisor of any questionable circumstance, occurrence and/or observation as soon as is feasible.)

- (a) Remarks about the physical attributes or development of anyone.
- (b) Excessive attention toward a particular student with careful consideration to the nexus of a tailored learning/teaching objective.
- (c) Sending emails, text messages or letters to students if the content is not clearly pertaining to a school activity (again, check the nexus to the fostering a healthy and safe learning environment).
- (d) For our youngest students, teachers may reciprocate brief student-initiated hugs provided that excessive attention is not disproportionately directed towards any single student.

- (e) For grades TK-1, it is acknowledged that students may need increased nurturing and support as compared to higher-level grades, and at times may sit in a teacher's lap during story time, or similar learning interactions.
- (f) Holding a child's hand to guide a student is acceptable, provided the student demonstrates a willing acceptance of their hand being held.
- (g) Staff must always be cognizant of the age, social development, and comfort level of each student and must never interact with a student in a manner that is prohibited, or would be discouraged by an administrator or by any objective third-party, were they present.

Acceptable and Recommended Staff/Student Behaviors

- (a) Getting parents' written consent for any after-school activity.
- (b) Obtaining formal approval to take students off school property for activities such as field trips or competitions.
- (c) Emails, text, phone, and instant messages to students must be very professional and pertaining to school activities or classes (Communication should be limited to school technology).
- (d) Keeping the door open when alone with a student.
- (e) Keeping reasonable space between you and your students.
- (f) Stopping and correcting students if they cross your own personal boundaries.
- (g) Keeping parents informed when a significant issue develops about a student.
- (h) Keeping after-class discussions with a student professional and brief.
- (i) Asking for advice from fellow staff or administrators if you find yourself in a difficult situation related to boundaries.
- (j) Involving your supervisor if conflict arises with the student.
- (k) Informing the Principal about situations that have the potential to become more severe.
- (l) Making detailed notes about an incident that could evolve into a more serious situation later.
- (m) Recognizing the responsibility to stop unacceptable behavior of students or coworkers.
- (n) Asking another staff member to be present if you will be alone with any student, including students who may need additional support such as a student with special needs.
- (o) Asking another staff member to be present when you must be alone with a student after regular school hours.
- (p) Giving students praise and recognition without excessive physical contact.
- (q) Pats on the back, high fives and handshakes are acceptable.
- (r) Keeping your professional conduct, a high priority.
- (s) Asking yourself if your actions are worth your job and career