

## Section 3 Appendix 8

### Guidelines for Appropriate Professional Boundaries

We need to constantly evaluate our actions critically, to ensure we are not guilty of intruding, acting inappropriately or violating the rights of another individual. Boundaries between teachers and students delineate a professional relationship not unlike the doctor-patient relationship.

However, there are circumstances when it is appropriate for employees and volunteers to touch student. It can be a normal, caring gesture to make physical contact with student when offering praise, encouragement, guidance or comfort. The key criterion in determining the appropriateness of this behaviour is the benefit to the student. If the normal needs of the child (for example to be comforted, reassured or encouraged) are met then the conduct is most probably acceptable. If the conduct is motivated by employee gratification, then it is unacceptable.

#### APPROPRIATE AND INAPPROPRIATE TOUCHING

##### Example 1 (Appropriate Touching)

A 6-year-old student falls over while running in the playground, skins his knees and he starts to cry. A janitor/grounds man working nearby puts his arm around the boy's shoulder and comforts him, then walks with him, holding his hand, to the person delegated to administer first-aid.

##### Example 2 (Appropriate Touching)

A teacher places his hands over a student's hand while the student is using a mallet and chisel, to instruct the student in the proper use of the implements. The contact ceases after the demonstration is completed

##### Example 3 (Appropriate Touching)

After a game of cricket one of the adult supervisors approaches a youth who played exceptionally well. The supervisor congratulates the youth and gives him a pat on the shoulder or back in recognition of his achievement.

#### INAPPROPRIATE CONTACT

##### Example 1 (Inappropriate contact)

After a school play, a teacher approaches one of the student actors, saying, "I didn't realize how grown up you were until I saw you in that outfit - the play went over really well. After we tidy up here, maybe you and I can get together to celebrate.

##### Example 1 (Inappropriate touching)

A staff member walks around the playground/grounds with one arm around the waist of a secondary school student. In all such circumstances, this type of prolonged contact is inappropriate.

##### Example 2 (Inappropriate touching)

After an athletics meeting a staff member moves to congratulate a student. While walking along side the student, the staff member hugs the student around the buttocks and hip region. In the same circumstances, it would be inappropriate for the staff member, while walking closely beside the student to place an arm onto the student's head and pull his/her head onto their own shoulder or head.

**Example 2 (Inappropriate contact)**

A teacher stands behind a 13-year-old female student while she is playing the clarinet. The teacher clasps hands around the student's ribs and diaphragm area to demonstrate proper breathing technique. The teacher's thumbs and wrist intentionally come in contact with the student's breasts. The behaviour is inappropriate.

Improper Assault**Example 1 (Improper Physical Assault)**

A student is taunting another student and refuses to desist. The staff member grabs the student's ear, twisting and lifting so the student rises from his/her seat.

**Example 2 (Improper Physical Assault)**

A student chases a cricket ball onto a newly prepared garden bed and the staff member pushes the student firmly in the shoulder causing the student to fall over, shouting to stay off the garden.

**NON-PHYSICAL CONTACT****Example 1 (Appropriate Non-Physical Contact)**

A staff member is driving home and sees a student that attends their school caught in a sudden downpour stops the car, and the student accepts a lift home which is a short distance away. It may be appropriate, especially in a small community for the staff member to accompany the student to the door and explain the circumstances to the parent or guardian.

**Example 1 (Inappropriate Non-Physical Contact)**

A staff member accompanying student to a sporting carnival in a neighbouring town suggests sharing a motel room with several of the young people to reduce expenses. In this example, the staff member's motivation may be entirely honourable, but the risks associated with the conduct are too high. Consequently, such an arrangement should be avoided.

**Example 2 (Inappropriate Non-Physical Contact)**

A staff member makes suggestive gestures to a student such as blowing kisses, rubbing hands over own body, unzipping or unbuttoning items of own clothing.

Such flirtatious behaviour exceeds the boundaries of a professional relationship between a staff member and a student and is inappropriate.

**Example 3 (Inappropriate Non-Physical Contact)**

A staff member shows sexually explicit material to a student or leaves the material in a place where a student could access it. Such conduct exceeds the boundaries of a professional staff member/student relationship and is inappropriate.

(Adapted from the Department of Education Manual HS-17 Student Protection)

**Personal Disclosure for Teachers**

- Be scrupulous about not using the students as your support group. Be friendly without befriending.
- Appropriate disclosure can enhance classroom experience
- Inappropriate disclosure can be dangerous to teachers and students alike.
- Do not share what is immediate, raw or highly personal in your life.

**Emotional Boundaries**

- The use of sarcasm, mimicking and put-downs, or making an example of students should not occur.
- The use of shaming by adults against children is an abuse of power and a direct denial of the developmental needs and rights of the child.

Contents of staff meeting, staff bulletins, staff room discussions etc, need to stay with the teaching community of the school. Do not use the staff room as a public forum to off-load frustrations about a particular student.