

**Policy:** Professional Boundaries and Personal Relationships with Children/Young People Policy

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**Standard Statement Aim:** As a responsible provider Unique Care Group recognises the importance for children and young people placed in our care being able to enjoy positive sound relationships with support staff based on honesty and mutual respect.

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy is intended to provide strict guidelines and a basis for personal professional boundaries for all support staff working directly or indirectly with children and young people and applies equally to everybody, including all employees, agency personnel and contractors.
- 1.2 The basis for all care is contained within a child or young person's individual Care Placement Plan, which is built around the presumption that all support staff strictly adhere to clear and proper professional boundaries in their relationships with the children and young people they care for.
- 1.3 This policy recognises the vulnerability of children and young people in residential care and establishes clear, safe and caring objectives.
- 1.4 In order to achieve the safe caring objectives that Unique Care Group is committed ensuring that the following safeguards will be adhered to:
  - a) That all support staff are recruited and selected through rigorous procedures in line with current legislation and the National Minimum Standards
  - b) That all support staff are trained in all areas of Child Protection and Safeguarding and are knowledgeable about how to implement Safeguarding Procedures
  - c) That all of the children and young people in our care feel valued, respected and their self-esteem is promoted
  - d) That all of the children and young people have access to a trusted adult outside of the Company and their Placing Authority
  - e) That all children and young people are fully aware of Unique Care Groups Complaints Procedure
  - f) That all children and young people are fully aware of their individual Placing Authority's Complaints Procedure
  - g) That all support staff are clear about their professional responsibilities in relation to raising legitimate concerns about the conduct of colleagues or Managers in line with the Whistle Blowing Policy

- h) That there is effective supervision and support in place for all support staff including temporary support staff and Agency Workers

## 2. Philosophical Context

- 2.1** The objectives of Safe Caring are:
  - a) The objectives of safe caring are to keep children and young people in residential environments safe from abuse by adults
  - b) To keep children and young children people in residential environments safe from abuse by other children and young people
  - c) To minimise the risk to support staff of unfounded allegation caused by misunderstandings, misinterpretation or transference
- 2.2** This policy is consistent with the philosophy of the Company and the belief that relationships between professional carer's and those cared for are founded upon genuineness, honesty and respect.
- 2.3** Further, there are relationships between adults with authority and professional responsibility for caring. They therefore should not be defined as either 'friendships' or 'surrogate parents. Defining them in this sense would be at best dishonest and at worst potentially abusive, adding further confusion to already confused lives.
- 2.4** Personal problems or the details of personal lives of support staff should not be shared with children or young people in our care. Doing this would undermine the ability of the member of support staff to show empathy to a child or young person who does not have the internal resources to cope or truly comprehend for reasons of maturity. However, it may be appropriate to identify the impact of a child or young person's actions on others and reflect this with them as part of the therapeutic approach.
- 2.5** For the above reasons, it is essential that clear, professional boundaries are consistently maintained and that the healthy and therapeutic boundaries that need to exist between the child/young person and the adult are constantly reinforced.
- 2.6** Each child or young person will have a comprehensive individualised Care Placement Plan which will include a daily living plan, a detailed risk assessment and if appropriate a positive handling plan where issues of safe care will be outlined and specific guidance will be provided which is approved by the Registered Manager and

consideration will also be given to any risks associated with the child or young person. Guidance must also be issued if appropriate to concerns around caring for a child or young person of opposite gender to the member of support staff.

### **3. Disclosure of Personal Information**

**3.1** With regards to children and young people in the care of the Company, it is important to ensure that:

- a) No personal issues are shared
- b) Personal addresses, phone numbers or email addresses are not passed on
- c) Children or young people do not in any way visit or telephone support staff at home.
- d) Similar information pertaining to current or former colleague must not be given out
- e) Support staff should be careful to ensure any conversation with or in front of the children or young people is appropriate and does not include a level of self-disclosure
- f) Professional or personal views on colleagues or Managers or opinions on the professional ability or competence of the child or young person's Social Worker, Local Authority or other Professional Agency should not be shared
- g) Opinions on policy or decision relating to any other children or young people in our care, or any other issues that should be dealt with in a support staff area should not be discussed with children or young people

**3.2** Relationships should be based firmly upon the needs of the child or young person and not upon the needs of the adult. Relationships should be based upon the needs of the child or young person with no expectation or requirements that the needs of adults are met with them.

### **4. Physical Care**

**4.1** Children and young people should be encouraged to undertake personal care and hygiene activities for themselves in line with their development. Consideration needs to be given to both their chronological age and their functional age as each home is committed to providing a nurturing environment.

- 4.2 If children or young people require assistance with physical care tasks the nature of this should be detailed in their individual Care Placement Plan. In these cases, physical touch of sensitive areas should still be avoided.
- 4.3 If children and young people require assistance in the bathroom support staff must always advise other members of support staff where they are and what they are doing and ensure that other support staff can have immediate access to the room.

## 5. Access to Bedrooms

- 5.1 Support staff should be mindful of children and young people's need for privacy and any situations which could give rise to misinterpretation.
- 5.2 Support staff should always knock and wait for a response before entering a child or young person's bedroom except when there may be immediate danger.
- 5.3 If support staff enter a child or young person's bedroom the door should always be left open and the member of support staff should make sure that their colleagues are aware of where they are and what they are doing. Regular checks should be undertaken by colleagues to ensure that the member of support staff and the child or young person feel supported at such potentially vulnerable times.
- 5.4 Boundaries need to be clear and appropriate nightwear needs to be worn by children and young people.

## 6. Photography and Video

- 6.1 No pornographic, erotic materials or videos with an 18 certificate should ever be brought into a children's home.
- 6.2 No unauthorised information should be downloaded from the internet.
- 6.3 Children and young people should always be appropriately dressed in photographs e.g. swimwear is acceptable in some situations but photographs in underwear are not.

## 7. Touch and Physical Contact

- 7.1 Appropriate physical contact is an important aspect in relation to caring for children and young people.

- 7.2** It is possible for support staff to express affection and concern in a variety of ways e.g. an arm around the shoulder or a hug. This can be done safely as long as support staff are sensitive to the needs and wishes of the child or young person.
- 7.3** In most cases an expression of comfort or concern involving physical contact should take place in the presence of others.
- 7.4** It is important to avoid situations where there are no witnesses so that allegations caused by misinterpretation are avoided.
- 7.5** All physical contact should take into consideration a child or young person's chronological and functional age.
- 7.6** Often children and young people who have been sexually abused present inappropriately as their experiences and expectations of adults are distorted. Any instances of sexualised behaviour or comment must be recorded and discussed with the staff team and the placing Social Worker.

## **8. Taking Children or Young People Home**

- 8.1** Children and young people in the care of the Company and members of their family are not permitted to:
  - a) Visit the homes of support staff, former support staff or the friends and relatives of support staff or
  - b) Telephone support staff at their own home
  - c) Telephone the On-Call Manager, this is for the use of support staff only

If it is necessary for a parent or other relative to talk to the On-Call Manager, then the On-Call Manager will contact them directly.

## **9. Family and Friends of Support Staff**

- 9.1** It is inevitable that from time to time the friends and relations of support staff need to call at the home, either to collect them at the end of their shift, or to bring in a change of clothes etc. However, whilst contact should be friendly and personable, clear boundaries must be maintained. Friends and family of support staff are not support staff and should not be treated as such.
- 9.2** Friends and relatives of support staff under the age of 18 years (including their children and grandchildren) should not visit them in the home. Relationships between support staff's children and children and

young people in the care of the Company are strongly discouraged. However, in circumstances where this may arise due to locality, education etc this should be managed sensitively in order to alleviate creating potentially confused loyalty between support staff and the children and young people and undermining professional boundaries.

## **10. Sexual Relationships between Support Staff and Children and Young People**

- 10.1** Sexual or intense personal relationships which border on sexual relationships between a member of support staff and any child or young person in care will be treated as Gross Professional Misconduct and will result in dismissal and where appropriate, prosecution in a Court of Law.
- 10.2** This applies regardless of the child or young person's age and equally applies to children and young people in the care of Unique Care Group and other organisations and agencies.
- 10.3** Any sexual relationship between a member of support staff and a child or young person who has left care but remains under the age of 18 years of age will be treated as Gross Misconduct and will also result in dismissal. It is regarded inadvisable and a possible example of poor personal judgement for any member of support staff to become involved in a sexual relationship with any child or young person formerly in care with the Company even if they are over the age of 18 years.

## **11. Relationships between Support Staff and Children or Young People's Families**

- 11.1** Relationships between support staff and the families of children or young people in the care of the Company should be maintained on a strictly professional basis. Collusion between families, support staff and children or young people to contradict or undermine the agreed Care Plan, any policy or any other agreement of the Company, Placing Authorities, Court or any other relevant person or body will be treated as a serious disciplinary matter.
- 11.2** Personal relationships, especially sexual relationships between a member of support staff and a family member of any child or young person they are looking after is regarded as wholly unprofessional and in conflict with their role, and an assessment will be made as to the suitability of that member of support staff continuing to work with the child or young person.

## **12. Former Employees of Unique Care Group**

- 12.1** All former employees of Unique Care Group who wish to have formal contact arrangements with children or young people in whatever circumstances must agree any plans with the Registered Home Manager, who will consult with relevant parties involved in the care of the child or young person concerned e.g. Placing Authority, Chief Operating Officer etc. These will be detailed in the child or young person's individual Care Placement Plan.
- 12.2** All former employees who wish to visit the home must first gain agreement with the Registered Manager to ensure a planned approach is taken in order that the best interest of the child or young person is considered each time,

## **13. Ongoing Contact with Children and Young People Post Discharge**

- 13.1** Some children and young people may wish to remain in contact with members of support staff once they have moved on from Unique Care Group. While this may not be inappropriate, care must be taken to manage this sensitivity and in a way that protects the child or young person and the member of support staff. There must be complete transparency in these relationships and information must be shared with Managers, Therapists, Social Workers, Parents and any others involved in the ongoing care of the child or young person. This is especially relevant if direct contact is to take place. If this is to happen the member of support staff should ensure that their line manager is aware of the times, dates and venue and that there are no objections from Social Workers or the child or young person's family. There may be times when unplanned contact happens e.g. an unsolicited visit or chance meeting. In these circumstances, the member of support staff should inform the above persons at the earliest opportunity to safeguard against any question of impropriety.

## **14. Conclusion**

Any deliberate and consistent breach of this policy will be treated as a serious disciplinary matter.

