Maintaining Right Relationships
Working in Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Wollongong

Our commitment to a safe and proper work and learning environment

There is solemn recognition that any tendency towards improper relationships, harassment or abuse in schools must be dealt with honestly and forthrightly. Nowadays, Catholic schools foster a culture of safety to maintain the good name and integrity of those who work in schools and to protect those who are vulnerable, including the children and young people in their care. With this in mind the following guidance is provided.

Purpose of these guidelines

The aim is to create a caring, life-giving and liberating environment and to build a culture of safety for all. These guidelines seek to:

- inspire, affirm, and provide guidance for the highest standard of practice in dealing with others
- encourage the establishment and maintenance of right relationships
- encourage the continued development of responsible persons who take seriously their work obligations
- honour, protect and support the dignity of those who work in the schools
- protect and nurture the moral and human integrity of each person

These guidelines are founded in the living of the Gospel, particularly focusing on the Gospel values of:

- Respect – upholding the dignity of each person, created in the image of God
- Love – the gift of sincere care, concern, empathy and compassion for each person
- Service – loving care for the needs of others
- Justice – the proper exercising of power and authority

Principles

The People who work in Catholic schools have a privileged role of service and are to exercise relationships that are life-giving and right. This involves developing and maintaining "right relationships".

There is therefore a challenge to achieve the most appropriate level of –

- connection and empathy with others, and
- flexibility and adaptability in dealing with others.

The particular role that each person has in the school will often define what is appropriate in dealing with students, staff and others.

Relationships with others will always need to be appropriate. These relationships will be characterised by behaviour that reflects the above values, beliefs and attitudes.
Guidelines

It is with this awareness that the following guidelines emerge:

Respect the physical and emotional boundaries that uphold the dignity and integrity of self and others.
- Be aware of, and always act in the interest of students and the school
- Exercise sensitivity, prudent judgement and self-control
- Act in ways that are open to scrutiny and ensure a safe environment that is, as far as possible, open and visible
- Behave and speak in ways that indicate respect for the role and the people
- Be aware of the development of young people and those who are vulnerable and avoid confusion through –
  - the use of over-familiar or inappropriate language
  - the invasion of “personal space”
  - actions that may be received as hostile
- Act with sensitivity regarding cultural norms and individual difficulties

Be aware of and sensitive to the factors that can put people at risk and can blur “professional boundaries”.
- Be conscious of the “arena of safety” and identify the danger areas and signs of a potential violation or abuse of power
- Act to minimise vulnerability and to strengthen right relationships
- Take personal responsibility in deciding how to act
- Help to change an inappropriate culture
- Actively support the development and maintenance of a culture that cannot, and does not, condone lapses into violations in relationships or abuse of power

A culture of safety and right relationships does not accept:
- harassment, bullying, threatening and intimidation
- sexual misconduct
- acts of violence
- corporal punishment
- abuse of children and young people
- providing alcohol or prohibited substances to children and young people
- any other behaviour that is an abuse of power or failure in the care of others

A culture of safety and right relationships requires the commitment of all who work in the Catholic school. This requires a sincere desire by all:
- to protect those who are vulnerable, whether child or adult
- to promote good practice and the integrity of those who work in the school.

See also Code of Conduct in the Protection of Children and Young People

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