



# **Nazareth College**

## **Child Safety Standards**

### **Professional Boundaries**

#### **P4.9**

*Nazareth College is committed to promoting the safety, wellbeing and inclusion of all children and young people.*

Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these'. (Matt:19:14)

### **Staff and Student Professional Boundaries**

This Policy applies to all teaching staff, administration staff, school support officers, Canonical Administrators, members of the College Board, volunteers (direct and indirect), third party contractors and external education providers.

Nazareth staff members hold a unique position of influence, authority, trust and power in relation to students at the College. As such, it is their duty, at all times, to maintain professional boundaries with students.

The following Policy and guidelines are designed to raise awareness of situations where professional boundary violations may occur and to provide guidance to minimise the risk of boundary violations.

### **Nazareth College Child Safety Policy**

Nazareth College is committed to providing a safe physical and emotional environment where all our students are respected and treated with dignity in an appropriate, professional and caring manner to ensure that a safe and supportive child safe environment is maintained.

It is our Policy that:

- staff exercise their responsibilities in a way that recognises professional boundaries with regard to their relationships with students at all times;
- staff identify, discourage and reject any advances of a sexual nature initiated by a student;
- staff interaction with students is professional at all times, including inside and outside of school hours;
- conflict of interest issues must be reported to the Principal as soon as practicable;
- equal learning opportunities are given to each student without discrimination; and
- appropriate consequences will be applied to staff who breach professional boundaries.

### **What are Professional Boundaries?**

Professional boundaries are parameters that describe the limits of a relationship in circumstances where one person (a student) entrusts his/her welfare and safety to another person (a staff member), in circumstances where a power imbalance exists.

The fact that College staff are in a unique position of trust, care, authority and influence with students means that there is always an inherent power imbalance that exists between them. It also means that professional boundaries must be established, maintained and respected at all times.

The following guidelines are not exhaustive, and given that sometimes 'grey areas' may occur, it is expected that all staff (no matter what their age or experience) use their own good judgement, think very carefully of the implications and potential consequences of engaging in certain behaviours with students, and always act on the side of caution.



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When unsure about whether professional boundaries are being, or have been, breached, ask yourself:

- Would I modify my behaviour if a colleague was present?
- How would I feel about explaining my actions at a staff meeting?
- Am I sharing information for the student's benefit, or for my benefit?
- Am I dealing with this student differently from others in similar circumstances?
- Is my language or demeanour different from normal when dealing with this particular student?

### Intimate Relationships

Staff must not initiate or develop a relationship with any student that is, or can be, misinterpreted as having a romantic or sexual, rather than professional, basis. This is regardless of whether the relationship is consensual, non-consensual or condoned by parents/carers.

The professional relationship of staff and students may be breached by:

- flirtatious behaviour or dating;
- development of an intimate personal relationship;
- sexual relations;
- the use of sexual innuendo, inappropriate language and/or material with students;
- unwarranted and inappropriate touching;
- unwarranted and inappropriate filming or photography;
- deliberate exposure to sexual behaviour of others (eg pornography);
- having personal contact without a valid context via written or electronic means (eg email, letters, telephone, text messages, social media sites or chatrooms);
- going out, whether alone or in company, to social events; and
- exchanging gifts of a personal nature that encourages the formation of a personal or intimate relationship.

Staff should also be aware that developing or encouraging romantic or sexual relationships with recent former students (over 18 years of age) may violate professional boundaries and staff are strongly discouraged from doing so.

The imbalance of power and authority in the staff/student relationship still exists after a student finishes school. Staff should not assume that they will be protected from disciplinary action by claiming that a relationship began only after the student left the College as there may be a reasonable belief that the emotional intimacy of the relationship developed while the staff/student relationship existed.

### Personal Relationships

Staff must not initiate or develop a relationship with any student that is or can be perceived or misinterpreted as having a personal rather than professional element. This is regardless of whether the relationship is consensual, non-consensual or condoned by parents or carers.

It is the student's **perception** of staff behaviour and not the intention of the staff member that is important.



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An established and expected professional relationship between staff and students may be compromised by staff:

- attending parties or socialising with students outside of organised College events;
- sharing personal details about their private lives with students;
- having contact with students on personal social media sites;
- having personal contact with students via email, text messages or phone calls; or
- meeting with students outside of school hours without permission from the College.

Staff must recognise at all times that their role is not to be a 'friend' or 'parent' to a student.

### Fair Learning Opportunities

The main focus of teaching is *effective student learning* and, as such, teachers are expected to support their students with their professional expertise so as to offer them the best education in their individual circumstances. The quality of teaching and learning between teachers and students characterises their relationship.

Teachers should demonstrate their commitment to student learning by:

- maintaining a safe and challenging learning environment that promotes mutual respect;
- recognising and developing each student's abilities, skills and talents by catering to individual abilities and respecting individual differences;
- encouraging students to develop and reflect on their own values;
- interacting with students without bias;
- not engaging in preferential treatment;
- not discriminating against any student on the basis of race, sex, sexuality, disability or religious or political conviction; and
- always making decisions in a student's best interests.

### Electronic Communications between Staff and Students

It is expected that all staff at the College will adhere to the following guidelines:

- all use of technology should be for educational purposes or for the organisation of co-curricular activities;
- all email communication between staff and students should be via the College email system and reflect a professional staff/student relationship;
- staff should not communicate with students via text messages;
- staff should not give out their personal telephone numbers or social media contact details;
- staff are not to accept or request students as 'friends' on social media or otherwise use social media to communicate in any way that is not condoned or approved by the College;
- staff should not exchange personal pictures with a student;
- beyond what is appropriate in the conduct of teaching a class, teachers are not expected or encouraged to respond to concerns of parents/carers or students on holidays, weekends or in the evening; and
- any student personal contact numbers or other personal contact details made available to the College should only be used for College communications.



## **Physical Contact with Students**

All staff should be aware that situations may arise that can be perceived in a manner that was not intended. For this reason, all staff at the College should adhere to the following guidelines for contact with students both in and outside of College grounds:

- at all times staff should avoid unnecessary physical contact with students;
- minimal, non-lingering, non-gratuitous physical contact in the context of the situation is acceptable (eg a congratulatory handshake); and
- contact for sport, drama and dance instruction is acceptable in a class situation but not in a 1:1 situation. If physical contact is required for specific technical instructions, it must be brief and only with the consent of the student. Note that a student may withdraw consent for this contact either verbally or gesturally and staff must remain vigilant whilst engaging in necessary contact situations. Once consent has been withdrawn **no** further contact can be or should be made.

## **Off-Campus Excursions and Camps**

During off-campus excursions or camps, the same physical contact guidelines apply, as well as the following:

- checking of sleeping arrangements, or supervising of students changing should be done, where possible, with another staff member present and always in a manner that respects a student's privacy and personal space;
- always knock and advise of presence prior to entering a bedroom or dormitory; and
- ensure that while in a bedroom or dormitory a strict staff/student relationship is upheld and that inappropriate behaviour, such as sitting on a student's bed, is not undertaken.

## **Managing Conflicts of Interest**

Where personal relationships with students such as family relationships and close friendship networks exist, questions of conflicts of interest may arise.

Where a staff member feels that a conflict of interest may exist, he/she should notify the Principal and arrangements should be implemented to avoid the conflict situation if possible. For example, teaching of students by a staff member with a conflict should be avoided where possible.

Any significant decisions relating to these students in the College (such as the appointment of classes or selection in sports teams) should be referred to another staff member and endorsed by a supervisor.

## **Disclosure of Staff/Student Interactions**

All staff are encouraged to declare any interactions with students outside of school hours. These interactions may include instances where the staff member is:

- related to the student;
- friends with the student's parents or family.



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The College will maintain records of all declarations made by staff members related to their interactions with students, or relationships with students, that exist outside of school hours or College premises.

These records are kept for a period of seven (7) years.

### **Staff Responsibilities**

All staff are to:

- follow the guidelines as set out in this policy;
- immediately report any conflicts of interest; and
- remove themselves from decision-making where a conflict has been identified.

**Where a staff member breaches this policy Nazareth College may take disciplinary action, including in the case of serious breaches, summary dismissal in accordance with the Victorian Catholic Education Multi Enterprise Agreement 2013.**

### **Implementation**

These guidelines are implemented through a combination of:

- staff training and development in professional conduct;
- student and parent/carer education and information;
- effective management of teachers engaging in inappropriate relationships with students;
- effective management of conflicts of interest;
- effective communication and incident notification procedures;
- effective record keeping procedures; and
- initiation of corrective actions where necessary.