

OPDS Staff, Volunteer and Host Family Code of Conduct

Statement

The following code of conduct for all parties gives clear guidance on behaviour that OPDS expects at all times. These guidelines confirm and reinforce professional responsibilities and are designed to help adults establish safe practices and reduce the risk of false accusations or improper conduct.

Power and Positions of Trust

All parties will have power over students and hold a position of trust. It is imperative that this position is not abused in any way and each should be aware of their own conduct to ensure that professional practice is clear and unambiguous. Favouritism should never be shown, and all students must be treated respectfully and fairly irrespective of culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious belief and sexual orientation.

Duty of Care to Children and Young People

All parties have a duty of care to children and young people. As such they must adhere to the various policies, including the safeguarding and child protection policy, that outline how we all safeguard students in our care.

Exercising Professional Judgement

OPDS recognises that this guidance may not cover every eventuality. There may be times when each uses their professional judgement to deal with situations not outlined in this section. In such circumstances, OPDS should be advised of the event and justification for any action taken or proposed.

Use of Appropriate Language

It is important to remember that whilst undertaking any role, you are representing OPDS. We expect all parties to be polite and courteous whilst undertaking their duties. It is inappropriate to swear or use abusive language.

Sexual Contact with Young People

Any (contact or non-contact activity) sexual behaviour (including grooming of a child so sexual abuse can take place), by any party, with or towards a student, is unacceptable and could be a matter for criminal and/or disciplinary proceedings. Students are protected by the same laws as adults in relation to non-consensual sexual behaviour, and by additional legal provisions depending on their age and understanding.

Communication with Students

Communication with students should only be in a professional capacity, using appropriate language and tone. For staff members, any communication, for example via telephone or video calls/WhatsApp should be via a device supplied by OPDS.

Social Contact with Students

Staff members should not give their private contact details to students, for example email address, home or mobile telephone numbers or details of web-based identities. If students locate these by any other means and attempt to contact or correspond with the staff member, it is important not to respond and the matter must be reported immediately to the line manager.

OPDS will then contact the student via the office email/phone to advise them that communication through personal channels is not allowed. Students and staff should only communicate for professional reasons using the company email addresses and telephone numbers. It is inappropriate for any party to befriend students and mix with them socially as a friend while the student is under the care of OPDS.

Social Contact with Parents / Agents / Staff at Partner Schools

As for students, it is inappropriate for OPDS staff, volunteers or host families to befriend parents, agents or school staff on social media (unless they were previously friends). OPDS expects all contact to be courteous and polite. It is inappropriate for any party to befriend parents, agents or school staff and mix with them socially unless, of course, they were previously friends before working with them.

Physical Contact Including Restraint

All parties are advised to avoid physical contact with students as this may be misconstrued by the student, an observer or any person to whom this action is described. There may also be cultural, gender sensitive or religious reasons about touching, of which the staff, volunteer or host family member is not aware. All parties must be aware that any physical contact with a student may need to be explained and would be open to scrutiny. Physical restraint should only be used if the student is placing themselves or others at risk. Any restraint must be reported immediately to OPDS. A written record must be submitted. The partner organisation and/or the natural parents will be made aware and OPDS will investigate fully.

An Outright Ban on any Corporal Punishment

It is illegal to use corporal (physical) punishment. Any reported incidences of corporal punishment, either verbal or written, will be reported by OPDS to the police.

Care of Distressed Students

Where a student is upset or distressed (for example due to homesickness) all parties should remember that sympathy and help can be given using kind words. Also, sitting with the student

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and listening to them until they feel better can be of great comfort. All parties should, therefore, use their professional judgement. In the majority of cases physical contact would not be appropriate and we do not recommend this.

One-to-One Meetings

All parties should be mindful when meeting students on a one-to-one basis. It is important when meeting students to do so in a space, such as a school classroom, meeting room or common room. If meeting students outside school, the meetings should take place in a public area such as a coffee shop. In the host family environment, host parents and their families should avoid going into the student's bedroom or inviting them into their bedroom.

Students' Entitlement to Privacy

All parties must respect a student's right to privacy at all times. This includes not entering their bedrooms (unless the host family is required to clean the room, and this should only be undertaken with prior warning and when the student is not in the room), ensuring that bathrooms have suitable locks and respecting the student's right to retreat to their rooms or a quiet area in the home if they feel the need. When students wish to email or call home, they should be allowed to do so in privacy.

Transporting Students

Staff or volunteers may at times be expected to transport students, for example to the airport, host family home, school or other out of school activities. A record of these journeys should be maintained, perhaps by retaining invoices submitted to OPDS. Any cars used must meet all legal requirements (e.g. MOT and appropriate insurance). Students should travel in the back of the vehicle and must wear seatbelts. Booster seats should be used where required (until students reach the age of 12 or 135cm in height). Host families transporting students should do so in line with the guidance included in the Host Family Handbook.

Gifts and Rewards

No party should give gifts to students on a regular basis, especially any of significant value. Similarly, such gifts should not be given to the families of students as this could be interpreted as a gesture to groom or bribe a student. Where a reward is given to a student, this should be in accordance with agreed practice, consistent with the behaviour policy and not based on favouritism. On no account should any monetary gifts be given.

There may be occasions where students or their families, may wish to make a present as a thank you. Small gifts (not monetary) and hospitality may be accepted but which is more than just a token, defined as a having a large value, should be politely refused or returned.

Use of Photographs and Videos

All parties should ensure that only photography, videos, or images of students are taken with their and their parent's consent and that these are published where such consent has been

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obtained. Images should be securely stored and used only by those authorised to do so. Under no circumstances should staff or volunteers take images of students without consent or without the students knowing that the images are being taken. Staff or volunteers should always be able to justify images of students in their possession and avoid making images in one-to-one situations.

Searching Students and their Belongings

It may be necessary in certain circumstances to search students and their belongings. This may be due to suspected possession of a prohibited item. This includes:

- Knives or weapons
- Alcohol
- Illegal drugs
- Stolen items
- Tobacco and cigarette papers
- Fireworks
- Pornographic images
- Any article that a member of staff or homestay reasonably suspects has been, or is likely to be, used to commit an offence or injure a person or damage property.

Ideally, consent should initially be requested of the student, although a search may still be conducted if this consent is not received. It is important that such a search is handled sensitively. An OPDS member of staff should be in attendance either physically or by video call, unless it is felt that a delay may put individuals at risk. The search should be conducted by a member of the OPDS staff or the primary carer in the homestay and they should be of the same gender as the student. The search should be conducted with the room door open and with a witness and the student present. If a search is conducted on students, please be aware that only outer clothing (not worn next to the skin or immediately over a garment being worn as underwear) may be removed. Staff, volunteers or the primary carer cannot carry out an intimate search; this can only be carried out by the police. A full incident report must be completed and the partner organisation or natural parents informed.

Whistleblowing

The OPDS Whistleblowing Policy provides guidance to staff on how to deal with malpractice in the workplace where there is concern for the safety of children.

Created
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