

Procedures and Standards of Behavior for Those Working with Minors

December 2007

To foster and maintain an atmosphere of trust and safety in our programs that serve minors, the following *Standards of Behavior for Those Working with Minors* apply to all staff and volunteers who engage in direct work with individuals age 17 and younger. Catholic Charities/El Programa Hispano Católico expects all agency personnel and volunteers to maintain the highest standards of professional and ethical behavior in our delivery of services to minors.

General Definitions

1. A minor is defined as anyone under the age of 18. For the purposes of these standards, the term “minors” also includes adults who would be considered vulnerable to abuse because of physical or mental disabilities.
2. Physical abuse is non-accidental injury that is intentionally inflicted upon a minor.
3. Sexual abuse is any contact of a sexual nature that occurs between a minor and an adult. This includes any activity that is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult. Abuse of minors is contrary to State law, Catholic Charities/ El Programa Hispano Católico policies and the teachings of the Church and is never permissible. Staff and volunteers have a responsibility to actively protect minors from all forms of abuse.

Policy Guidelines

The following guidelines clarify for agency personnel and volunteers standards of conduct for work with minors in agency sponsored and affiliated programs. They do not supersede state law, State of Oregon mandatory reporting requirements, or other Catholic Charities/ El Programa Hispano Católico policies and procedures.

Communication

Agency personnel and volunteers are prohibited from speaking to minors in a way that is abusive or demeaning. All are to refrain from using inappropriate language/humor in the presence of minors.

Staff are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with minors. However, it may occur that classes or instructional activities sponsored by the agency may address human sexuality issues. The content of these classes will conform to agency policies concerning human sexuality (see Guidelines Regarding Human Sexuality policy (A.2.02)). Agency personnel/ volunteers are not permitted to discuss their own sexual activities with minors.

Email contact with minor clients by staff or volunteers is strongly discouraged. Staff or volunteers who have Face Book or My Space accounts are not to communicate with minor clients through these accounts and are to register these accounts as private to prevent minor clients from accessing or posting messages on them.

Physical Restraint

Catholic Charities/ El Programa Hispano Católico personnel and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline or restraint for behavior management of minor clients (see agency Use of Restrictive Behavior Management Practices policy (J.1.01)). This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching,

hitting, manual or mechanical restraint, locked seclusion or chemical restraint or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behavior by minors.

For purposes of this policy, physical restraint shall be defined as the application or use of any manual method of restraint that restricts freedom of movement; or the application or use of any physical or mechanical device that restricts freedom of movement or normal access to one's body, including material or equipment attached or adjacent to the client's body that he or she cannot easily remove. Holding a client in a "therapeutic hold" or other manner that restricts his or her movement constitutes manual restraint for that client. Excluded from this definition of physical restraint are physical guidance activities, gentle physical prompting techniques, escorting a client who is walking, and the use of devices or assistive technology that are designed and used to increase client adaptive skills (such as may be used with educational settings). Escorting means the temporary touching or holding of the hand, wrist, arm, shoulder or back for the purpose of inducing a client to walk to a safe location.

Inappropriate Physical Contact

Some forms of physical affection have been used to initiate inappropriate contact with minors. In order to maintain the safest possible environment for minors, the following are examples of physical contact or affection that are not to be used in agency sponsored and affiliated programs:

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces.
- Kisses on the mouth.
- Holding minors over five/six years old on the lap.
- Touching buttocks, chests or genital areas.
- Sleeping in a bed, sleeping bag or small tent with a minor.
- Touching the knees or legs of minors.
- Tickling minors.
- Wrestling and/or roughhousing.
- Piggyback rides.
- Any type of massage given by a minor to an adult.
- Any type of massage given by an adult to a minor.
- Any form of unwanted affection.
- Compliments that relate to physique or body development.

Appropriate Physical Contact

Appropriate affection between agency personnel/ volunteers and minors can be an important element of service intervention and treatment. Appropriate physical contact is a positive part of agency service activity, but should be given in public but not in isolated or secluded areas.

The following forms of affection are regarded as some appropriate examples for most agency sponsored service activities:

- Side hugs.
- Shoulder to shoulder hugs.
- Pats on the shoulder or back.
- Handshakes.
- "High-fives" and hand slapping.
- Verbal praise.
- Touching hands, faces, shoulders or arms of minors.
- Arms around shoulders.

- Holding hands while walking with small children.
- Sitting beside small children.
- Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children.
- Holding hands during prayer.
- Pats on the head when culturally appropriate. (Avoid in some Asian communities.)
- Reciprocation of appropriate gestures initiated by a minor.

Undue Attention

Actions that single out minors or a particular minor or that show minors or a particular minor unusual attention are explicitly forbidden. Some examples of this behavior prohibited for agency personnel and volunteers include:

- Presenting gifts to a minor that would not ordinarily be given to an entire group of children, excluding awards, etc
- Singling out a particular child for special dinners, events, trips or outings, etc.

Transportation of Minors

Authorized agency personnel/ volunteers may transport minors in their own vehicles, provided that they are sensitive to the circumstances associated with this activity (see agency Transportation of Clients Procedures (E.2.01)). These circumstances include location, time of day, number of clients being transported, ratio of staff to clients, etc. In all situations, staff and volunteers are to strictly adhere to the behavioral standards set forth in this policy. Under no circumstances is a minor client ever allowed to operate staff, volunteer or agency vehicles. All client must wear seat belts when transported by agency staff or volunteers (agency policy K.2.05). In addition, the following guidelines should be observed when transporting minors:

- Minors are to be transported directly to their destination. No unauthorized stops are to be made nor any unnecessary travel undertaken.
- Agency personnel/ volunteers are to avoid unnecessary and/or inappropriate contact with minors while in vehicles.

Release of Minor Clients at the Conclusion of Agency Sponsored Activities

Agency personnel/ volunteers are responsible for releasing minors 12 years of age and under in their care only to parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians at the close of services or activities. In the event that Church personnel are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a minor, they are to contact the parent or legal guardian of the minor. Otherwise, they are to contact their supervisor before releasing the child.

Home Visitations

Agency personnel and volunteers may visit minors in their homes, provided they follow existing agency policies and that they are sensitive to the circumstances associated with this activity (see agency Safety Procedures for Off-site Locations (policy E.2.02)). These circumstances include location, time of day, ratio of staff to clients, etc. In all situations, staff and volunteers are to strictly adhere to the behavioral standards set forth in this policy. That said, no staff member or volunteer may make a home visit to a minor client after 11:00 pm or before 4:00 am without the explicit permission of his/her immediate supervisor.

Self Disclosure

All staff and volunteers are to refrain from unnecessary and inappropriate self disclosure when working with minor clients. The discussion of personal issues, problems, or feelings with minors in order to help personnel or volunteers meet their own needs is explicitly forbidden (see agency Code of Conduct (policy A.2.03). Any self disclosure by staff or volunteers must be done with discretion and explicitly for the benefit of the minor client alone.

Staff/ Volunteer Attire

Agency personnel and volunteers working with minor clients are to maintain a professional appearance that appropriately models program and agency goals and values. In an effort to identify and communicate a clothing standard for agency workers, the following guidelines are established to describe clothing that would NOT be acceptable for agency work:

- Low cut tops or clothing that exposes the midriff, stomach, back, or cleavage
- Clothing that exposes undergarments, such as bra straps or boxers
- Tube or see-through tops
- Tops with narrow or string straps
- Sagging pants or pants that expose underwear
- Ripped or torn clothing
- Clothes with inappropriate pictures/ language (by way of example: references to alcohol, violence, messages demeaning to the opposite sex or different race, or clothing with sexual references)
- Pajamas
- Short-shorts or mini-skirts (would be defined as too short if the individual's fingers extend below the hemline when arms are held straight at his/her sides)
- Any attire that is overly tight or causes distraction
- Wearing no shirt or shoes

Special Recreational, Entertainment or Enrichment Activities

In general, Catholic Charities/ El Programa Hispano Católico encourages the development of enrichment activities for minors that are consistent with agency mission and program goals. Within the broad range of activities that benefit minors, the following standards apply:

- Overnight events are explicitly prohibited
- Evening or indoor social events are to be held in a well lit environment
- The showing of R rated movies should only occur when the film has educational merit and parent/ guardian permission has been obtained prior to the event.
- Video games rated T must be approved by the staff/ volunteer supervisor prior to usage. First person shooter video games are not permitted. Video games rated M or A are explicitly forbidden.
- A 1:10 staff to client ratio at special events is strongly encouraged.
- Staff or volunteers are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented or morally inappropriate material while working with minors, or accessing similar materials on the internet on agency property, at agency sponsored events, and/or in the presence of minor clients.

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Reporting Violations

All agency employees or volunteers are required to report violations of these policies by an employee or volunteer to that individual's immediate supervisor, or, if that is not possible, to the appropriate Manager and/or Director of Human Resources.

Signature

Date

Printed Name