

## **SINGAPORE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY (the Society) CODE OF CONDUCT FOR DIRECT SERVICE STAFF**

The following Code of Conduct stipulates the Society's expectations of staff when performing their daily and ad hoc duties at all service centres, except SBP. Any staff working directly with our child, youth and adult beneficiaries (the Beneficiaries), and who violates this Code of Conduct will be subject to disciplinary action by the Society.

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### **1 General Behaviour**

- 1.1 Staff should maintain good moral conduct at work at all times, and serve as role models for all the beneficiaries. This entails:
- Abiding by the mission and the values of the Society
  - Complying with all laws, policies and procedures established by the state as well as the Society
  - Ensuring responsibility on the job by adhering to schedules and completing work duties in accordance with the expectations set out by the Society
  - Speaking and acting in a respectful manner towards all staff and beneficiaries
  - Being objective and fair in dealings with the beneficiaries
  - Always acting in the best interest of the beneficiaries
  - Observing working hours and generally be punctual, unless affected by events beyond the staffs' control
  - No misuse of the Society's equipment supplies and facilities for personal business.
- 1.2 The personal life of staff is considered private matter. Nevertheless, personal activities outside of work should not contravene any requirements of the job nor affect public confidence in the person.
- 1.3 Staff who have committed or are found to commit the following offences will not be employed by the Society, but may be allowed to continue to be employed by the Society to take on jobs with no direct contact with beneficiaries and subject to the approval of the Executive Committee:
- offence under Section 5, 6, 7, 11, 12 or 13 of the Children and Young Persons Act (Cap. 38) or any other offence involving child abuse or child neglect;
  - offence under Part XI of the Women's Charter (Cap 353);
  - offence under Section 354, 354A, 375, 376, 376A, 376B, 376C, 376D, 376E, 376F, 376G, 377, 377A or 377B of the Penal Code (Cap. 224) or any other offence involving sexual acts;
  - offence related to possession of obscene / pornographic materials;
  - convicted in any court of law for any crimes under the Registration of Criminals Act
- 1.4 Specialized staff are required to observe the regulations and ethics spelled out by their respective professional bodies (e.g. for social workers, nurses).

- 1.5 It is the responsibility of all staff to report any ethical violations to appropriate persons and / or bodies.

## **2 Dress and Appearance**

- 2.1 Dressing and appearance is largely a matter of personal choice, although there is a need for staff to uphold one's professional image in order to set a good example for the beneficiaries. This means that staff should avoid dressing in a manner that can be seen as offensive or sexually provocative.
- 2.2 To avoid unnecessary distraction or misunderstanding, clothing with messages or pictures that are sexual in nature or may be offensive to any race, religion or culture should also be avoided.

## **3 Communication**

- 3.1 It is important for staff, in their daily communication with one another and with the beneficiaries, to foster mutual respect between all parties. In order to do so, staff should always be considerate in their manner and speech, and must not use words or remarks that will demean, intimidate, humiliate, or embarrass one another or the beneficiaries. These include words that are offensive or discriminatory. Whilst staff may be assigned by the respective Centre Head to provide personalized care and support to certain beneficiaries, there should generally be no biases or favouritism towards any of them.
- 3.2 In communicating with the beneficiaries, staff is to be mindful of the individual's age, gender, developmental stage, personality and past experiences, and tailor their style of communication accordingly. It is also necessary to ensure the right tone and setting, particularly when dealing with sensitive cases. Staff needs to exercise tact, and not be overly intrusive nor coercive in soliciting information from the beneficiaries. Leading questions ought to be avoided. If a staff is assigned by the Centre Head to provide personalized care and support to certain beneficiaries, she should assume the role of a guardian in encouraging these beneficiaries to share what happened to them, their emotions and their thoughts. The objective is to provide emotional support and also to help them to develop positively.
- 3.3 All information obtained from the beneficiaries must be kept confidential as far as possible. In circumstances when it is not possible to withhold information, for example when such information has to be shared with other caregivers in the best interest of the beneficiaries, staff should make known to the beneficiaries the limits as to which confidentiality can be maintained.

## **4 Confidentiality**

- 4.1 All information obtained in the course of one's work should be used for sole purpose of work and not discussed in casual conversation. These include information obtained verbally, as well as those documented in official reports. Access to written information should be restricted to those who require it for work purposes and not shared with any external party unless there is a valid reason and approval is obtained from the Centre Head.

- 4.2 Information on the beneficiaries should be accessed only when necessary, and not to fulfil personal curiosity or for any other purpose.
- 4.3 Any staff interviews or communication with external parties (e.g. media) on matters pertaining to the operations or beneficiaries of the centre must be done only with permission from the Executive Director of the Society or the Chairperson of the respective Standing Committee.

## **5 Physical Boundaries**

- 5.1 As part of the daily management of the beneficiaries, there will be moments whereby staff need to come into physical contact with the beneficiaries (e.g. during sports activities or when applying therapeutic touch during counselling). Staffs are to exercise discretion in using any form of physical contact. The following principles serve as a guide:
- There should be no unwarranted and inappropriate touching of the beneficiaries
  - Touch that is meant to provide comfort and encouragement should be done in the presence of other staff as far as possible, and must be restricted to the head, shoulder, upper back, arms and hands of the beneficiaries
  - Kissing - only allowed on the forehead and cheek, never on the lips or body - and hugging that is meant to provide comfort and reassurance should be done in open areas and in the presence of other staff, and should only be done to the younger children 6 years and below, irrespective of gender
  - Only hugging of female beneficiaries 7 years and above by female staff is allowed.
  - At least 2 staff should be present when body searches / checks are conducted
  - Male staff are strictly not allowed to conduct body searches / checks on female beneficiaries
  - Male staff should not touch female beneficiaries as far as possible, unless in emergencies such as when there is a fire or when a female beneficiary needs to be carried for medical attention
  - Staff should not touch private and sensitive areas of the body under any circumstances, except when under the explicit order of the Centre Head in medical emergencies
  - Any form of sexual contact or advances is strictly prohibited
- 5.2 It is important for staff to understand the history of the beneficiaries to ensure that any form of touch will not be misinterpreted as a threat (given that some of the beneficiaries may have experienced sexual abuse in the past) or encouragement to engage in inappropriate activity.
- 5.3 When there is a need for one-to-one contact with any beneficiary (e.g. during private counselling sessions, or when staff is performing his/her duty in providing emotional support and developmental caring to beneficiaries specifically under his/her charge), it is important to ensure that another staff knows that the session is in place and the location in which it is held. Room doors should not be locked during these one-to-one sessions.
- 5.4 Staff should also respect the privacy and dignity of the beneficiaries, notwithstanding their duty to ensure the safety and compliance to rules. This will include being mindful when entering private areas such as bathrooms, toilets or any areas whereby beneficiaries may not be fully dressed. Male staffs are not allowed under any circumstances to enter any area where female beneficiaries may be engaged in bathing, changing, sleeping or toileting, except in emergencies, and under the instruction of the Centre Head as well as in the presence of at least one female staff.

5.5 Maximum precautions should be taken to avoid any misunderstanding or allegations against staff of the Society. These include avoiding any form of visually intrusive behaviour, or unwarranted physical contact with the beneficiaries when they are in a vulnerable state.

## **6 Professional Boundaries**

6.1 In engaging the beneficiaries in meaningful and therapeutic relationships, staff must ensure that professional boundaries are maintained to avoid misunderstandings. The following good practices serve as a guide to help staff stay within the worker-client relationship:

- Staff should not buy gifts or items in their personal capacity for the beneficiaries
- Staff should not receive personal gifts or items of commercial value from the beneficiaries
- Staff should not borrow any personal belongings to and from the beneficiaries, but may lend personal belongings and money to them in emergencies and with the approval of the Centre Head
- Staff should not assist the beneficiaries in buying goods or services, unless in exceptional cases and with the approval of the Centre Head, but definitely not prohibited items such as cigarettes or pornographic materials
- Staff should not share personal phone numbers, addresses or personal particulars with the beneficiaries
- Interaction via social media (e.g. Facebook) should be limited to the organisation's account or website
- There should be strictly no personal contact with the beneficiaries outside of work duties (including ex-beneficiaries), and it should be noted that in the case of a staff being assigned the duty by the Centre Head to provide personalized care and support to certain beneficiaries, the staff is acting as a representative of the Society in providing guardian-like contact with the beneficiaries concerned.

6.2 Staff should also refrain from using their working relationship to promote their personal values and beliefs (e.g. proselytise).

6.3 Similar professional boundaries have to be maintained with the beneficiaries' families as well.

6.4 Staff should not post any information on work and/or beneficiaries that can be deemed to be negative to the image of the Society

## **7 Discipline**

7.1 Under no circumstances should staff do the following as part of discipline:

- Hit or physically assault any beneficiary
- Shout at any beneficiary except in emergencies to catch the beneficiary's attention.
- Use vulgarities at any beneficiary
- Emotionally abuse any beneficiary by ignoring or rejecting them, or threatening them in ways that could be emotionally damaging to the beneficiaries
- Use derogatory or discriminatory words that attack any beneficiary's personal attributes, race, religion or culture
- Humiliate any beneficiary in front of other beneficiaries or praise a beneficiary in front of other beneficiaries with the intention of demeaning the other beneficiaries
- Subject any beneficiary to overly strenuous tasks or activities

7.3 Staff has to be mindful not to abuse their power and authority by carrying out inappropriate disciplinary measures as a form of personal attack against any beneficiary

## **8. Safety of the Beneficiaries**

8.1 The physical safety of the beneficiaries is of paramount importance. All significant injuries suffered by the beneficiaries and observed by staff whilst on duty, must be reported and treated, whatever the cause of the injuries

8.2 Staff must not bully the beneficiaries, and should try to prevent the beneficiaries from bullying one another. All bullying by staff must be reported, and all bullying by staff and reported by the beneficiaries must be investigated.

8.3 A child beneficiary below the age of four should not be left alone and should not be left with other beneficiaries

## **9. Financial Integrity**

9.1 Staff should not solicit or accept any personal gifts, money or favours from the beneficiaries or their families. In the event whereby it is difficult to refuse a gift, this should be declared in writing to the respective Centre Head who will decide how to manage it in accordance with the Society's policies.

## **10. Caring for the Beneficiaries with Special Needs (where applicable)**

10.1 The care of the beneficiaries with special needs is a sensitive issue, as they often require a higher level of care and may find it more difficult to comprehend explanations and instructions given by staff. General guidelines to safeguard the integrity of both the beneficiaries and staff are as follows:

- Where personal and intimate care is required, staff should have prior discussion with the beneficiaries' family to agree in writing the specific duties that staff can perform and the manner in which these duties are to be executed
- In carrying out care, the safety, privacy and dignity of the beneficiaries should be protected at all times

## **11. Conflict of Interest**

11.1 Staff should inform the Centre Head when there is conflict of interest (e.g. staff is related to one of the beneficiaries), so that adjustments to work duties can be made to avoid any potential misunderstandings.