



First Presbyterian Academy STAFF/STUDENT INTERACTION GUIDELINES

The interaction between employees and students is a vital part of our school culture at First Presbyterian Academy (FPA).

Educators serve in many capacities: teachers, coaches, mentors, and disciplers and because of this dynamic, it is encouraged that relationships between FPA staff and students are mutually respectful. However, we understand the vital need for boundaries. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide clear boundaries and direction regarding appropriate conduct between staff and students. These guidelines are not intended to serve as an exhaustive list of requirements or limitations. Rather, the purpose of these guidelines is to:

- Provide staff with clear guidelines and expectations, which provide guidance in conducting themselves in a manner that reflects FPA's high standard of professionalism.
- Bring attention to sensitive and potentially problematic matters that can arise in staff/student relationships
- Provide specific boundaries related to situations and conduct bearing potential inappropriate overtones, implications and consequences that are not acceptable norms of behavior.

In conjunction with these guidelines, all employees agree to and sign a personal lifestyle statement each year. The purpose of this statement is to clarify that all employees are expected to live a Christ-honoring lifestyle that bears the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The document addresses church membership, conflict resolution, moral principle rooted in Scripture, standards for behavior and Christ-likeness, and a commitment to follow the Lord.

At the center of a healthy school is the need to maintain a school culture in which students, staff, and parents understand their responsibility to report misconduct without fearing retaliation. It is the job of the Administration to support students, staff, and parents when they report possible misconduct. All community members should err on the side of caution and report behaviors that may seem strange or unsettling; if you see something, say something.

It is important that each staff member understand and utilize the guidelines provided to avoid situations that could prompt suspicion by parents, students, colleagues, and administrators. Accountability and transparency are vitally important in confirming that actions of staff members remain above reproach. Failure to follow guidelines will result in disciplinary action and potential dismissal from the school.

Boundaries*

For the purpose of these guidelines, the term “boundaries” is defined as acceptable professional behavior by staff members while interacting with students. Crossing the boundaries of a student/staff relationship is deemed an abuse of power and a betrayal of public trust. Crossing boundaries erodes the ability of the staff member to effectively educate students.

Definitions of Unacceptable Behavior and Acceptable Behavior with Parent Permission*

Some activities may seem innocent from a staff member’s perspective, but can be perceived as unacceptable from a student or parent point of view. The objective of the following lists of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors is not to restrain positive relationships between staff and students, but to prevent relationships that could lead to, or may be perceived as, sexual misconduct, or conduct that is ethically or morally compromising.

Staff members must understand their own responsibility for ensuring that they do not cross the boundaries as written in these guidelines. It is crucial that all employees learn this policy thoroughly and thoughtfully apply the lists of acceptable behaviors and refrain from unacceptable behaviors in their daily activities. Although good-natured, heartfelt interaction with students certainly fosters learning, student/staff interactions must always be guided by appropriate boundaries regarding locations, behaviors, and intentions. Employees will review these guidelines on a yearly basis and agree to them by signing a copy of the guidelines.

Unacceptable Behaviors*

In the context of the previous paragraphs, the following partial list of behaviors shall be considered violation of this policy:

- Giving gifts to an individual student that are of a personal or intimate nature;
- Unnecessary physical contact with a student in either a public or private situation;
- Being alone with a student on campus or away from the school without explicit permission and knowledge of one’s supervisor and/or the student’s parents;
- Making or participating in sexually inappropriate comments;
- Sexual jokes, stories, or jokes/comments with sexual innuendo;

- Seeking emotional involvement with a student for an employee's benefit; personal illustrations and stories may be inserted into academic lessons, but should be directly related to the classroom objective and shared with the class as a whole.
- Discussing an employee's own personal troubles or intimate issues with a student;
- Becoming involved with a student so that a reasonable person may suspect inappropriate behavior;
- Being alone in a car with one child;
- Non-school related use of social media with or about students;
- Excessive attention toward a particular student;
- Sending communications to students of a personal nature if the content is not about school activities;
- Being alone in a room with a student at school with the door closed and window blinds closed;
- Failing to keep the appropriate administrator informed when a significant issue develops involving a student's welfare;
- Using inappropriate language/profanity in the presence of students;
- Students should not seek personal advice in a one-on-one setting from staff members of the opposite sex; staff members will redirect students that seek such advice.

Behaviors that are Unacceptable Without Parental Permission*

- Giving students a ride to/from school or school activities;
- Allowing students in your home;
- Communicating with students other than by using school technology (i.e. communicating via personal email, cell phone, or social media) other than during a field trip or other school activity after receiving parent permission;
- Communicating with students outside of regular school hours on matters other than appropriate and relevant school business; or
- Sending emails, text messages, or letters to students if the content is not about school matters.

Athletic Guidelines

- Coaches will not hold individual private practices with athletes without the express permission of the parents; standard team practices are published each week as part of the school's calendar.
- In situations where a coach and a student are on a bus without other athletes (for example, all other athletes ride home with their parents), the coach will text an administrator to alert them of the situation; the student will alert their parent; once the coach and athlete arrive

back at school, a follow-up text must be sent to alert all parties that the coach and student are back on school property.

- Coaches will also have additional staff and/or parents in meetings that involve individual athletes.
- We understand that text communication may be necessary between coaches and athletes throughout the season; all communication should be appropriate and relevant to the specific sport.
- If a coach plans an additional activity, such as an open gym, the coach must alert the Athletic Director or other administrator regarding the additional event.

Duty to Report*

If an employee finds him/herself in a difficult situation related to boundaries, the employee should ask for advice from a supervisor or administrator. When any employee becomes aware of another employee crossing appropriate boundaries with a student, the employee must report the matter to his or her supervisor. In some circumstances, employees will also have the duty to report such conduct in accordance with the mandated reporter requirements.

Steps to Report

If a parent, student, or staff member is made aware of potential inappropriate behavior, he/she must report the behavior to a school administrator, a school counselor, or directly to a reporting agency (DSS or Law Enforcement Agency). When reports are made to school administrators or school counselors by a student or staff member, the parents of the student involved will be contacted and included in the investigation. Transparency and communication are vitally important. Should law enforcement need to be involved, school officials and parents should report accordingly. It is important to note that reports do not need 'proof' in order to report. Reporting possible misconduct is vitally important for the safety of the students.

**Some definitions and guidelines are being used with permission from Almaden Country Day School in San Jose, California*