

## Appendix XXI – Code of Practice – Working with Learners, Children and Vulnerable Adults



### Policy & Procedure Title:

Code of Practice - Working with Learners, Children & Vulnerable Adults

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## **1.1 Introduction & Application**

South East Technological University Carlow's (herein referred to as SETU Carlow) staff interacting with learners, children and vulnerable adults are in a position of trust and influence. They are responsible for setting and monitoring the boundaries between a working relationship and friendship with learners, children and vulnerable adults. In doing so they should recognise the imbalance in power inherent in staff/learner and adult-child/vulnerable adult relationships. They shall always ensure that learners, children and vulnerable adults are treated with integrity.

Likewise learners on placement are also in a position of trust and influence.

In working with children/vulnerable adults, both staff and learners shall strive to enhance the child/vulnerable adult's involvement and enjoyment of the activity undertaken while ensuring their welfare and safety.

SETU Carlow's Code of Practice is a general guide and may need to be adapted for particular situations; however, the general principles shall be adhered to.

The Code can help to protect staff in SETU Carlow and learners on placement by providing a framework for the promotion of good practice.

It shall also reassure learners, parents/guardians and children themselves that there is an University wide commitment to best practice.

## **2.1 Code of Practice**

### **2.1.1 Equality**

All learners, children and vulnerable adults must be treated equally.

### **2.1.2 Physical Integrity**

The physical integrity of learners, children and vulnerable adults must be respected at all times. Never engage in inappropriate physical contact such as touching of groin, genital areas, buttocks, breasts or any other part of the body that might cause a learner/child/vulnerable adult distress or embarrassment – including tough physical play, physical reprimand, and horse-play. This shall not prevent contact in situations where it is necessary to ensure the well-being and safety of a learner / child e.g. when a learner/child is distressed or in need of first aid treatment<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For additional information see

[http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/child\\_welfare\\_protection/ChildrenFirst.pdf](http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/child_welfare_protection/ChildrenFirst.pdf) or [www.ehsni.gov.uk](http://www.ehsni.gov.uk)

### **2.1.3 Privacy**

The right to privacy of learners, children/vulnerable adults must be respected at all times. Particular care regarding privacy must be taken when they are in locations such as changing areas, swimming pools, showers and toilets. Photographs of learners/children/vulnerable adults must never be taken when they are in changing areas, swimming pools, showers, toilets etc. Tasks of a personal nature (washing, toileting or changing clothes) shall never be done for children/vulnerable adults. Do not do something that an individual can do themselves.

### **2.1.4. Prohibition on the use of Corporal Punishment**

Corporal punishment or the use of physical force of any form on a learner, child or vulnerable adult is not permissible under any circumstances.

### **2.1.5 Verbal Abuse/Sexually Suggestive Comments/Jokes**

Verbal abuse of children, vulnerable adults or learners, telling jokes of a sexual nature in the presence of children, vulnerable adults or learners, or making any sexually suggestive comments about, or to, a learner, child or vulnerable adult is not acceptable. Great care must be taken if it is necessary to have a conversation regarding sexual matters with a learner/child/vulnerable adult.

### **2.1.6 Bullying**

Behaviour constituting bullying of a learner/child/vulnerable adult including verbal, psychological or physical shall not be engaged in or tolerated by staff<sup>2</sup>.

### **2.1.7 Lone working**

Learners/children/vulnerable adults shall not be allowed to work or remain in buildings unless there are at least two adults present.

### **2.1.8 Alcohol, tobacco or drugs**

Alcohol, tobacco or drugs must not be used by staff or learners who are supervising or working with learners/children/vulnerable adults. Under no circumstances shall staff give alcohol, tobacco or drugs to a learner/child/vulnerable adult.

### **2.1.9 Computer and computing facilities**

Computer and computing facilities may be authorised for certain visitors to campus. Usernames and passwords are assigned. Where children/vulnerable adults are given access to computers on campus they must comply with SETU Carlow's Computing Regulations. Computers used by children/vulnerable adults shall be monitored regularly to ensure that they are being used in accordance with the stated policy.

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<sup>2</sup> See IT Carlow's Dignity at Work Policies & Procedures & IT Carlow's Learner Code of Discipline for further information

### **2.1.10 Children or learners with additional needs**

Learners or children with additional needs or those with a disability may depend on adults more than other children for their care and safety, so the tasks must be undertaken with the utmost discretion and sensitivity. Where it is necessary to carry out tasks of a personal nature for a learner/child/vulnerable adult with additional needs, this shall be done with the full understanding and consent of the parent/guardian. In an emergency situation where this type of help is required, parents shall be informed as soon as is reasonably possible.

### **2.1.11 Vulnerable Adults/Children**

Vulnerable adults/children may depend on adults more than other children for their care and safety. It is important that they are carefully listened to, in recognition of the fact that they may have difficulty in expressing their concerns and in order that the importance of what they say is not underestimated. They are more likely than other children/adults to be bullied or subjected to other forms of abuse and may be less clear about physical and emotional boundaries.

### **2.1.12 Challenging or disruptive behaviour**

Challenging or disruptive behaviour of a child or vulnerable adult shall be dealt with by more than one person. A record shall be made describing what happened, the circumstances giving rise to the incident, who was involved, whether any injury was sustained or property damaged and how the situation was resolved. Consideration shall be given to the involvement of the parents.

### **2.1.13 General Supervision**

- Good practice dictates that staff shall try to ensure that more than one adult is present with a child/vulnerable adult and that there shall be at least one of each gender with mixed groups. This shall help to ensure the safety of the children/vulnerable adults as well as protect adults
- SETU Carlow shall aim to ensure adequate Adult: Child/Vulnerable Adult ratios. This shall depend on the nature of the activity, the age of the participants and any special needs of the group, a general guide (NSPCC) might be 1:8 for less than 12 years of age and 1:10 for 12 years and over;
- Where possible and for their own safety staff shall avoid being alone with a learner/child/vulnerable adult. If a situation arises where it is necessary to be alone with a learner/child/vulnerable adult such a meeting should not be held in an isolated environment but should allow for transparency by being held in a room with a glass panel or with the door open and where other people are present.
- Staff should avoid spending disproportionate amounts of time with any particular learner/child/vulnerable adult.

- Staff shall engage in best practice in relation to travel with learners/children/vulnerable adults on SETU Carlow business. They shall not undertake a car journey alone with a learner/child/vulnerable adult. If, in certain circumstances, only one adult is available, there shall be a minimum of two learner/ children/vulnerable adults present for the entire journey. In the event of an emergency where it is necessary to make a journey alone with a child/vulnerable adult, a record of this shall be made and the child/vulnerable adult's parents/guardian informed at the earliest opportunity. Ideally staff shall not undertake a car journey alone with a learner.

### **3. Recognition of Child/Vulnerable Adult Abuse**

3.1 Both SETU Carlow staff and learners must be alert to the possibility that children/vulnerable adults with whom they are in contact may be victims of abuse. Child/vulnerable adult abuse can often be difficult to identify as it may present in many forms. The possibility of child/vulnerable adult abuse shall be considered if a child/vulnerable adult appears to have suffered a suspicious injury for which no reasonable explanation can be offered. It shall also be considered if the child/vulnerable adult seems distressed without obvious reason or displays persistent new behavioural problems.

3.2 Some signs are more indicative of abuse than others. These include;

- Direct observation
- Disclosure of abuse or neglect by a child or third party
- Age-inappropriate language, abnormal sexual play or knowledge
- Specific injuries or patterns of injuries
- Absconding from home or care situations
- Self harm
- Suicide/attempted suicide
- Underage pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease
- Non-verbal communication, unusual or fearful responses to certain persons

Signs of one or more categories at the same time, e.g. signs of developmental delay, physical injury and behavioural signs may together indicate a pattern of abuse.

3.3 If a staff member/learner becomes aware of any of the above signs of abuse they and has a reasonable ground for concern they shall be expected to raise this, in the first instance, with SETU Carlow's designated liaison person. If for any reason the designated liaison person is not available the staff member may raise their concerns with their manager or HR Manager. Staff, as individuals, are also free to consult with or report their

concerns directly to the HSE or An Garda Síochána. Staff shall refer to SETU Carlow's Child Protection & Welfare Policy & Procedure

Under no circumstances shall a child/vulnerable adult be left in a situation that exposes that individual to harm or to risk of harm pending HSE intervention. In the event of an emergency where it appears a child may be in immediate danger staff shall contact the HSE or alternatively the Garda, through any Garda station.

## **Appendix 1 - Definitions**

The definitions set out below are relevant to the implementation of this code of practice.

Child: means a person under the age of 18 years, excluding a person who is or has been married.

Member of SETU Carlow; may be a member of faculty, staff or learner of SETU Carlow and those working on a voluntary/unpaid basis on behalf of SETU Carlow

Vulnerable Adult: A person aged 18 years or over, who is in receipt of or may be in need of services by reason of, but not limited to, any of the following:

- intellectual physical or cognitive disability,
- mental health issues
- age
- illness

and who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.