

<b>POLICY # 305</b>	<b>SUBJECT:</b> Standards of Conduct: Employees, Volunteers and Interns
<b>EFFECTIVE DATE: December 22, 2002</b> <b>REVISION DATE: March 11, 2004;</b> <b>August 15, 2012; August 20, 2013; October</b> <b>11, 2016, April 9, 2018</b>	Page 1 of 7
<b>Approved By: Josette Manning, Cabinet Secretary</b>	

## Delaware Children’s Department Policy

### **I. PURPOSE**

The Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families recognizes the value of having high ethical standards which guide the conduct of its employees, volunteers and trainees. Department employees are public servants, charged with ensuring public respect and confidence while promoting the vision and mission of the Department. The purpose of this policy is to establish ethical and conduct standards for Department employees, volunteers and trainees to: 1) assure the safety and well-being and promote the best interests of children, youth and their families; 2) maintain a safe, secure, respectful, and professional work environment; and 3) uphold public trust and confidence. This policy is applicable to all Department employees as well as individuals who are volunteers or who are training with DSCYF (e.g. interns, practicum students).

### **II. DEFINITIONS**

Child – A person birth to 12 years of age.

Client – A child, youth or family currently or previously receiving benefits, services, residential care, under the supervision or control, or in the custody of the Department.

Department or DSCYF - Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families

Employee - Anyone working for the Department including Merit employees, Merit exempt employees, casual/seasonal employees, contracted staff, and paid/unpaid interns.

Family – Blood, foster, adoptive relatives including but not limited to: parents, children, siblings; legal guardians and wards, and others *in loco parentis*.

Intern – an individual who is working in a paid or unpaid capacity within the Department as part of an internship or practicum and receiving supervision from DSCYF staff.

Professional boundaries- limits in the therapeutic/helping relationship that the professional/worker is responsible for establishing and maintaining. Professional boundaries define effective and appropriate interactions between professionals/workers and the public including service recipients.

State – State of Delaware.

Volunteer- a person offering services for the Department without compensation.

Youth –A person ages 13 to 18.

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### **III. EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES / STANDARDS OF CONDUCT**

- A. Each employee shall assure the safety and well-being and promote the best interests of children, youth and their families and be positive role models for Delaware's children. As such:
1. Employees are responsible to maintain appropriate, professional boundaries with clients. Children and youth cannot consent to breaching these boundaries. No employee shall have physical contact with clients beyond that which is routinely required by specific job duties.
  2. Employees are responsible to maintain appropriate, professional boundaries with coworkers.
  3. No employee shall use derogatory language in their written or verbal communications to or about clients or coworkers.
  4. No employee shall impose their personal beliefs or values on clients or coworkers in a manner inconsistent with job duties, agency mission and values, or client service plans.
  5. All employees shall avoid negative criticism of colleagues in communications with clients or with other professionals. Negative criticism may include demeaning comments that refer to a colleague's level of competence or to individuals' attributes such as race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, political beliefs, religion, or disability.
- B. Employees will limit interactions with clients to work-related activities except as described below. No employee shall engage in a social relationship with a client on their caseload or where the social relationship could compromise the staff's ability to exercise official authority appropriately or when there is a risk of potential exploitation or potential harm to the client, whether such contact is consensual or forced.
1. An employee may be the parent or guardian for a child who becomes active as a Department client. This raises the potential for a dual relationship (personal and professional at the same time) which is not in the best interest of the child or employee and must be avoided.
    - a. If an employee's child becomes active with the Department, the employee will ensure that they do not have professional responsibilities for their child including but not limited to serving as the case manager, case manager supervisor, residential service staff, etc. Employees are encouraged to consult with their supervisor or Human Resources if they are unsure about whether a dual relationship exists.

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- b. An employee whose child(ren) becomes active with the Department should not attempt to interfere with the duties of any employee assigned to serve their child, nor should such employee violate the acceptable use policy with respect to accessing information about their child.
  2. An employee who plans to become a non-relative or relative caregiver for a child not in the custody of the Department but actively receiving services may do so as long as the employee does not have a professional relationship with the child.
    - a. If the employee has a professional relationship with a child for whom they wish to become a non-relative or relative care giver, they will notify their supervisor to determine if accommodation can be made so that they no longer have a professional relationship with the child prior to placement.
  3. Employees may pursue becoming a foster, relative or non-relative caregiver for a child in custody of the Department but are required to do the following before placement occurs:
    - a. If foster placement, the employee will work with DFS to complete any required background/home study. If the placement is determined to be in the best interest of the child, DFS will consult with the employee and their supervisor regarding whether a professional relationship exists between the child and the employee. If a professional relationship exists, the employee's supervisor will determine if accommodation can be made so they no longer have a professional relationship with the child prior to placement. If accommodation can't be made, the employee will not be approved as the foster parent for the child.
    - b. If relative or non-relative placement, the employee will notify their supervisor and determine whether dual relationships can be avoided and the placement is in the best interest of the child and employee.
- C. Each employee shall maintain a safe, secure, respectful, and professional work environment.
  1. Each employee shall promote and maintain a safe work environment by being aware of and complying with safety procedures such as utilizing safety equipment, emergency plans, access to buildings and rooms.
  2. No firearms are permitted on any premises or work site, unless by a Department authorized, issued employee or member of law enforcement.

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3. Acts and threats of harm or violence to persons and property are prohibited.
4. DSCYF is a drug free workplace. The unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensing, possession or use of illegal substances is prohibited in all places where employees work, including all State-owned vehicles, and in carrying out any federal grant activity.
5. Each employee will safeguard and appropriately utilize all Department and Department-issued property, give notice of loss or damage, and return it when requested, such as furniture, equipment, cell phones, computers, devices, and keys.
6. Employees are required to create, maintain and preserve accurate, complete, timely and authentic business records. Records may only be destroyed appropriately (Reference DSCYF Policy #409).
7. Employees shall be good stewards of financial resources, including pay, time and leave, credit card use, purchasing and allocating resources.
8. Each employee shall conduct themselves in a respectful and professional manner and maintain a high standard of personal conduct both on the job and when identifying themselves as representatives of the agency.
9. All employees shall treat others with respect, dignity, and professionalism.
10. Employees must refrain from discriminatory actions against protected classes which include race, color, national origin, ethnicity, religion, sex (including pregnancy), age, marital status, genetic information, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, political beliefs, or other non-work-related factors.
11. Behaviors which demean or offend people are not acceptable and will not be tolerated. These include, but are not limited to:
  - Slurs or jokes that reflect negatively on any group or individual.
  - Harassment in any form (including sexual harassment), in accordance with the State's harassment policy.
  - Displays of pictures, posters, calendars, flyers, or other material which denigrates (belittles/ridicules) or shows hostility or aversion (dislike) towards another individual or group.
12. Attendance reliability is an essential function of every job. Employees shall devote full time and attention to work-related activities.
13. Employees are required to report for work and remain throughout the work period in a condition fit to perform the essential duties of the position. This includes, but is not limited to: attire, personal hygiene, being under the influence of alcohol, medication, drugs or other substances, and sleep deprivation.

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14. Employees will safeguard confidential, private, and personal information and refrain from gossip.
15. Employees must be free from criminal activity and substantiated cases of child abuse/neglect.
16. Employees are expected to cooperate with Department investigations including providing forthright, accurate, complete and timely statements, information, evidence, etc. and to maintain confidentiality of what is discussed as directed.

D. Each employee will uphold public trust and confidence

1. Each State employee shall endeavor to pursue a course of conduct which will not raise suspicion among the public that such State employee is engaging in acts which are in violation of the public trust and which will not reflect unfavorably upon the State and its government.
2. Employees must be good stewards of public resources.

**IV. EMPLOYEE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

A. Each employee shall immediately inform their Supervisor/Manager of the following:

1. An unsafe or unsecure condition which is likely to cause an imminent safety or security risk to employees or clients and a work-related injury or illness.
2. Criminal convictions, arrests, investigations, warrants or indictment of themselves or of any investigation of child abuse/neglect or entry onto any child protection registry subsequent to initial employment (Reference DSCYF Policy 313).
3. Any incident which could be interpreted as social contact with current clients which could compromise their ability to exercise authority. (Reference Policy #119 Use of Social Media)
4. Any corrupt or unethical behavior which could affect a client or the integrity of the organization.
5. When they are referred to a client to whom they are related or socially acquainted.
6. Any personal relationship with former clients.
7. When they (or their family) are a victim of a crime allegedly committed by a youth served by the Department.
8. When an employee reasonably suspects that a course of conduct will raise suspicion among the public that an employee is engaging in acts which are in violation of the public trust and which will reflect unfavorably upon the Department, State, and its government.

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D. Failure to immediately notify their Supervisor/Manager of any of the above could result in discipline up to and including dismissal.

## **V. VOLUNTEER/INTERN RESPONSIBILITIES/STANDARDS OF CONDUCT**

A. Volunteers/Interns are shall:

1. Only begin their volunteer/internship work after the required criminal history background checks and drug screening have been completed. Costs for fingerprinting and drug screening will be the responsibility of the volunteer/intern.
2. Maintain appropriate boundaries and not have physical contact with youth beyond what is required for their assigned activities.
3. Maintain appropriate boundaries with department staff and other individuals they encounter during the course of their assigned activities.
4. Avoid use of derogatory language in their communications to or about clients, Department staff or other individuals in the course of their assigned activities.
5. Not impose their personal beliefs or values on clients, Department staff or other individuals in the course of their assigned activities.
6. Promote and maintain a safe work environment by being aware of and complying with safety procedures such as emergency plans.
7. Not bring firearms into any Department office/program/site
8. Not engage in acts or threat of harm or violence to persons or property or behavior which demeans or offends people (e.g. slurs or jokes, harassment)
9. The unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensing, possession or use of illegal substances is prohibited in all places where volunteers/interns engage in assigned activities.
10. Notify the Department staff overseeing their volunteer activities if:
  - a. They see unsafe or unsecure conditions that are likely to cause imminent safety or security risk to clients, staff and/or other volunteers
  - b. They are assigned to work with a youth with whom they have a prior or current personal relationship
  - c. If they or their family are a victim or crime allegedly committed by a youth served by the Department.

## **VI. MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES**

A. Department management also has responsibilities regarding implementation of this policy. They are:

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1. To ensure that employees, volunteers and interns are aware of the expectations outlined in this policy.
2. To furnish to each employee, volunteer and intern work processes and sites which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause unsafe conditions that may result in harm.
3. To provide a secure workplace by providing security devices and procedures, emergency plans, drills, and training.
4. To ensure there is no discriminatory actions against protected classes which include race, color, national origin, ethnicity, religion, sex (including pregnancy), age, marital status, genetic information, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, political beliefs, or other non-work-related factors.
5. To offer employees due process.
6. To ensure adherence to the Merit Rules and Collective Bargaining Agreements.
7. To ensure and commit to equitable application and enforcement of all employment/personnel practices as specified by State, federal laws, regulations and policies.
8. To ensure that volunteers/interns have completed the required background checks and drug testing prior to beginning their volunteer/internship activities.

**VII. ADHERENCE TO THE POLICY**

- A. All employees, volunteers and interns are responsible for being aware of and complying with the content of this policy. Failure to comply with any provision in this policy may result in discipline up to and including termination.
- B. This policy is not intended to create any individual rights or cause of action not already existing or recognized under state or federal law.

**VIII. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE POLICY**

DSCYF Human Resources staff or designees are responsible for providing guidance regarding this policy.