



Model NRL Conduct Code: Adult Interactions with Minors

Every year we read or hear about school employees (including volunteers and other adults affiliated with a school) arrested and criminally charged for sexual misconduct with students. These incidents occur in schools and in youth organizations across the nation. Unfortunately, programs like the NRL that rely on adults supervising and working closely with minors need to be diligent.

There is no established profile of the adult advisor or volunteer who has the potential to engage in sexual misconduct with a student. Some are “opportunistic predators” who choose to support programs like the NRL in order to have access to vulnerable children. Others are “bad judgment predators” who did not initially support programs like the NRL in order to target children, but end up in a sexual relationship to meet their emotional needs.

Investigations of such molestations confirm that sexual misconduct, regardless of why the adult did it, was usually preceded by a sexual “grooming” process: the development of a peer-to-peer relationship, desensitization to touch, and physical isolation from parents and others. Sexual grooming entails repeated violations of professional boundaries that every adult advisor or volunteer should carefully observe and respect in their dealings with students. Accordingly, defining and enforcing professional boundaries may help deter the sexual grooming that precedes a molestation.

Of course, a violation of professional boundaries does not necessarily mean that the adult advisor or volunteer purpose was to engage in sexual grooming. However, violations of professional boundaries are not appropriate regardless of his or her motive. All adults should recognize and avoid conduct that might be misconstrued, or worse, result in accusations of sexual misconduct with a minor.

Likewise, adult advisors or volunteers need to understand when another’s conduct raises legitimate concerns so that they can respond appropriately. For the protection of our youth, every adult advisor or volunteer should consider it his or her responsibility to notify a supervising administrator when he or she has reason to believe that a colleague has violated a professional boundary.

The NTMA has adopted a policy in regards to adult relations with students to clarify professional and volunteer boundaries. This policy creates a non-exclusive list of prohibited conduct that falls into three categories:

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Conduct prohibited under any circumstance.

- Engaging in sexual activity, a romantic relationship, or dating of a student participating in the NRL program.
- Making any sexual advance - verbal, written, or physical - towards a student.
- Showing sexually inappropriate materials or objects to a students.
- Discussing with a student sexual topics, including sexual jokes that are not related to a specific curriculum.

Conduct prohibited in the absence of a legitimate health, safety, or educational purpose.

- Using phone calls, e-mail, text messaging, or social networking sites to discuss with a student a matter that does not specifically pertain to the student's participation in the NRL program.
- Invading a student's physical privacy (e.g., walking in on the student in a restroom).
 - Being overly affectionate with a specific student.
 - Allowing a specific student to engage in misconduct that is not tolerated from other students.
 - Discussing with a student your personal problems that would normally be discussed with adults (e.g., marital problems).
 - Giving gifts of a personal nature to a specific student.

Conduct prohibited if not expressly approved by a school administrator or parent.

- Transporting a student in the employee's personal vehicle in cases other than a health, safety, or emergency situation.
- Taking a student on a private outing, or meeting a student at a prearranged location.
- Inviting a student to your home, hotel room or place of work.
- Going to the student's home when the student's parent or a parent figure is not present.

The subject of hugging and other physical contact with a student as a boundary violation is not fully addressed in this policy because of its complexity. Obviously, any physical contact with a student that is of a sexual nature, or otherwise unwelcome, is not acceptable. However, the NRL also recognizes that hugging a student during the thrill of victory and other emotionally healthy forms of physical contact that, in light of the student's age and other circumstances, are appropriate in a safe, nurturing learning environment should not be regarded as a boundary violation. Accordingly, physical contact with students is a subject that will require all adult advisors and volunteers— those whose conduct is in question and those who must judge the conduct — to use common sense and good judgment.

Compliance with this policy is the responsibility of each adult staff, advisor or volunteer. Any adult who has questions about whether specific conduct is or is not a professional boundary violation should seek guidance from the NTMA Director of Youth Engagement.

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