

**Bath and North East Somerset**

**Youth Connect**

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**Professional Guidelines**

**Revised November 2015**

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**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of these guidelines are to advise Bath and North East Somerset Youth Connect staff/volunteers on the ethical standards, professional boundaries and the appropriate processes, procedures and structures to ensure they are able to perform their duties in a manner which respects and protects young people, the staff themselves, colleagues and the wider community.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Councils code of Conduct policy:

http://intranet/code-conduct

**1. PROFESSIONAL ETHICS and Values**

**General principles**

1. Youth Connect staff performs their duties to meet the needs and requirements of young people.
2. Young people have a right to place trust in the relationship that they develop with a staff member. Many young people who access Youth Connect are vulnerable and are in need of support. There will always be an unequal power relationship between the adult worker and the young person.

***Youth Connect workers must not abuse the balance of power in the relationship and must be very careful to establish and maintain clear boundaries to the relationship, which are understood by the young person. This involves ensuring that a proper professional distance is maintained in the relationship between the youth worker and young people so that relationships of friendship or dependence are avoided***

In order to maintain proper professional standards therefore, **Youth Connect staff must not**

* Develop physical, sexual or emotional relationships with young people who are, have been or could be associated with their work
* Develop friendships, outside of working time, with young people with whom they are working
* Use language that is inappropriate or could be misconstrued by young people
* Behave physically in a manner which could be misconstrued by young people
* Condone, or participate in, behaviour exhibited by young people that is illegal, unwise from a safety point of view, or which is discriminatory or oppressive.
* Behave in a manner that is disrespectful of the physical or emotional privacy of young people.

**2.** All Youth Connect staff have a commitment to ethical values and principals outlined in the Youth Connect Values document.

2.1 The process of Youth Work and Information Advice and Guidance work involves clear understanding of purpose and careful planning, with young people. Assessment, recording and evaluation are all key to ensure positive outcomes for the young person.

2.2 The [Youth Work Curriculum](http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/BathNES/communityandliving/youthsupport/ywcurriculumframework.htm) provides a framework of informal educational opportunities to enable this.

2.4 A Youth Connect worker’s role is to enhance the **personal and social development** of young people. Educational attainment, employment and personal safeguarding are important aspects but we are also concerned with enabling them to reach their full potential.

2.5 **A Youth Connect worker is:**

* An approachable professional, building trusting relationships with young people in the work context, with a clear understanding of personal and professional boundaries.
* Able to retain a professional detachment and objectivity
* A listener, who respects young peoples’ views and encourages their expression
* Able to challenge constructively in areas of awareness, prejudice, responsibility and consequences
* An advocate for young people’s interests, able to represent their issues when they cannot be present (however, recognising this is complimentary to young people representing themselves)
* Accepting and understanding of young people and their circumstances, able to separate behaviour from underlying causes or reasons
* A facilitator for young people, helping them explore and express their own feelings, circumstances and options, encouraging them to gain the confidence, skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for decision making, self reliance and interdependence
* An enabler, coach and motivator, encouraging growth in self esteem and realistic self image for young people through involvement in a range of positive experiences and activities
* A source of information on a wide range of issues including health, education, training and employment, and signposting or referrers when appropriate
* Able to plan for clear learning outcomes with young people and evaluate progress with them, accrediting their learning where and whenever possible.

**3. DUTY OF CARE**

Youth Connect staff must recognise that, as adults, they have a responsibility towards the safety of the young people with whom they are working. Young people can, either within their own activities or Youth Connect organised activities, be at risk of physical harm, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, emotional harm and personal harm.

It is the responsibility of Youth Connect staff to minimise the risk of harm. This duty of care may, in some circumstances, override other considerations, such as confidentiality.

1. **Related Policies.** All staff must apply the following policies and guidelines in relation to their duty of care:
   * South West Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures (version 3.4 March 2009; <http://www.swcpp.org.uk>
   * [Safety in Off Site Activities handbook](http://intranet/SiteCollectionDocuments/Services%20and%20Teams/Children's%20Services/Youth%20Service/Safety%20in%20Outdoor%20Activities%20Manual.doc) (2006) and Safety in Outdoor Activities (2003);

* + [B&NES Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Young Person’s Sexual Health Policy and Guidelines](http://intranet/SiteCollectionDocuments/Services%20and%20Teams/Children's%20Services/Youth%20Service/Sexual%20Health%20Practice%20Guidelines%20-%202009%20(Word%20-%20495KB).doc) (2009);
  + [Health and Safety - Bath & North East Somerset Council](http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/BathNES/business/healthandsafety/default.htm)

1. **Professional Competence.** All staff must also consider their personal and professional competence in relation to their duty of care. Staff should not operate when their functioning is impaired due to personal or emotional difficulties or if they cannot adequately carry out their duties and responsibilities as a result of prescribed medication, if they are to tired or unwell. Staff must not consume alcohol or operate under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs during their work with young people (see further information in section 4).
2. **Professional Judgement.** This document provides guidance on a range of key areas and clearly outlines expectations in terms of what is and what is not acceptable with respect to the behaviour of staff. However, the Code of conduct cannot provide a complete checklist of what is, or is not, appropriate behaviour for staff. It does highlight however, behaviour that is illegal, inappropriate or inadvisable. In following these guidelines staff should always maintain a sense of proportion, apply common sense to situations and promote young people’s welfare as a priority.

There will be occasions and circumstances in which staff have to make decisions or take action in the best interest of young people which could contravene this guidance or where no guidance exists. In such circumstances staff must:

* Discuss the circumstances that informed their action, or their proposed action, with their line manager at the earliest opportunity.
* Always record discussions and actions taken and the reasons for actions taken.

**4. PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS & GUIDELINES**

1. **General Professional Issues.**

* It is the responsibility of staff to evaluate their own practice, keep themselves informed of developments and improve their practice through training, supervision (including Performance Development Review (PDR), staff meetings, sessional briefings, etc.
* Youth Connect workers must take all reasonable steps to be aware of current law affecting the work of the service.
* Youth Connect workers must not conduct themselves in ways which undermine public confidence in either their role. Issues which may arise include “punctuality”, “communication by email, telephone, etc.” or a workers “dress or appearance”.
* Bath and North East Somerset Council staff and volunteers should wear Identity badges at all times while at work.
  1. **How staff interact with young people:**
* Physical contact:

Physical contact between staff and young people should only take place where there is a genuine reason in relation to the activity, i.e. some sporting activity or to meet a young person’s special needs (i.e. support when walking).

Staff members need to be very aware of how they interact with young people in informal activities which can allow physical contact i.e. swimming, outdoor activities etc. Staff must ensure they keep physical contact to the minimum.

* Congratulating:

It is acceptable to congratulate young people by shaking hands, or through brief contact on the arm or shoulder.

* Responding to young people’s physical contact:

Young people may initiate physical contact with staff. This may be through excitement, distress or relate to their special needs. This kind of spontaneous action from a young person needs to be handled sensitively and in a way that does not hurt their feelings. The member of staff needs to disengage themselves as soon as possible and engage the young person in a discussion about appropriate boundaries and roles.

* Comforting:

A Youth Connect worker should not initiate physical contact, as part of comforting a distressed young person, beyond brief contact on their arm or shoulder. It is, however, important for the youth worker to show support & sensitivity through words and body language.

* Working in a position of trust and sexual contact:

All adults should clearly understand the need to maintain appropriate boundaries in their contacts with children and young people. Intimate or sexual relationships between children/young people and the adults who work with them will be regarded as a grave breach of trust. Allowing or encouraging a relationship to develop in a way which might lead to a sexual relationship is also unacceptable (in or outside the normal working environment).

Any sexual activity between an adult and the child or young person with whom they work may be regarded as a criminal offence and will always be a matter for disciplinary action. Children and young people are protected by specific legal provisions regardless of whether the child or young person consents or not.

Under The Sexual Offences Act (2003) it is illegal for a person in a position of trust (like a Youth Worker) who is aged 18 or over to have sexual intercourse or engage in any other sexual activity with, or directed towards, a person under the age of 18 for whom they have responsibility.

This offence covers all young people under the age of 18 but is principally in place to protect 16 and 17 years old who are over the age of consent for sexual activity but considered to be vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation from someone who holds a position of trust or authority in relation to them.

* Responding to intrusive personal questions:

Young people often ask staff intrusive personal questions, for example about their sex life. Experience helps us become aware regarding what can and can’t be shared, getting the balance correct is essential to building appropriate professional relationships.

* Responding to unacceptable behaviour from young people:

All children and young people have a right to be treated with respect and dignity even in those circumstances where they display difficult or challenging behaviour.

Adults should not use any form of degrading treatment to punish a young person. The use of sarcasm, demeaning or insensitive comments towards children and young people is not acceptable in any situation.

When the behaviour of a young person is unacceptable it should be appropriately challenged by staff. In most cases this will be sufficient. When a young person’s behaviour continues to be unacceptable other action needs to be taken. The Youth Connect should be working with young people who are most in need of support so exclusion should not be used as a response unless all other avenues have been exhausted. Staff should use line managers as support for developing alternative responses. Where it is necessary staff can exclude young people for short periods. Any exclusion should be made with reference to Youth Connects “Managing Young people’s behaviour” policy.

* Restraint/ Physical Intervention:

There are circumstances in which adults working with children displaying extreme behaviours can legitimately intervene by using either non-restrictive or restrictive physical interventions. This is a complex area and adults and organisations must have regard to government guidance and legislation in the development and implementation of their own policies and practice.

The use of physical intervention should, wherever possible, be avoided. It should only be used to manage a child or young person’s behaviour if it is necessary to prevent personal injury to the child, other children or an adult, to prevent serious damage to property or in what would reasonably be regarded as exceptional circumstances. When physical intervention is used it should be undertaken in such a way that maintains the safety and dignity of all concerned

The scale and nature of any physical intervention must be proportionate to both the behaviour of the individual to be controlled and the nature of the harm they may cause. The minimum necessary force should be used and the techniques deployed in line with recommended policy and practice. Any occasion when physical intervention is necessary should be recorded through the Health & safety reporting procedures, immediately shared with your line manager.

* Verbal interaction:

It is important that staff members are aware, at all times, of the way in which they speak to young people. This must not be demeaning or belittling, or put them down. Jokes should never be made at the expense of young people. Keep in mind at all times the professional role and the intended outcomes of the conversation.

Staff should not talk about young people to other young people. For example: If young people approach a worker and want to talk about their concerns about another young person, or share information with the worker, it is important that the worker does not share any information that they have from that individual.

Staff members also need to be very careful that what they say cannot be misconstrued, and should avoid innuendo.

It is unacceptable for staff members to use swear words whilst working or where they can be heard by clients. Staff must not tell “dirty jokes” to young people or in their hearing.

* **Communication with Young People; including use of technology see social media policy**

Communication between young people and staff, by whatever method, should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries. This includes the wider use of technology such as mobile phones text messaging, e-mails, digital cameras, videos, web-cams, websites and blogs. Staff should ensure that all communications are transparent and open to scrutiny. Staff should also be circumspect in their communications with young people so as to avoid any possible misinterpretation of their motives or any behaviour. This means that staff should:-

- not give their personal contact details to young people, including their mobile telephone number.

- only use equipment e.g. mobile phones, provided by the organisation to communicate with young people. Record any sent messages on the sessional form.

- only make contact with young people for professional reasons.

- recognise that text messaging is rarely an appropriate response to a young person in a crisis situation or at risk of harm. It should only be used as a last resort when other forms of communication are not possible.

- not use internet or web-based communication channels to send personal messages to a young person.

* 1. **Unplanned situations with young people**
* Young people who are not collected at the end of the session:

Some young people can be collected at the end of a session by parents/carers. If the young person does not have a key to their house, or is not allowed to go home on their own, and no-one arrives to collect them, they cannot be left unattended. Staff should try to phone parents/carers first, and if there is no answer, family or friends. If this is unsuccessful staff should phone either the police or the duty social worker and arrange for them to take the young person. Two members of staff need to remain with an individual young person, so that a staff member is not alone with one young person.

Under no circumstances can the young person be taken to the staff members home.

If a parent/carer is consistently late to collect their child/young person, the line manager needs to discuss with the parent/carer explaining the difficulty this causes and the distress to the young person. Young people should not be excluded from attending because the parent/carer is persistently late. If this continues discuss with your line manager and arrange to meet the parent/carer to discuss and understand why the problem is occurring.

* Walking young people home:

Occasionally, a young person will ask a member of staff to walk them home. If there is a situation where a staff member thinks it is warranted, staff must walk the young person home in pairs and record why this has taken place. If the young person doesn’t want to walk home and they consider it to be dangerous please contact the parent/carer and ask for them to be collected, if you can’t get hold of them please contact the police.

* Young people visiting staff at home:

Young people should not visit staff in their homes unless there is a prior personal relationship with a member of staff or their family.

Examples of prior relationship:

* + where the young person is a friend of the member of staff’s children
  + where the young person is also a member of the family
  + where the young person is a child of a close friend and a regular visitor to the staff member’s house

In these situations the member of staff must discuss with their line manager as soon as possible and declare the nature of the relationship to the young person.

Where staff live close to the place that they work, it is possible that a young person may turn up on their doorstep. The worker must ask themselves “is this young person at risk at this immediate moment?” If the answer is no, then you must talk to them on the doorstep and explain to them that the young person needs to see them at the Youth Hub or venue where they work, as it is not appropriate for them to be at their house. Please record this and pass to the line manager. If the young person is at immediate risk, they can be taken into the house whilst contact is made with duty social care and or the Police. If the situation is that serious please be aware of your own personal safety and it may be better to take the young person away from the area and then contact relevant agencies, under no circumstances can the young person stay the night at the staff member’s house.

A Youth Connect manager must be contacted as soon as reasonable possible.

* **Meeting young people unexpectedly in your own time**

It is good practice to keep work and your private time separate. If you meet young people who you work with it is polite to greet and talk with them, but avoid getting drawn into either social interaction or a work role. If a young person wants to talk privately to you, make an appointment in the near future, in an appropriate setting.

* Young person being ill; The first response must be to try and contact the parent/carer and ask them to collect their young person. If the parent/carer cannot do so (cannot leave a younger child nor has no transport) and the parent gives permission for the young person to be transported in the member of staff’s personal transport, then they can be taken.
* Taking a young person to hospital; the emergency services are placing an emphasis on not calling ambulances unless it is an extreme emergency. They are stressing that ‘walking wounded’ that need treatment need to be brought to hospitals in other ways. The response from staff needs to be:-

Try to contact the parents/guardian to get them to collect their young person and take them to hospital.

If the parents/guardian cannot do so, obtain permission from the parents/guardian to either:

* + Take the young person to hospital yourself
  + Book a taxi to take young person to hospital
  + If the parent has no transport, you may choose to pick up the parent and take the parent and young person to hospital.

Please take either another member of staff or young person to stay with the young person until their parent/guardian arrives. Record what time the parent/guardian arrives.

1. **Dress and appearance:**

* **Appropriate dress.** Dress and appearanceare matters of personal choice and self-expression. However staff should consider the manner of dress and appearance appropriate to their professional role which may be different to that adopted in their personal life.

1. **Employment**

Youth Connect recruits all staff using the Council safer recruitment processes.

* **Volunteers**

All volunteers are expected to have an application, DBS and references, full induction and roles descriptor.

* Young People as volunteers/staff

It is good youth work practice to encourage young people to develop their skills and take responsibility in youth work. This can lead to them becoming junior leaders and then volunteers or paid workers.

Young people under the age of 16 can be voluntary peer/senior leaders.

At 16, a young person can become a voluntary or paid worker. Usually they would start as a voluntary junior leader. They need to complete exactly the same paperwork as all volunteers, including references and a DBS. However, adult staff need to be aware that young people, who become volunteers or workers in this way, are still within the age range of the Youth Connect and that other guidelines within this document (& other relevant policies), in regard to appropriate relationships & duty of care, need to be followed.

* Work Experience Placements

Young people undertaking work experience in the Youth Connect must be supervised at all times that they are with clients. A placement must be part of a clear educational process. In advance the manager must:-

* speak to the tutor/teacher at the referring college/school
* be clear about the intended outcomes for the student
* be clear about the times being worked
* be clear about the supervision and support being offered
* complete a risk assessment

Where a student is less than 16 years, then earlier guidance about lone working with a young person is applicable. Where the student is 16 and over, they should be seen as a volunteer or junior leader. There is more flexibility, but careful planning will still be needed. The guidance on Student Placements will apply also.

* Student Placements

Students (16 years plus) on placements, dependant on length of time of placement will depends on whether a DBS needs to be completed.

Students on placements on 1 months or less do not need to complete a DBS but must be fully supervised at all times. All other placements must complete a DBS form or be able to produce a DBS which has been undertaken by their college/school, an application will need to be completed and references will also be requested.

1. Cigarettes, alcohol, illegal substances, prescription drugs.

Bath and North East Somerset Council supports staff that have problems as a result of using cigarettes, alcohol and/or illegal substances through its Employee Assistance program. If the problem is not resolved performance management or disciplinary procedures could follow.

Staff need to take a common sense approach about whether social activities in their own time could be detrimental to their professional role and/or could be interpreted by the council as inappropriate, or bring the council into disrepute, which are disciplinary criteria. If a staff member feels that a colleague’s actions fall into these categories, and they cannot be encouraged to stop or to seek help and/or support, staff have an obligation to report them to a Youth Connect manager. Examples might be reliance on alcohol, or use of illegal substances.

* Cigarettes.

Staff are not allowed to smoke at any time when they are working. They are also not allowed to smoke just before or after a work session in the vicinity of the workplace where young people can see them.

If there are social events as part of the work, or to support the work of the unit, for staff and young people, staff cannot smoke where young people can see them.

* Alcohol. Staff should not drink alcohol whilst working. This includes during breaks in their working day. Similarly staff should not drink alcohol immediately before coming to work.

Staff should not drink alcohol during residentials with young people, even during free time. In the case of emergencies, which can occur at any time during a residential, you will need to be fully alert and may need to drive.

* Illegal substances. Illegal substances are not permitted in any council building or vehicle, or any building or vehicle being used for Youth Connect activities. It is the responsibility of all staff to ensure this.

Staff are not allowed to be at work under the influence of illegal substances. Staff residentials are included in this.

When staff use illegal substances outside of work, but it impinges on work, and will become a disciplinary matter.

* Prescription drugs. Youth Connect staff should always consider their personal and professional competence if they feel their functioning is significantly impaired and they are not able to adequately perform the duties and responsibilities associated with their post as a consequence of taking prescribed medication.

**8. Young People at risk of harm**

* Child protection/ safeguarding procedures are outlined in the

South West Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures (version 3.4 March 2009; <http://www.swcpp.org.uk>). A flow chart should also be displayed in the office of each youth project or kept in a detached worker’s bag.

Staff members should be familiar with these procedures and refer to them when any child protection/ safeguarding issue/ allegation come to light. Any child protection/ safeguarding issue that needs to reported, should also be immediately shared with your line manager

* Confidentiality. Young people will sometimes want to share sensitive information with a Youth Connect worker which they may ask you to keep confidential. It is important that young people are aware from the outset of any professional conversations or relationship that we have a duty of care towards them and if they are risk of harm we can’t keep information confidential, but we will always tell them what we are planning to do.

Examples of when a worker would need to share information|:

* + child protection
  + reference to a racist attack
  + knowledge of a crime being committed.

1. Whistle blowing

If a member of staff feels a colleague behaviour falls below the council professional standards the corporate whistle blowing policy must be followed

<http://intranet/sites/default/files/SiteFiles/Resources/Risk%20%26%20Assurance/Whistleblowing%20Policy%20Nov%202015.pdf>

It is particularly important if a member of staff feels uncomfortable about the way a member of staff interacts with young people, or a particular individual young person, that they share that concern, however vague. Concerns shared in this way will be dealt with carefully, with a priority for protecting young people.

Challenging the behaviour directly should not normally be done until the matter has been reported. This gives greater opportunity to gather evidence and take effective action. If staff have read this document as part of their induction and training, it is less likely that the incident stems from lack of awareness but from a tendency towards inappropriate behaviours.

Concerns should be raised with the line manager, if you have concerns about your line manager then please raise with a more senior manager(see policy for full guidance).