Guidelines for Professional Relationships with Students

The relationships that students develop over time with their teachers and members of the staff are a hallmark of the Grace experience. The School supports these relationships and is committed to ensuring that they are formed and maintained in ways that contribute to the wellbeing and safety of its students and the adults whose responsibilities entail working closely with them. In light of the influence, power, and trust inherent in these relationships, it is important to provide guidelines for appropriate conduct. The guidelines, in conjunction with the School’s policies on harassment and with any other policies regulating student and faculty behavior, define the boundaries that should exist between students and the adults who work at the School.

In addition to the behavior prohibited by the Harassment Policies set out in the Personnel Handbook, Grace employees and volunteers (collectively “Grace adults”) should endeavor to avoid any behavior that might have the appearance of impropriety and in particular should:

- ensure that one-on-one meetings with students occur in public spaces or in a room with an open door. If the circumstances require the door to be closed because additional privacy is needed, the meeting should take place in a room whose door has a window which should remain uncovered, and the door to the room should remain unlocked. When circumstances require additional privacy, Grace adults should let a supervisor know—in advance, whenever possible.

- use only their official Grace email address to communicate with students, and refrain from emailing students between the hours of 10 pm and 6 am.

- not text students. Exceptions may be made for emergencies that require immediate communication with students. In such cases, students should be texted as a group (i.e., not individually) and the Division Head or Athletic Director should be informed about the communication and copied on the message.

- have no contact with current students or, beginning in June 2019, with alumni younger than 21 on any social media platform. Faculty who wish to use a social media platform for pedagogical purposes should first speak with their Division Head or the Assistant Head.

- not bestow inappropriate attention on a particular student, including giving gifts to only one child. If there is any question about the appropriateness of group gifts, the adult in question should seek guidance from a division head or the Head of the School.
▪ not direct any students to keep secrets or withhold information from their parents or other Grace employees.

▪ not “hang out” inappropriately with students inside or outside of school.

▪ refrain from conversing with students about students’ sexual lives except for educational, health, or safety-related purposes, and from revealing details of their own sexual lives or romantic relationships to students.

▪ address students by the names they call themselves and ask students to address adults (including members of the staff) by the appropriate title (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Coach, etc.), followed by their last name.

▪ not provide alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes to a student, or permit them to drink, use drugs, or smoke in their presence, except when part of religious observances or when medications have been prescribed.

▪ not have inappropriate physical contact with a student. It is expected that Early Childhood and Lower School faculty will have more physical contact with younger students. In these cases, the teachers should make sure that their attention is shared evenly with all the students in the class and always in a public space. With older Lower School students, as well as Middle and Upper School students, physical contact should be limited to a brief supportive or congratulatory hug, arm squeeze, high five, or pat on the back. Patting of the buttocks, even in the context of an athletic event, is unacceptable. If a student engages in repeated or prolonged physical contact with a Grace adult, the adult in question should clearly and firmly discourage such behavior. If the student persists, the adult should involve a Division Head to assist him or her in setting appropriate boundaries.

**Special Circumstances**

A Grace adult should:

▪ not be alone with a student in a room or tent during school-sponsored overnight trips or be inside a student’s room or tent when the student is changing or sleeping. If a situation arises in which this becomes necessary, for example, when a student is sick, the employee should make a supervisor aware of the situation. An adult should sleep in a separate area specifically established for the chaperone overseeing a group of students. On school-sponsored overnight trips and sleepovers, students may be awakened by loudly knocking on their doors or calling out to them, but should not be awakened by making physical contact with them.

▪ wear appropriate clothing at all times while on school-sponsored trips. In athletic facilities, there shall be no showering and changing in the locker rooms while a student-athlete is present. Grace adults should avoid being in showers or locker rooms while a student is undressed. If they must enter, they will first announce themselves.
▪ ask a Division Head for permission to have a group of students gather outside the building, and require that the students arrive and leave in groups if the setting is private, so that the teacher is never alone with a student.

▪ make sure at least one parent or guardian is present when visiting a student’s home. (In the case of providing tutoring or childcare during vacation periods, the adult should receive permission from the Division Head.)

▪ drive a student in the adult’s car only under the following conditions: (1) the adult drives a carpool and has obtained permission from that child’s parent; (2) the adult is a chaperone for an event and has permission from the parent; (3) the adult is driving the student to or from the hospital in the case of an emergency.

▪ not ride in students’ cars.

▪ contact the parents if transporting a student who is babysitting to and from the home.

(The boundary guidelines referring to home visits or transportation are not applicable if the Grace adult is the parent, guardian, or sibling of the student in question or if his/her own child is a friend of the student.)

Responding to Boundary Crossing

If a Grace adult receives information that a boundary has been crossed by an adult or student, he or she must pursue it, whether the information is a direct complaint or is obtained in some other manner, such as from an individual overhearing a group conversation. Boundaries are often crossed inadvertently and may require nothing more than a reminder to the adult or student to maintain the boundary in the future. At other times, the crossing of a boundary indicates a more serious problem.

When made aware of a potential boundary crossing, the adult must bring information to the attention of a Division Head, the Assistant Head, or the Human Resources Manager. The Head of School will be informed of such a report and will work with the appropriate supervisor to respond.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that there may be circumstances in which it would not be inappropriate to cross one of the boundaries set out above. For example, such a situation can be imagined in a counselor-student relationship. A student might be particularly troubled about something and ask to speak to a counselor at some private location. Should any Grace adult ever feel that a situation calls for or justifies deviation from the boundaries set out above, he or she must bring the situation to the attention of a Division Head and obtain permission from him or her before deviating from these guidelines.