

At Dovetail & Slate, we recognise that all workers, whether temporary or permanent, have a duty to maintain transparent, appropriate, and professional relationships with learners at all times. These guidelines aim to inform and protect both learners and staff by promoting good practice and ensuring a safe learning environment. They also support staff in adhering to the boundaries of their professional roles and provide contextual, day-to-day guidance on following clients' child protection, safeguarding, Prevent, Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE), and safer recruitment policies.

## Introduction and scope

Dovetail and Slate are a recruitment agency that specialises in the education sector. We place professionals such as teachers, assessors, learning support assistants (LSAs), receptionists, cleaners, and electricians in schools, colleges, and educational facilities across the UK.

Part of our responsibility is to ensure that we provide relevant and informative guidance relating to the safeguarding of learners and vulnerable people, and so have created 'How to Maintain Professional Guidelines' as a resource for workers. These guidelines are intended for individuals working with or around children or vulnerable people, collectively referred to here as 'learners'.

The aims of these guidelines are to raise awareness of the importance of appropriate, consistent, and responsible boundaries when working with learners, to help workers set boundaries to protect both learners and themselves from behaviours or communications that could be ambiguous, misinterpreted, inappropriate, illegal, or harmful and promote the use of internal support services for learners, providing specialist assistance for issues that may interfere with their learning.

This policy applies to anyone applying for or accepting a role involving the care or supervision of children or vulnerable people. These guidelines ensure a consistent approach and clarify the roles and responsibilities of all involved.

***Maintaining appropriate boundaries while working with learners is crucial in ensuring professionalism, privacy, and the well-being of both staff and learners.***

***Inappropriate behaviors include engaging in any illegal activity, sharing personal contact details, giving or accepting gifts, meeting outside of work hours, or failing to secure learner information properly.***

***This document explains why workers should maintain professional relationships, keep interactions respectful, focused on the learner's development, and adhere to official communication channels, as actions can easily lead to misunderstandings, unequal treatment, or unprofessional intimacy.***

***Failing to uphold boundaries can have serious consequences, including police action, loss of reputation, and personal liability. Workers should always consider whether their behavior would change if observed by others, whether it benefits the learner or themselves, and if it respects the learner's rights to privacy and security.***

## Guidelines on Boundaries and Good Practice in an Education Setting

All workers have a duty to clearly establish the limits of their involvement with each learner and familiarise themselves with the relevant teams or personnel to whom they should report issues which will likely change from placement to placement and will include line managers, HR teams, pastoral teams and safeguarding teams, to resolve problems and promote the well-being of learners or individuals they work with.

Workers are expected to identify their professional boundaries, including recognising situations that fall outside their role, responsibility, expertise, or knowledge and are required to respect learners' personal information, sharing it only with staff who need it in a professional capacity and keeping it private from others.

It is important to note that other staff members or adults in education settings are required to be vigilant in watching for possible safeguarding concerns and have a responsibility to report any concerning behaviours or situations. All workers are advised to maintain boundaries when around learners, staff members and all people when in an education setting.

## What are Boundaries?

Boundaries are limits or rules set in relationships, interactions, or environments, they are used to define what individuals are comfortable with and how they expect others to treat them. Boundaries can exist in various forms, including physical, emotional and workplace boundaries.

Many learners have difficulty with boundaries and may expect workers to help them immediately with their personal problems. It is common in this situation for a learner to “reach out” to people they see on a daily basis (e.g. teacher, tutor, assessor etc.) and confide in them, particularly if they lack support outside of the education setting. It is the workers' responsibility to set appropriate boundaries in their role.

## Appropriate Boundaries Whilst Working with Learners

There are some situations that are never appropriate while working with Learners:

- Drinking alcohol or taking recreational drugs.
- Any illegal activity.
- Having any form of sexual relationship with a learner.
- Telling a learner your home address your home telephone number, or personal mobile telephone number.
- Taking a learner to your home, giving a learner a lift home or going to a learner's home.
- Arranging to meet a learner outside of work hours or on non-education business.
- Giving out any information about learners, without their written consent.
- Storing data on a learner in an unlocked drawer/cabinet/filing system or disposing of learner data in an unsecured manner.
- Failing to password protect a work mobile phone or other digital media.
- Using a work mobile phone or other digital media to discuss on non-education business with a learner.
- Engaging in any physical contact unless for the purpose of professional assistance such as in a workshop environment.
- Accepting money or gifts from a learner or lending money to learners.
- Taking responsibility for a learner's personal property.
- Leaving learners unattended in a learning situation.

## Why are these situations not appropriate?

The above situations involve workers stepping outside their professional boundaries with a learner, or breaching the learner's right to privacy. In these cases, the learners no longer have the appropriate professional distance that is necessary between a learner and a member of staff.

### Consider:-

- Would I modify my behaviour if a colleague was present?
- How would I feel about explaining my actions at a staff meeting?
- Am I sharing information for the learner's benefit, or for my benefit?
- Am I dealing with this learner differently from others in similar circumstances?
- Is my language or demeanour different from normal when dealing with this particular learner?
- Could this conversation or action make someone uncomfortable?

## Boundaries that are advisable to maintain

- Maintain a teacher-learner relationship by keeping interactions professional and focused on the learner's academic or personal growth.
- Ensure that instructions, feedback, and conversations are respectful, clear, and constructive.
- Be mindful of the physical proximity to learners and avoid unnecessary physical contact. Even casual contact can be misinterpreted.
- Cultural sensitivity may be needed, as there may be differences that might influence learners' perceptions of personal space and interactions.
- Treat learners equally, avoid giving excessive privileges and forming exclusive relationships with learners.
- Uphold the teachings of Equality and Diversity throughout working, and refrain any comments relating to sexual preference, religion, physical appearance, gender etc.
- Avoid flippant comments or jokes that are sensitive in nature, for example where the subject relates to domestic violence, eating disorders, sexual assault, neglect, bereavement etc.
- Keep communication professional by using school email, a work mobile or official platforms.
- Set clear expectations regarding when you're available to discuss school-related matters. Avoid late-night or off-hours communication unless necessary.
- Avoid connecting with learners on social media.
- Ensure that online interactions remain professional and respectful, adhering to school policies on digital communications.
- It is advisable not to be alone with any one learner.
- Avoid providing intimate or excessive personal detail to learners.

## What are the consequences of not maintaining boundaries?

- Workers may be reported to the Disclosure & Barring Service, Teachers' Regulation Agency, Local Authority Designated Officer and/or the Police. The Teachers' Regulation Agency will also decide if they are fit to work with children/vulnerable adults.
- Workers may lose their reputation and employability in the education sector.
- Workers may no longer be legally protected under Dovetail and Slate's insurance policies, as it applies only to approved actions and decisions in line with a worker's role. Once people step outside what is in the agreed job description and role there is a loss of entitlement to this protection and individuals may be personally liable under Civil Law.
- Workers may leave themselves open to allegations and criminal charges of sexual, physical or financial abuse.
- Worker's leave themselves vulnerable to being assaulted or the subject of manipulative or obsessive "stalking" behaviour (the learner may believe that a member of staff's/governor's/volunteer's actions indicate a personal, or inappropriate interest or relationship with them).
- Workers may feel overwhelmed by the emotional content of the problems learners share.
- Staff may be suspended or dismissed.
- If there is a breach of GDPR, staff may be liable to prosecution.

## What are the consequences for learners when we do not maintain boundaries?

The consequences for learners are just as serious and potentially damaging, for example:

- Can keep them in a dependent position rather than encouraging them to develop coping skills of their own and to be independent.
- Emotional/psychological damage of receiving mixed or inconsistent messages from trusted, respected, professional role models.
- Lead to abuse or punishment by parents/others.
- Lead to anger, aggression and violence as the learner feels vulnerable and struggles to understand why staff's perceived boundaries are different from those of others.
- Can lead to future sexual/emotional exploitation as current behaviour reinforces their poor judgement of boundaries and inappropriate behaviour.
- Cause exclusion from the client and disruption/termination of their education.
- Criminal charges for assault, abusive behaviour, stalking.
- Learners do not have an inclusive or emotionally safe environment, and may not report issues as a result.

## Expectations of Workers

Workers in educational settings are expected to uphold the highest standards of professionalism, integrity, and respect. This includes understanding their role and the associated safeguarding expectations, ensuring they act in line with policies designed to protect learners.

Workers must maintain confidentiality, promote equality and diversity, and foster a positive and inclusive learning environment. They should communicate effectively and respectfully, prioritise the well-being and development of learners, and always maintain appropriate boundaries.

Accountability, collaboration with colleagues, and ongoing professional development are essential, as is adhering to organisational policies and acting as role models both within and outside the workplace.

## Confidentiality and Disclosure

Confidential does not mean secret. Those workers to whom information has been given in confidence, or who have acquired information which they regard as confidential, may not always be sure whether they should disclose the information or not. Workers with Dovetail and Slate should deem confidential information as private to the institution, and not to themselves, as an individual.

### Are there any situations when staff can give a learner an assurance of secrecy?

No - learners should be made aware that should the information they provide lead a member of staff to believe they or someone else may be at risk of harm, they have a duty to share that information. The learner should, in most cases, be told who that information will be shared with.

### When must staff pass information on?

It is essential to respect a learner's right to privacy. However, staff cannot under all circumstances agree to keep a learner's information confidential from their line manager or a safeguarding officer.

Staff may agree to keep things private from other learners and colleagues, but not their line manager or safeguarding officers. If the issue is a child protection or protection of a vulnerable adult issue it must be reported to a member of the safeguarding team in the first instance.

### Disclosure of personal problems

When a learner discloses that they are having problems and asks a member of staff to keep it confidential, staff must clarify that they cannot agree to keep anything confidential. If the learner discloses they are or someone else is in danger then explain it is your responsibility to refer them as soon as possible.

Workers are always welcome to seek advice from a member Dovetail and Slate staff about whether or not they need to refer the learner elsewhere or to determine if the learner is "at risk". Some contacts are below.

## Support and Training

Below links can be used to access further training and information that will further context and support you in how you are expected to deal with learners.

[Prevent Awareness Training](#)

[Safeguarding Training](#)

[Equality and Diversity Training](#)

[Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024 | Government Guidance](#)

## Dovetail & Slate Contacts



### Pippa Stead

Designated Safeguarding Officer

07513132023

Pippa.stead@dovetailslate.co.uk



### Vetting Team

0300 1245 769

[Vetting@dovetailslate.co.uk](mailto:Vetting@dovetailslate.co.uk)



### Helen Carter

Deputy Safeguarding Officer

0300 1245 769

Helen.Carter@dovetailslate.co.uk



### Sales Office

0117 422 9420

## External Support

### Education Support

A leading mental health charity offering advice, support, and information on managing mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and stress.



[educationsupport.org.uk](http://educationsupport.org.uk)

### Samaritans

A 24/7 helpline offering confidential emotional support to anyone in distress or in need of someone to talk to.



**Call 116 123**

### Mind

Mind provide advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem.



[mind.org.uk](http://mind.org.uk)

### Shout

Shout is the UK's first and only free, confidential, 24/7 text messaging service for anyone who is struggling to cope.



[giveusashout.org](http://giveusashout.org)



**Text 85258**

### NHS

If you require medical attention, please call NHS 111 or your GP.

The NHS offers a range of free mental health services, including talking therapies, counselling, and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). If you're struggling, your GP can help guide you towards the right support.



**Call NHS 111 or your GP**

## Monitoring, Review and Responsibility

These guidelines will be reviewed by the Vetting and Safeguarding Team annually.