

# Irrelevant

Safer Working Practices for Staff at The Purcell School A Purcell School Safety and Welfare Document

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION

Background

Some adolescents experience periods of profound emotional disturbance and turmoil when they might lose all sense of rationality, balance and perspective. They may be unable to differentiate between fantasy and reality, and they are often unable to foresee the consequences of their actions. They may even be temporarily insane.

They can thus present a danger, even to the most careful of teachers. This being the case, it is important to realise that appropriate demeanour is not enough. For your own safety, you must try to ensure that you never find yourself in a situation where it could simply be their word against yours, with no witness. A “witness” might be somebody who knows when and where you are working – such protection is better than nothing.

The greatest potential dangers arise from:

- Physical presence, place and circumstance, especially outside School
- Electronic communication

The following strictures are designed to protect you from allegations and their consequences.

Please observe them carefully

- In a teaching situation never obscure the glass panel in the door with your coat etc
- Always ensure that the times and places of your individual lessons are public knowledge: at the Purcell School this is relatively easy – simply follow the published timetable. Do not negotiate changes directly with pupils – you could be inviting trouble
- Never give private lessons to Purcell School pupils at home.
- Never visit the home of a Purcell Pupil to give lessons, unless a parent is in the room. Even then this is not advisable.
- Do not give lifts to single Purcell School pupils in your car without another adult present. If you have to (perhaps in the case of medical emergency) then make them sit in the back seat and use your mobile to tell a member of staff (or parent) what you are doing and why. Log the circumstances (date, time and place) for future reference.
- If you accompany pupils to external events, be especially careful:
  1. If possible, do not disclose the whereabouts of your hotel room. If a

pupil finds out and wants to visit you, do not allow entry to your room – communicate via reception or official phone – meetings with pupils should be in open spaces

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2. At external engagements do not allow a pupil into your green room/dressing room unless it is communal and busy

3. Coaching sessions should not be given in isolated places. At the end of a session, show the pupil out in a brisk, “no nonsense” manner. If the pupil is reluctant to leave the room, then leave the room yourself. Do not stay on for a chat – if this has to be done then do it in a public place where you can be observed.

4. Do not be a single member of staff accompanying trips outside School. Two staff should be the minimum for any trip.

• Electronic Communication:

Computer communication between staff and current pupils should only be done using your Purcell School email via the Purcell School server which can be accessed worldwide on <https://mail.purcell-school.org>

Never communicate with a current pupil using your own private email address. Never use your private facilities to communicate with a current pupil via websites such as Facebook, MySpace, Bebo etc. It is against School policy for individual staff to become a “friend” of a current pupil via Facebook etc: doing so is unwise and could lead to investigation and disciplinary action.

Mobile Phones: Members of Staff are strongly advised not to text pupils from their private mobiles. If you have to use mobiles, then consider having one mobile for private use and another for professional use. Your “professional” phone should only be used for arranging appointments: chit chat should be avoided. Do not give pupils the number of your private “social” phone.

If you are unfortunate enough to have an allegation made against you then you might face suspension, which, although a neutral act, can be a traumatic and quite devastating experience. In the initial stages you would not know the origin of the allegation nor any details, and the suspense can of course be frightening.

If, however, you have observed the above procedures then the investigative process could be speeded up and it is more likely that an investigation might find in your favour.

For these reasons please absorb these procedures so that they become second nature. Do not think “this could never happen to me because I’m an experienced, sensible person” – this may well be true but your accuser could be of unsound mind.

It’s helpful to think of current pupils as “clients” rather than friends, as a doctor does.

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