

Professional Guidelines For working with Young People

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Professional Guidelines

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of these guidelines are to advise GoConnect Ltd staff and volunteers (called staff or Youth Workers throughout this document). On the ethical standards, professional boundaries and the appropriate processes, procedures and structures which are necessary to ensure that they are able to perform their duties in a manner which respects and protects young people, the staff themselves, colleagues and the wider community.

Professional guidelines of this type cannot address all issues, but can give a very clear indication of the kind of behaviour expected of staff when working for the Youth Service. It is the responsibility of every member of staff to check with the lead worker if they are unclear about what is acceptable, or if their particular situation is not covered within these guidelines.

1. PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

General principles

- 1.1 Youth workers perform their duties to meet the needs and requirements of young people. Youth work does not take place in order to meet the needs of members of staff who carry out the work.

Youth workers must understand therefore, that they have privileged access to young people. They have a professional role which brings with it ethical and practical responsibilities which they must respect and adhere to.

- 1.2 Young people have a right to place trust in the relationship that they develop with a youth worker. Many young people who access the youth service 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 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 workers 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 to others (see GoConnect Equal Opportunities Policy)
- Behave in a manner that is disrespectful of the physical or emotional privacy of young people.

The above guidelines are reinforced by the following ethical and professional principles as outlined in the National Youth Agency document:

NYA Ethical Conduct in Youth Work

Youth Workers have a commitment to:

- a) **Treat young people with respect**, valuing each individual and avoiding negative discrimination.
- b) **Respect and promote young people's rights to make up their own decisions and choices**, unless the welfare or legitimate interests of themselves or others are seriously threatened.
- c) **Promote and ensure the welfare and safety of young people**, while permitting them to learn through undertaking challenging educational activities.
- d) **Contribute towards the promotion of social justice** for young people and in society generally, through encouraging respect for difference and diversity and challenging discrimination (practice would include promoting just and fair behaviour, challenging discriminating actions, encouraging young people to respect and value differences and diversity, promoting the participation agenda).

Professional Principles

Youth Workers have a commitment to:-

- e) Recognise the boundaries between personal and professional life** and be aware of the need to balance a caring and supportive relationship with young people with appropriate professional distance.
- f) Recognise the need to be accountable** to young people, their parents or guardians, colleagues, funders, managers and wider society with a relevant interest in the work, and that these accountabilities may be in conflict.
- g) Develop and maintain the required skills and competence** to do the job, particularly focusing on those set out in the job description/contract.

2. THE PURPOSE OF YOUTH WORK AND THE ROLE OF THE YOUTH WORKER

2.1 The National Youth Agency (“Ethical Conduct in Youth Work” state the purpose of youth work as facilitating and supporting young people’s growth through dependence to interdependence, by encouraging their personal and social development and enabling them to have a voice, influence and place in their communities and society.

2.2 Youth work is informed by a set of beliefs which include a commitment to equal opportunity (including issues of inclusion and diversity), to young people as partners in learning and decision-making and to helping young people to develop their own sets of values. We recognise youth work by these qualities (based on Davies 1996):

- it offers its services in places where young people can choose to participate;
- it encourages young people to be critical in their responses to their own experience and to the world around them;
- it works with young people to help them make informed choices about their personal responsibilities within their communities;
- it works alongside school and college-based education to encourage young people to achieve and fulfil their potential; and
- it works with other agencies to encourage society to be responsive to young people’s needs.

2.3 The process of youth work involves clear understanding of purpose, careful planning, with young people, and rigorous recording and evaluation. The

Youth Work Curriculum provides a framework of informal educational opportunities to enable this.

- 2.4 A youth worker's role is unique in the broad education field in that the main stated purpose is to enhance the **personal and social development** of young people. While educational attainment, employment and personal safeguarding all come into this, we are concerned with enabling the young person to feel comfortable with themselves, making and sustaining personal relationships, reaching their potential and finding a place in society which is as satisfying as possible. In other words, helping them grow in circumstances which may be far from ideal.

A youth 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, with connections to other services and signposting or referring as appropriate
- Able to plan for clear learning outcomes with young people and evaluate progress with them, accrediting their learning where and whenever possible.
- An efficient organiser, keeping commitments to young people

3. DUTY OF CARE

Youth workers 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 Service organised activities, be at risk of physical harm, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, emotional harm and personal harm.

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

3.1 **Related Policies.** Youth workers must apply the following policies and guidelines in relation to their duty of care:

- GoConnect Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- GoConnect Health + Safety Policy

3.2 **Professional Competence.** Youth workers must also consider their personal and professional competence in relation to their duty of care. Youth workers 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. Youth workers 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).

3.3 **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 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 lead worker at the earliest opportunity.

- Always record discussions and actions taken and the reasons for actions taken.
- Always discuss any misunderstanding, accidents or threats with a lead worker.

4. PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS & GUIDELINES

4.1 General Professional Issues.

- Youth work is constantly evolving and developing. It is the responsibility of youth workers to constantly evaluate their own practice, keep themselves informed of developments and improve their practice through training, supervision and staff meetings.
- Youth workers must take all reasonable steps to be aware of current law affecting the work of the youth worker. Ignorance of the law is no defence against legal liability.
- Youth workers must not conduct themselves in ways which undermine public confidence in either their role as a youth worker or in the work of other youth workers. Issues which may arise include “punctuality”, “communication by email, telephone, etc.” or a workers “dress or appearance”.

4.2 When working away from youth service premises: The authority defines lone working as:

Managers have a duty to risk assess, organise, control and support the working activities of lone workers in a safe manner. If lone workers find themselves in a work situation that in their opinion is hazardous or they feel their personal safety may be compromised they **must immediately cease the activity** and return to their office to request assistance or an assessment of the activities suitability for lone working.

Managers must ensure adequate arrangements including diary planners, communication devices, alarms and personal protective equipment are provided as appropriate to the lone working situation.

One to One Situations

It is not realistic to state that one to one situations should never take place. It is however; appropriate to state that where there is a need, agreed with a colleague/line manager and/or parents/carers.

Youth Workers should be offered training and guidance for the use of any areas of the workplace which may place themselves or young people in



vulnerable situations. This would include those situations where they work directly with young people in unsupervised settings.

4.3 Staff Interaction 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). In these cases managers must ensure staff members have clear guidelines as part of their induction (see Safeguarding Code of Practice for more detail).

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.

- **Adventure Activity:**

Staff members need to be especially careful when helping young people into safety equipment like safety harnesses. Staff must ensure that the young people do as much as possible for themselves and that they are careful when checking to avoid any inappropriate contact.

Best practice is to have equipment that is easy to adjust, but where older equipment, that requires significant adjustment, is used it is important to remember to **never compromise safety** by not checking thoroughly.

If staff members keep in mind the role of the professional youth worker, this will enable them to identify appropriate behaviour. For example, shaking hands, particularly with older clients, as a greeting gives the message that the person is respected and the contact is appropriate, whereas other physical contact is not. Where young people greet each other with a hug, this is fine between friends but should not be seen as acceptable between workers and young people/clients as it could give mixed messages (see below)

- **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 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. Keeping in mind the professional role of the youth worker and intended outcomes will help staff frame appropriate responses about areas which are private and personal. It is important to remember that young people need to be helped to make decisions as to what is right for themselves. In this context what is right for a particular individual member of staff is irrelevant.

- **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. Any sanctions used should be part of service policy which is widely publicised and regularly reviewed.

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. Staff should use lead workers as support for developing alternative responses and where it is necessary staff can exclude young people for short periods after this discussion.

- **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 and immediately shared with your lead worker.

- **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 youth worker 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.**

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.

4.4 Unplanned situations:

- **Shortage of staff**

Unexpected shortages of staff can be very disruptive to youth work, create resentment among young people and undermine the Pledge made by the Service to them. Good planning and communication can minimise these incidents. Staff members should allow enough time to get to work. If staff cannot attend work through ill health they should notify the youth project as soon as possible so cover arrangements can be explored. All staff absences and project closures must be discussed with the lead worker.

Young helpers and volunteers (*unless the volunteer is sufficiently experienced*) can help with activities but should not be seen as substitute staff members.

- **Young people asking for lifts/cigarettes/borrow money etc:**

While youth workers should be friendly towards young people, they are not friends. They are professional youth workers and the kind of personal favours which a friend might grant are not appropriate. While private transport can be used as part of a youth work programme, it should not be extended to giving casual lifts. Equally, young people should not be favoured with loans or gifts of any kind. If a young person needs to borrow money, for example a bus fare, then project money can be used if deemed appropriate. If these are not available then personal funds can be used, but only as funds you will claim back later (always obtain a receipt if possible). All normal financial regulations should be followed.

- **Young people visiting staff at home:**

The basic ground rule for youth project members/ users, who have no prior personal relationship with a member of staff or their family, is that they should never be at a member of staff's house. This includes not asking

young people to baby-sit, do gardening etc. There are some exceptions to this, for example:-

- 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 the lead worker 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 they must talk to them on the doorstep and explain to them that the young person needs to see them at the Youth Centre or project, as it is not appropriate for them to be at their house. This needs to be recorded and passed to the lead worker. If the young person is at immediate risk, they can be taken into the house whilst contact is made with the appropriate agencies. The lead worker must be contacted immediately, or if that is not possible, a message left on their voice mail. Social Services, Police or the relevant agency must be contacted and the young person referred on as quickly as possible. Under no circumstances can the young person stay the night at the staff member's house.

- **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.

- **Homeless young person**

If a young person says they are homeless, they are very likely at risk and the situation should be treated seriously. It may be that the young person has had a row at home. With the young person's agreement it may be possible for you to mediate by telephone so that the young person can return home. However, you need to be alert to the possibility that it could be a child protection issue. Where this is evident or where you suspect it, the priority should be to obtain a place of safety for the young person.

If a young person is under sixteen years, the local authority has a Duty of Care to provide accommodation within the care system. Your first step should be to discuss the situation with your lead worker. There will be a Duty Officer at Social Services who should be able to help, though in practice, arranging accommodation at short notice, often late at night, is likely to be problematic.

An alternative, as a short term measure, may be to arrange for the young person to stay with a friend, though there are risks with this as you may be unaware of the suitability of that setting and have no opportunity to check it yourself. **It is not acceptable to allow the young person to stay in Youth Service premises which are not designed for residential use, nor to take the young person home with you.**

If the young person is 16 or over, there are other housing options which need to be explored through the Duty Officer.

For young people under 16 years old, your actions must be agreed with the Social Service's Duty Officer. Ultimately, the local police station may be the only safe temporary option. In any event, it will be essential to check the young person's condition next morning. A strategy meeting must be called that day through the council's Child Protection Unit.

4.5 Transporting young people:

- **Use of staff's personal transport.**

All planned trips using personal transport must be agreed with the lead worker in advance and follow 'Safety in Off Site Activities & Safety in Outdoor Activities' policy guidelines'.

A member of staff should never be alone in their transport with a young person. There must always be a minimum of two adults and a young person, or two young people and an adult in the car. Seatbelts must be worn and the carrying capacity of the vehicle not exceeded.

When using private vehicles for work, workers must ensure they have appropriate insurance cover (**business use**), that they have a valid drivers licence, the car is taxed, has a current MOT and is roadworthy. In addition, an "employee car user declaration form" should be completed.

Staff must declare any points they have on their licence and give details of the offence to their lead worker. Advice may be taken by GoConnect as to whether the offence(s) render the person unsuitable to drive young people.

It is not acceptable to give young people lifts home after sessions. There may be rare occasions when the use of staff's personal transport in a situation, which was not planned, is appropriate. However, if this situation arises, the staff member should inform the lead worker as soon as practicably possible. If a lead worker cannot be contacted, a message must be left at that time on the youth service manager's voicemail explaining why the young person is being transported, to where and the attempts made to obtain permission. The sort of situation that this could apply to is:-

- **a 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. A second member of staff or another young person must go with them.

- **Taking a young person to hospital;** the emergency services are placing a new 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 or from lead worker. If the parent has no transport, you may choose to pick up the parent and take the parent and young person to hospital.

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 arrived.

NB This can only happen if there are sufficient staff members remaining to supervise the youth work.

4.6 Dress Code and appearance:

- **Appropriate dress.** Dress and appearance are 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. Staff should ensure they are dressed decently, safely and appropriately for the tasks they undertake. This means that adults should wear clothing which:
 - promotes a positive and professional image;
 - is appropriate to their role;
 - is not likely to be viewed as offensive, revealing, or sexually provocative;
 - does not distract or cause embarrassment;
 - is absent of any political or otherwise contentious slogans.

4.7 Employment

- **Rigorous Vetting**

Before youth service staff commence work, whether paid or voluntary, the following process must be completed:-

- a completed application form
- Disclosure and Barring Service clearance
- two satisfactory written references

No-one should be involved in any aspects of the work unless these checks have been carried out.

- **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 leaders; members who help out and take responsibility in the unit. This can be accredited, but they are not members of staff.

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 check. 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 service 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 service 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

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**

All students (16 years plus) on placements, regardless of the length of time that the placement lasts, must complete a DBS form if not already provided by the educational establishment.

- **Employment of Family members/Partners/ Friends**

The Corporate Code of Conduct states that “Employees involved in the appointment of staff should ensure that these are made on the basis of merit ...and that... to avoid any possible accusation of bias, employees should not be involved in an appointment where they are related to an applicant, or have a close personal relationship outside work with him or her”.

Hence the guidance on Recruitment and Selection states that “if a proposed member of the selection panel is a close friend or relative or shares a household with, one of the applicants, it is advisable that they should withdraw from the panel to avoid any suspicion of impartiality. In all cases, members of a panel should declare to the panel any knowledge of the candidates.

Similarly the Corporate Code of Conduct states that “employees should not be involved in decisions relating to discipline promotion or pay adjustments for any other employee who has a level of relationship similar to a relative, partner, husband or wife”.

4.8 Cigarettes, alcohol, illegal substances.

Staff need to take a view about whether social activities in their own time could be detrimental to their professional role and/or could be interpreted by GoConnect as inappropriate, or bring the services provided by GoConnect into disrepute. 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 lead worker. 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. This also applies to residential with young people. It may be possible to organise a rota system on a residential so that staff can have some private time, but the care of young people must remain a priority.

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

- **Electronic Cigarettes.** Staff need to be aware of any new guidelines that are drawn-up regarding the use of e-cigarettes in public spaces and by young people under the age of 18. Discussion needs to take place

between staff and volunteers to discuss this in detail and whether to permit their use on projects.

- **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 residential 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.

At staff residential, it needs to be remembered that this is a work environment, and the amount of alcohol drunk must not impair the ability to participate fully in all sessions.

- **Illegal substances.** Illegal substances are not permitted at any project location or vehicle, or any building or vehicle being used for GoConnect 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 residential are included in this.

When staff use illegal substances outside of work, but it impinges on work, this becomes a disciplinary matter. For example if the young people see or know about the use and discuss it, this will undermine the credibility of GoConnect as well as potentially exposing the staff member to prosecution.

4.9 Prescription drugs.

As stated earlier, in the Duty of Care section, youth workers should always consider their personal and professional competence and should not operate as a youth worker 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.

5. Suspicions of abuse

- **Procedures.** Child protection/ safeguarding procedures are outlined in GoConnects Child Protection and Safeguarding policy and copies should be available on project at all times.
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 be reported, should also be immediately shared with the lead worker.
- **Confidentiality.** Young people will sometimes want to share sensitive information with a youth worker, to share a burden, seek advice or

information or explain an incident or behaviour. They will frequently want that information to be confidential. It is not possible to give a blanket assurance to a young person that the information they reveal will be kept confidential. The youth worker may need to take some action involving other people if **the young person is at risk of harm, or they describe another young person at risk of harm**. To maintain trust, the youth worker must tell the young person this as soon as they ask to speak to them confidentially.

Examples of when a worker would need to share information would be where a child protection issue is revealed, reference to a racist attack or knowledge of a serious crime being committed. There are a wide range of lesser issues and incidents where professional judgement and experience will be necessary to decide what should be done. In any case, it is best to be open and transparent with the young person, giving reasons for any actions you feel you have to take.

- **Challenging and reporting inappropriate behaviour of staff; ‘Whistle blowing’.**

Youth Work is a profession with a high standard of ethics and principles, as outlined in this document. However, if staff feel that the behaviour of a colleague falls short of those professional standards, they have a duty to share their concerns with their line manager or a senior member of staff if their concern is with their line manager. Concerns could include behaviour outside work that impinges on work.

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 behaviour.

The nature of youth work makes the practice of prescriptive guidelines difficult in some areas. Youth workers therefore need to be aware of the different working contexts, and make appropriate decisions.

With acknowledgement to the National Youth Agency.

Please note that all Policies referred to within this document are available through the lead worker of GoConnect projects and services. New staff should take time to look at these during their induction period, any questions arising from this document/other policies should be discussed with the lead worker, during supervision / staff monitoring.

