



**Breaking the Silence**  
**Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Training**  
**Scenario 3-Response 3**

**Communication Boundaries (Secondary)**

**Initial Actions**

The safety and well-being of every student must be the first and foremost priority for all educators. Immediate action should be taken to bring the matter to the attention of the site administrator to protect any student from any situation which threatens the student's safety or well-being. For example, the school may initiate employee consequences, class changes, student safety plans, etc.

This scenario may involve "grooming" or adult sexual misconduct, and it also involves Code of Conduct with Students violation. Accordingly, a SCAR may be filed with a CPA. Also, since the allegations involve suspected abuse by an employee, these SCAR reports are generally filed with local law enforcement.

**Considerations**

**1. GROOMING OR ADULT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT**

This inappropriate conduct violates the Code of Conduct with Students policy, and it may also rise to the level of suspected child abuse regardless of gender or job title. For example, in an attempt to gain trust and confidence, a perpetrator may engage in "grooming" or adult sexual misconduct, that is, physical or non-physical activity directed to the student, the student's parents, or other adults with the purpose of developing a sexual or romantic relationship with the minor.

As described below, grooming activities vary but generally methodically increase over time and allow a groomer to test their targets as to gauging acceptance and silence at each step. Children who are victims of adult misconduct may feel conflicted about the situation, especially if people they trust, such as school staff or other adults working with students (teacher/volunteer/classroom assistant/employee of school), are implicated.

Grooming activities may be done privately or publicly and gradually progress to sexualized behaviors. Signs that may signify grooming include, but are not limited to:

- (1) Touching that is intimate or sexual in nature;
- (2) Personal or social media interaction with a student without others' knowledge or supervision;
- (3) Meeting a student away from school grounds or hours;
- (4) Giving gifts or spending extra time with a student in nonsexual ways; and
- (5) Sexual or personal oral or written comments made to a student.

Also, adults who engage in grooming may exhibit some of the following behaviors: Testing boundaries of students to determine whom to target or who is a vulnerable student; trying to build a more personal relationship with the student, such as telling the student personal stories and involving student personal matters (e.g., favors/errands); discouraging the student from sharing with others; acting in a manner to manipulate student's affection; engaging in intimidation and threats to silence and isolate the student.

Based on the above, an employee with reasonable suspicion of child abuse must file a SCAR without further questioning. In this case, if reasonable suspicion exists, a SCAR can be filed without knowing the identity of the victim student, that is, naming the victim as "Jane Doe." Also, if reasonable suspicion exists, one does not need to see the actual note or ask any clarifying questions prior to filing the SCAR. Further, pursuant to District policy, an employee must inform their site administrator of these allegations of inappropriate conduct because the District administrator is obligated to:

- (1) Stop the misconduct, if any;
- (2) Investigate the misconduct, if any; and



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- (3) Take appropriate administrative and/or disciplinary action, if warranted.

In general, if you, however, do not have reasonable suspicion of child abuse, you may ask clarifying questions to determine whether or not suspected abuse exists. Also, if based upon the initial information you receive, you do not have reasonable suspicion of child abuse, you may call and consult with the CPA and inform your site administrator of the inappropriate employee (or adult working with student) conduct. Although some grooming types of conduct may not be criminal, they often violate other laws and professional codes of conduct in the educational setting.

## **2. CODE OF CONDUCT WITH STUDENTS**

This scenario is an example of a Code of Conduct with Students violation. The teacher pays special attention to one student over others, which can give an impression of inequity or preferential treatment. In addition, the teacher has used her personal phone to communicate with the student, including specific conversations about her family and personal relationships with other students. This scenario violates the District's *Code of Conduct with Students* bulletin.

Ms. V should enforce clear boundaries between her after school tutoring assistance and how she communicates with students. Communications should be school-related and should not be overly personal to the extent manifested in the scenario and on personal electronic devices, such as by cell phone and email. If the communications are overly explicit and personal, this could raise suspicion of suspected child abuse.

Though conduct of this nature may be seemingly innocuous on its face, it can, in some cases, also be considered a form of boundary invasion that some adults use to get closer to young persons, build trust, and potentially engage in other increasingly more inappropriate boundary invasions leading up to and including sexual misconduct. If left unaddressed, this behavior could escalate and even result in reasonable suspicion of child abuse and discipline for the employee. In general, when allegations of inappropriate conduct or behavior are made, the relevant District administrator is obligated to:

- (1) Stop the misconduct, if any;
- (2) Investigate the misconduct, if any; and
- (3) Take appropriate administrative and/or disciplinary action, if warranted.

In general, if you have reasonable suspicion of child abuse based on the scenario, you must file a SCAR without further questioning. If you, however, do not have reasonable suspicion of child abuse you may ask clarifying questions to determine whether or not suspected abuse exists. Thus, you may ask clarifying questions of the student or colleague if the information provided raises any concerns for you. Depending on the context and any additional overtures that may become known or suspected, you may develop concerns about possible other violations leading to suspicion of child abuse and required mandated reporting.

## **3. RESPONSIBLE USE POLICY (RUP)**

District equipment and data systems must only be used in a responsible, efficient, ethical, and legal manner, and such use may only be in support of the District's business and educational objectives. Misuse may lead to disciplinary and/or legal action, including dismissal from employment, or criminal prosecution.

## **4. SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

Under certain circumstances, the District has jurisdiction to discipline employees who violate rules of appropriate conduct which includes, but is not limited to, the use of District and the employee's social networking sites during or outside of work hours. In short, employees may participate in online social media venues, but employees should be aware that information produced, shared, and retrieved by them may be subject to District policies and is a reflection of the school community. For further information, please refer to the District's Social Media Policy for Employees and Associated Persons bulletin.