

# **Our Free Minds**

## **Staff Code of Conduct**

This Code of Conduct applies to employees of Our Free Minds CIO, whether employed on a permanent, temporary or voluntary basis. All staff must follow this Code. Deliberate breaches of the Code may be treated as a disciplinary offence. As with all policies and procedures, we ask that staff use their common sense and act reasonably within the conditions provided in this document.

Staff must always be mindful of the fact that they hold a position of trust, and that their behaviour towards the children and young people in their charge must be above reproach. They must uphold the best interests of the young person as a primary consideration in any of their actions concerning children and young people at Our Free Minds.

This Code of Conduct is not intended to detract from the enhancing experiences children gain from positive relationships with staff. It is intended to assist staff by offering guidance on prudent conduct.

**The purpose of this code of conduct for Our Free Minds staff is:**

- to identify boundaries and responsibilities.
- to agree on communication and accountability.
- to explain what is expected of you as an employee.
- to ensure staff demonstrate high standards of conduct in order to encourage our children to do the same.
- to ensure that staff avoid putting themselves at risk of allegations of abusive or unprofessional conduct.
- to help staff understand what behaviour is and is not acceptable.

**This Policy/Code of Conduct should also be read in conjunction with:**

- the relevant job description.
- the contract of employment.
- all our other policies and procedures.

We have a range of policies and procedures which apply to all staff. These are available on our website. All staff must read the policies and make sure they understand the terms.

### **Our Free Minds Values**

At all times during their employment, members of staff are expected to uphold the values of Our Free Minds, which include the fundamental values of democracy, community, individual liberty and mutual respect.

Staff members should uphold these values by modelling mutual respect and positive relationships, by challenging stereotypes through open discussion and exploration,

and by offering second hand experiences (such as stories and learning through media).

As a self-directed learning community, we expect our staff members to

- recognise the importance of play, fun and spontaneity.
- recognise how incredibly sensible children become when people respect them and afford them agency, autonomy, consent and equality.
- aim to create a sense of wellbeing, based on trust in oneself and others.
- provide a regular, consistent community experience, a safe place where children can be themselves.
- offer support as our young people work towards projects – where an interest, theme or objective is explored over time.
- refrain from offering help or advice when our young people do not need them.
- understand the significant impact, whether conscious or unconscious, that an adult can have around children, and bring awareness to their interactions.
- understand their responsibility to have their own heads sorted, and regularly question: how have we worked on ourselves? How do we model our own continuous learning and growing journey?
- aim to create a “bridge” to the outside world – involve the wider community especially for the older children.
- be present and available when the children need them.

## **Professional Development**

Our Free Minds is fully committed to staff development. We will advise on any training courses that might be relevant to employees' work. This will be discussed during their induction and as a continuous process while they are employed by Our Free Minds.

There is some mandatory training that all staff should undertake (e.g. safeguarding). Staff need to identify what is expected and ensure they attend these sessions. It is expected that a childcare practitioner will continually update their knowledge and skills through a life-long learning approach. Meanwhile, a childcare practitioner should seek help and support when they encounter an activity in which they do not feel competent, or is outside their area of practice and knowledge.

We model learning throughout Our Free Minds' sessions. Therefore, we welcome staff to continue their learning and training at our sessions.

Our Free Minds will ensure that appraisal and feedback will be regularly given to staff members.

## **Teamwork and partnership**

Staff are required to work cooperatively within teams and respect the skills, expertise and contribution of colleagues. They are expected to treat others fairly and without

discrimination. As required, they must share their knowledge, skills and expertise with other team members in order to improve practice.

Staff must communicate effectively, both verbally and in writing.

Staff must work with other members of the team to promote a care and learning environment that is conducive to safe and ethical practice. If the care environment deteriorates, the practitioner must report this to their line manager.

### **Vulnerable situations**

Employees should always encourage children to undertake self-care tasks independently. Meanwhile, they should discuss intimate care routines with a child's parents where necessary. Our Free Minds' Safeguarding Policy must be followed at all times.

Employees should not be placed in situations which render them vulnerable. Where this is unavoidable, full and appropriate risk assessments should be conducted and agreed on where possible (e.g. for lone working situations).

When one to one situations are unavoidable, employees must take precautions to reduce the vulnerability of both the child and the adult, for example, by informing colleagues of the situation and leaving room doors open.

Employees need to be vigilant of neglect or abuse caused outside the setting and to report any signs to their manager.

### **Confidentiality**

Staff must guard against breaches of confidentiality by protecting information from improper disclosure at all times and follow all appropriate policies.

Staff must only disclose information outside the immediate team if:

- it can be justified as being in the public interest (usually where disclosure is essential to protect the child or someone else from risk or significant harm).
- this is required to do so by law or by order of the court.
- there is an issue of safeguarding, and staff must then act at all times in accordance with national and local procedures.

Most staff are likely at some point to witness actions which require confidentiality. This needs to be reported and dealt with in accordance with the appropriate procedure.

Staff who intend to share information about a child's care, learning and development with an outside agency (i.e. additional childcare services used by the family, or health visitors) must seek prior permission from the child's parent and the setting manager.

## **Whistleblowing**

Employees must be prepared to report any actions of another individual they deem inappropriate to the setting management. It is vital that all team members talk through any concerns they may have with their line manager at the earliest opportunity to enable any problems to be ironed out as soon as they arise.

If, in the course of your employment, you become aware of one or more of the following, you should promptly disclose this to your manager so that any appropriate action can be taken:

- That a criminal offence has been committed or is being committed or is likely to be committed.
- That a person has failed, is failing or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation to which they are subject.
- That the health or safety of any individual has been, is being, or is likely to be, endangered.
- That the environment has been, is being, or is likely to be, damaged.
- That information tending to show any of the above, is being, or is likely to be, deliberately concealed.

If it is inappropriate to make such a disclosure to your manager (i.e. because it relates to your manager), you should speak to the chair of the Board of Trustees.

Employees will suffer no detriment of any sort for making such a disclosure in accordance with this procedure, unless proved to be made with malicious intent.

For further guidance in relation to the disclosure procedure, employees should speak in confidence to the CEO Guy Asherson-Taylor.

## **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)**

All staff have a duty to notify Our Free Minds of any circumstance which may affect their suitability to work with children. They are expected to declare all convictions, cautions, court orders, reprimands and warnings that affect suitability. Meanwhile, the CEO is also responsible for ensuring all staff, including paid employees, volunteers, students and contractors are suitable to work with children.

Checks are carried out via enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance checks, as well as other sources, such as employer references, identity checks and qualification checks, amongst others.

A regular status check will be performed for all staff.

Where possible, new staff will have the checks completed prior to starting employment. However if there are delays in checks coming through, as a last resort, candidates may work in the setting before these checks are completed as long as they are supervised by registered and DBS checked staff at all times. Staff awaiting these checks will never:

- be left unsupervised whilst caring for children.

- take children for toilet visits unless supervised by registered staff.
- change nappies.
- be left alone in a room or outside with children.
- administer medication.
- take photographs of any children.
- look at a child's learning and development log.
- have access to children's personal details and records.

### **Attendance, time keeping and appointments**

Staff are required to comply with the rules relating to notification of absence set out in their contract of employment.

Staff are required to arrive at work promptly and be ready to start work at their contracted starting times.

Staff are required to remain at work until their contracted finishing times.

Staff must obtain management authorisation if for any reason, they wish to arrive later or leave earlier than their agreed normal start and finish times.

Persistent poor timekeeping will result in disciplinary action.

We appreciate that it is sometimes difficult to make appointments such as with doctors or dentists at a time that is convenient for both the employee and the employer. In most cases, Our Free Minds requests you make appointments in your own time. However, in cases where this is not possible, appointments should be scheduled at the beginning or end of a session and agreed with your manager.

### **Alcohol, drug abuse, smoking and e-cigarettes**

The consumption of alcohol on the premises is strictly forbidden unless it is part of an agreed event authorised by management, such as a staff event or family event in which parents are responsible for their own children.

Any employee who is found consuming alcohol on the premises or is found to be intoxicated by alcohol at work will face disciplinary action. Please be aware that even if you are not found to be intoxicated, coming into work suffering from the immediate after effects of alcohol may also impair your ability to perform your role to the required standards. A breach of this procedure is considered an act of gross misconduct.

The possession, use or distribution of drugs for non-medical purposes on the premises sites is strictly forbidden. Any member of staff who is found to be intoxicated by drugs at work will face disciplinary action. A breach of this procedure is considered an act of gross misconduct.

Smoking (including e-cigarettes) is forbidden on the premises. Any member of staff who is found smoking on the premises will face disciplinary action.

If staff members do smoke in their own time, hands must be washed, teeth cleaned and clothes changed before attending to the care of any child at Our Free Minds. Staff have a duty to ensure they do not smell of smoke at any time during working hours. Cigarettes, matches and lighters must be kept securely away from children.

**Electronic Cigarettes** - Although generally thought to be less harmful than smoking real cigarettes, electronic cigarettes still contain the addictive chemical nicotine as well as other toxic substances. Consequently, for the purposes of this code of conduct, the smoking of substitute cigarettes is deemed to be the same as smoking the real thing. Therefore, please observe our no smoking rules.

### **Medication**

Staff must not be under the influence of any medication which may affect their ability to care for children. If a member of staff is prescribed medication by their doctor that may affect their ability to perform work, this should be discussed with their manager.

Staff's medication should be kept in the first-aid safe and should remain inaccessible for the children.

### **Health and safety**

Our Free Minds will act positively to minimise the incidence of all workplace risks as required by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and other associated legislation.

Through continuous improvement of standards and use of risk assessments, we aim to remove the causes of accidents/incidents and ill health. Staff must work as a team to minimise any risk and use common sense to remove potential risk where reasonable and possible.

Staff will be provided with an induction when joining Our Free Minds which will include a safety briefing and sharing risk assessments as well as on-going training as required.

All activities should be carried out with the highest regard for the health and safety of all staff, children and visitors.

Staff have a responsibility to carry out tasks in accordance with training received (e.g. manual handling) and to wear protective clothing provided where appropriate.

Staff should understand the extent and limitations of their role in applying basic care and hygiene tasks for minor abrasions, and understand where an injury might require more experienced intervention.

Staff should be a role model to the children in terms of their own health. For example, they should:

- be aware of the importance of physical development (e.g. exercise, diet, rest, managing risks etc).
- be aware how the states of the mind and body are interrelated.

- be aware of the importance of hydration.
- use respectful, clear and purposeful language/communication.
- know how to take positive risks safely.

### **Dress Code and hygiene**

Staff should wear clothing which:

- allows free movement and is appropriate to their role.
- is **not** likely to be viewed as offensive, revealing or sexually provocative.
- does **not** contain hate speech.
- is **not** considered to be discriminatory and is culturally sensitive.

Staff should be a role model to the children in terms of their personal hygiene.

### **Relationships with parents and carers**

- Staff should maintain a professional relationship with parents and carers.
- Staff should recognise that parents and carers need feedback regarding their children and that this must be given in an open, honest and friendly manner while respecting the child's boundaries.
- The relationship with parents and carers should not cloud your judgement and action promoting the welfare of the children in our care.
- We encourage close bonds with our families and children, but we recognise that we must avoid any conflict of interest or undue favouring of a child. Where such conflict of interest or undue favouring arises, the member of staff should immediately inform the manager to discuss any action to be taken.
- Likewise if a member of staff has had a conflict or difficulty with a family or child, they should discuss it with the team to help support them in working through this difficulty in order to put the needs of the child at the heart.

### **Social Contact**

At Our Free Minds, we encourage a nurturing community beyond the limits of our sessions. We aim to promote the values of kindness, support and friendship within the setting and beyond. As such, we embrace our staff members nurturing relationships outside of Our Free Minds settings.

However, we also expect that Our Free Minds staff will act responsibly and continue to promote the values of Our Free Minds into their relationships with our families beyond the setting. Confidentiality of employment must be adhered to and respected during social contact.

In summary, it is expected that members of staff:

- consider the appropriateness of the social contact according to their role and nature of their work.
- continue to put the welfare of Our Free Minds children at the forefront and advise management of any social contact they have with a child or parent with whom they work, which may give rise to concern.

- understand that where you feel a boundary has been crossed or you are uncomfortable with the contact made by a family, you can ask your manager or other staff members for advice and support.
- must not, whether at work or outside work, engage in activities which could damage the reputation and standing of Our Free Minds, or the reputation of other members of the Our Free Minds community.

During their general communication with the families, staff members have a duty to act respectfully by:

- valuing people's cultural diversity, opinions and choices.
- being non-judgmental.
- planning appointments with the parents and respecting the agreements.
- seeking clarification if necessary.
- listening and responding appropriately.
- acknowledging her/his own limitations.
- avoiding using inappropriate or offensive language when speaking to our children or families.

## **Childminding**

If an employee offers a childminding service, then this is a private agreement between the parent and the employee, and Our Free Minds will not be held liable. This must be made clear to the parents.

Any member of staff who transports a child and does so as a private arrangement must ensure they have their own insurance. Our Free Minds accepts no liability for the child once off the premises.

## **Mobile phones and cameras**

It is recognised that in certain situations it may be necessary for staff to have a mobile phone for the use of the setting e.g. on an outing, and to be available for emergency contact with parents given there are no landlines at the setting.

We request that staff use common sense when using their mobile phones, ensuring that content is appropriate and that they are behaving appropriately and respectfully.

Staff must refer to the individual family / child's permission regarding photograph use.

## **Information and Communication technologies**

Staff must not use any ICT services for copying, storing, sending or retrieving unacceptable material. "Unacceptable material" includes any documents, messages, information, graphics or other electronic data that:

- Breach UK legislation.
- Contravene the settings' Equality Policy.
- Contain offensive, pornographic or obscene language or material.
- Plan, promote, incite or facilitate any illegal or terrorist activities.

- Contain defamatory or slanderous language or material.
- Denigrate, insult or ridicule another person.
- Intimidate, bully or harass another person.
- Adversely comment on integrity, personality, honesty, character, intelligence, methods or motives of another person unless it is factual response to a formal reference request.
- Provide or facilitate the use of computer hacking tools or virus toolkits.

Staff must not use the Internet, external electronic mail, external telephone, fax or any other form of electronic communication to transmit sensitive, subversive information, including:

- Opinions that do not reflect the policies of Our Free Minds.
- Information that could damage Our Free Minds' reputation and standing in the community.

## **Social Networking sites**

Staff must ensure that social networking sites are set as private so that only authorised persons can have access to them.

Staff must not accept or invite any children to use their private sites without the express permission of their families and the setting.

Staff must never upload any photos, comments or information about the setting or any persons linked with it without the knowledge and permission of the setting.

## **Outside Commitments**

All employees should consult their managers before taking on additional employment. Additional employment must not conflict with Our Free Minds' interests or impair employee's ability to carry out their role at this setting.

Please bear in mind if you do have additional employment elsewhere, then you will need to declare which employer is the primary source of your income. This is necessary in order to avoid confusion over tax codes.

You are only allowed one employer where your tax code can be used to take advantage of your personal tax free allowance. Additional employers will have to adopt a secondary position and tax all of your earnings, usually on a BR (Base Rate) coding. Consequently, if we are not your main employer then we will need to tax you at the BR rate. Failure to declare a primary employer to the HMRC may result in the levy of backdated tax and penalties.

## **OFSTED**

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education Children's Services and Skills. It inspects and regulates services which care for children and young people, and those providing education and skills for learners of all ages. At the moment Ofsted has 4 inspection ratings (1) outstanding (2) good (3) requires improvement (4) inadequate.

It is expected that all staff members share our aspiration to uphold the highest standards at all times, such that when we are inspected by Ofsted, we can demonstrate outstanding practice. In doing so, staff members are expected to regularly reflect on these questions:

- What are we doing now?
- What are we aiming to do?
- How well are we doing by comparison to previous years?
- How well are we doing by comparison to other settings?
- What areas of quality practice need to be maintained?
- What areas of practice need to be improved?
- How do we plan to achieve our aims in the future?

## **Miscellaneous**

If staff do not feel competent to undertake any activities, they should inform their immediate manager and may request reasonable/appropriate training.

Staff have a responsibility to challenge any discriminatory remarks or behaviour against other staff members, visitors, children and their families.

Staff have a duty to notify Our Free Minds of changes to personal details, change of address, telephone number, and relevant health issues.

## **SUMMARY**

It is important that staff understand Our Free Minds' policies, procedures and protocols.

Our Free Minds will act with integrity, sensitivity and in a manner that will be deemed as reasonable in all its dealings with staff.

Staff are expected to be appropriately trained and to work in partnership with others.

Staff must maintain client confidentiality, and act accordingly with communications.

Staff have a duty of care to all parties associated with Our Free Minds.

This Code of Conduct is deemed to have been accepted by the employees as soon as they commence employment. Failure to comply with this Code of Conduct may lead to disciplinary action.

We welcome any feedback from staff that will help us improve this Code of Conduct.

This policy was adopted by: <a href="#">Our Free Minds</a>	Last reviewed and signed by:
Last review Date: 28.08.2023	- <a href="#">Katie Kotting, Chair of the Board of Trustees</a>

To be reviewed: 30.08.2026

- Clea Sambrook, Trustee for  
Safeguarding  
- Sze Wai Wong, Trustee