

Guide to good practice

# Positive working relationships



## Introduction

To provide the best outcomes for your learners, it's not only important to establish positive and professional relationships with parents and carers but also with your colleagues.

Even though you spend the majority of your time, care and attention on fostering positive relationships with learners, it's just as important to build good working relationships with colleagues. This does not happen automatically, and is not always easy; it takes time and effort.

This guide aims to help raise your awareness and understanding of building and maintaining positive working relationships. It cannot address all possible circumstances and is not intended to be an exhaustive list of behaviours but is rather provided to raise awareness of issues and situations which can arise and highlight the importance of positive working relationships in all educational environments.

# The Code

All Education Workforce Council (EWC) registrants are subject to the Code of Professional Conduct and Practice (the Code) which sets out the key principles of good conduct and practice for registrants. This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Code.

The principles and expectations in the Code which refer to building and positive working relationships are:

## 1. Personal and Professional Responsibility

Registrants:

- 1.5 are mindful of their professional responsibility for the health, safety and well-being of colleagues and themselves;
- 1.6 demonstrate a commitment to equality and diversity.

## 2. Professional Integrity

Registrants:

- 2.1 are accountable for their conduct and professional competence.

## 3. Collaborative Working

Registrants:

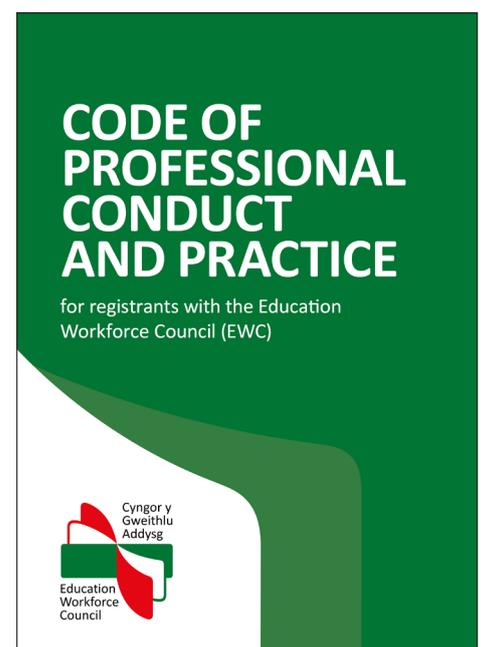
- 3.1 respect, support and collaborate with colleagues, learners and others to achieve the best learning outcomes;
- 3.2 share experience and knowledge to help themselves and other practitioners develop and maintain best practice;
- 3.4 communicate appropriately and effectively with all involved in the education of learners.

## 4. Professional Knowledge and Understanding

Registrants:

- 4.4 where necessary, seek support, advice and guidance and are open to feedback, responding to it positively and constructively.

The Code is available to download from our [website](#).



# Positive and professional relationships with colleagues

As with any workplace, your colleagues will have a range of roles, different personalities and working styles. It's important to value and respect their varying approaches to their work. Remember, there is as much diversity amongst education practitioners as there is amongst learners.

In developing positive relationships with your colleagues, it's helpful to think about their expectations of you. Just as learners need to know what is expected of them, you also need to know what is expected of you as a practitioner and a colleague.

There are many important characteristics that contribute to positive and professional working relationships. These include the following which are not mutually exclusive:

- mutual respect;
- open communication;
- empathy;
- trust;
- interpersonal skills; and
- building rapport with staff or team members.

Characteristic	Examples
<b>Mutual respect</b>	<p>Few people thrive in a bullying, aggressive work atmosphere where they are rarely praised and regularly criticised.</p> <p>Respect for colleagues is an essential part of a good relationship. The realities of the workplace mean that you will often come into contact with people from a far more diverse range of backgrounds than we would in our private life. The simplest, most effective way of showing respect is to encourage the input and suggestions of colleagues and acknowledge that all of their views are equally valid.</p> <p>It's important to listen to the views of your colleagues and to be prepared to examine viewpoints that may differ from your own. Learn to accept and celebrate differences and try to maintain a professional and courteous manner at all times by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• treating your colleagues in a respectful and empathetic way;</li><li>• treating your colleagues equally no matter their race, religion, gender, age or sexual orientation;</li><li>• never insulting your colleagues even if you think it is just a joke or 'banter';</li><li>• avoiding personalising issues;</li><li>• being aware of your body language, tone and demeanour;</li><li>• not constantly criticising your colleagues over the little things, or belittling, demeaning or patronising them; and</li><li>• being mindful that a series of seemingly trivial actions, added up over time, may be considered bullying.</li></ul>

<p><b>Open communication</b></p>	<p>Open communication in the workplace is very important. It allows people to express ideas freely without fear of criticism.</p> <p>Don't be afraid of feedback. Listen and learn from it to become a better practitioner and colleague. It's important to remember effective communication is everybody's responsibility and is about more than just exchanging information. It's also about understanding the emotion and intentions behind the information.</p> <p>Good communication skills will help you to connect with your colleagues effectively, build trust and respect, and feel heard and understood.</p>
<p><b>Empathy</b></p>	<p>Empathy means understanding others by taking a genuine interest in them and their concerns.</p> <p>Showing your colleagues compassion, selflessness and being non-judgemental are key factors to developing empathy.</p>
<p><b>Trust</b></p>	<p>All good relationships are built on trust. Trust is established by you maintaining good conduct and practice.</p> <p>Take responsibility for your mistakes, rather than casting blame on someone or something else. Integrity is central to trust. Be fair and honest in all your dealings.</p> <p>Share resources, information and learning with colleagues and resist the temptation to gossip.</p>
<p><b>Interpersonal skills</b></p>	<p>Interpersonal skills in the workplace are generally related to an employee's ability to get along with others whilst getting the job done. They include everything from communication and listening skills to attitude and demeanour.</p> <p>Communication is more than just an exchange of information. It's important to be clear, calm and focused as well as polite. Remember, it's not just what you say that is important but how you say it. Think about your eye contact, body posture and body movement. Assess each situation and be prepared to adjust your verbal and non-verbal communication to fit.</p> <p>Appreciate others – genuinely show your appreciation when colleagues help you. Everyone likes to feel appreciated and that they are making a worthwhile contribution. Identifying, acknowledging and celebrating the achievements of colleagues, no matter how small, can have a significant impact upon their self-esteem. A little genuine praise can go a long way to developing good working relationships.</p> <p>Poor listening skills mean that messages can be misunderstood or misinterpreted. A good listener will not only listen to what is being said, but also note what is left unsaid or only partially said.</p> <p>Effective negotiation helps to resolve situations where what one person wants may conflict with what another colleague wants. Ideally, it's best to find a solution that is acceptable to all parties. Identifying common goals and being willing to compromise will normally result in an effective solution.</p> <p>No job comes without problems. Ignoring problems in the hope that they might go away is not a solution. Where possible, listen to colleagues and reflect on the impact any decision will have on them and / or the learners.</p> <p>Not everybody is naturally assertive, and often people are not confident enough to assert themselves in the workplace. Being assertive means expressing yourself effectively and standing up for your, or another's point of view, without being aggressive or inconsiderate to others.</p>

As with any relationship, it takes time to build positive relationships with your colleagues. Remember to act professionally at all times, value and respect them, and work with them. You will then be well on your way to developing positive and supportive relationships with your colleagues to the benefit of your working environment.

## What to do if things go wrong

Naturally, there are times when professional relationships do not develop in an appropriate manner. It's important to recognise and remedy these situations as soon as possible before the behaviour becomes entrenched.

Sometimes, relatively trivial things can become a source of conflict and lead to resentment. It's important that you are able to recognise when disputes have arisen and to be able to respond appropriately including managing your own behaviour. Prompt proactive intervention can frequently prevent longer term breakdown in relationships.

### Bullying and harassment

Bullying is behaviour which is intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.

Bullying can have a devastating effect on the victim and seriously impact their health and mental well-being. It's best dealt with at the earliest stage possible and, if you consider yourself to be a victim, you may need to seek support perhaps from another colleague, your manager or a union representative.

It may help you to keep a diary record of the behaviour and to refer to your employer's bullying policy for further guidance.

### Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment can be defined as when someone behaves in a way which makes a person feel distressed, intimidated or offended and the behaviour is of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment is not about fun or friendship but about abuse of power. Sexual harassment can include:

- sexual comments, innuendo or jokes;
- physical behaviour, including unwelcome sexual advances, touching and 'accidentally' brushing up against you;
- questions or comments about your personal life; or
- promises or threats concerning employment conditions in return for sexual favours.

Again, should you consider yourself to be a victim of such treatment you should alert your employer (line manager or HR representative) and your union representative if you are a member of trade union.

# Consequences

The examples below are illustrative of cases where registrants have been subject to EWC disciplinary proceedings as a result of them failing to maintain appropriate, professional relationships with colleagues.

In all cases, there has been a clear breach of the Code of Professional Conduct and Practice and the registrants received a range of disciplinary sanctions including, in some cases, being prohibited from practising in the education workforce in the future.

A registrant:

- behaved inappropriately both verbally and physically with a number of colleagues which included bullying and sexual harassment. The behaviour resulted in a serious breach of trust and confidence;
- bullied and harassed a colleague by making sexualised comments in front of other colleagues and learners justified as “only banter”;
- violated policies and procedures by discriminating against a disabled colleague;
- demonstrated homophobic discriminatory behaviour against a colleague who was a member of the LGBT community;
- behaved in an unprofessional way towards colleagues which included losing their temper, shouting and swearing at staff, making derogatory and sexist remarks;
- bullied and intimidated staff in relation to the school’s performance against the national literacy and numeracy tests;
- committed fraudulent acts with learners’ work and sought to blame and implicate other colleagues. They also committed theft by stealing from a number of colleagues over a prolonged period of time; and
- failed to follow management instructions, sought to mislead colleagues, provided inaccurate information about learners. They also failed to participate in planning, record keeping, learner progress and acted dishonestly with regards to learners’ work.

## Further support

The EWC offer presentations which focus on fitness to practise. If you or your employer would like to arrange one in the workplace, please contact [information@ewc.wales](mailto:information@ewc.wales).

The EWC’s Code of Professional Conduct and Practice for Registrants with the Education Workforce Council, and information about the EWC’s fitness to practise work can be found on our [website](#).

Any queries should be referred to the Fitness to Practise team at [fitnesstopractise@ewc.wales](mailto:fitnesstopractise@ewc.wales).



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