

## Code of Conduct

### 1. Policy

At Ambitious about Autism (AaA) and Ambitious about Autism Schools Trust (AaAST), Autistic children and young people are at the heart of everything we do. We champion their rights and create opportunities and have zero tolerance of any form of abuse or discrimination.

We want even more autistic children and young people to have happy and fulfilling lives that give them dignity, respect and compassion. Our vision is for a future where every autistic child and young person can be themselves and realise their ambitions and potential. Therefore, we stand with autistic children and young people, champion their rights and create opportunities. We want to help create a world where autistic people are heard, included and supported and not discriminated against.

Whatever your role, you have a key part to play in ensuring that we maintain our positive, credible reputation with all of our stakeholders to the highest standards of integrity and effectiveness. You are accountable for our work and for building and maintaining good working relationships with parents/carers, pupils/students, all staff and others in our community.

In addition any employee who is a [registered teacher](#), [nurse](#), [social worker](#) or [therapist](#) are bound by their professional codes of conduct and must also act, at all times, in accordance with them.

### 2. Principles

This code of conduct outlines what Ambitious about Autism and Ambitious about Autism Schools Trust expects of all those who work here as employees or agency staff. It should be read in conjunction with our other policies and procedures. Failure to follow this code, or other applicable professional codes of conduct, is a serious matter and can lead to disciplinary action.

Other policies to be referred to include:

- Behaviour Management
- Capability
- Data Protection
- Data Security
- Disciplinary
- Dignity at Work
- Drugs & Alcohol
- Equality and Diversity
- Finance
- Flexible Working
- Grievance
- Health and Safety
- Hybrid Working
- ICT Acceptable Use
- Personal Protective Equipment Guidance
- Safeguarding
- Social Media
- Special Leave of Absence

### 3. Behaviours and Performance

#### **We are ambitious**

We are ambitious for autistic children and young people and our work.

#### **We celebrate difference**

We celebrate difference creating a world where everyone belongs.

#### **We are open**

We are open to new approaches in how we make decisions and engage with our community.

#### **We work together**

We work together with autistic children and young people, parents and carers, our partners and staff to maximise impact and research.

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## **We love learning**

We love learning and commit to learn from our successes and mistakes sharing knowledge, expertise and resources.

## **Equal Opportunities & Diversity**

AaA/AaAST will ensure that any breaches of this code of conduct are dealt with in line with the Equalities Act.

AaA/AaAST is committed to equality of opportunity and values diversity in the workplace and in all services we deliver. It is a condition of your employment that you are familiar with and understand the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and actively seek to ensure that it is upheld in your area of work.

## **4. Confidentiality**

All information about pupils, students, their families or about employees or volunteers whether oral, written or recorded electronically is strictly confidential, may only be used for the professional purposes for which they were gathered and may not be shared with third parties or other individuals except within the confines of a professional information exchange. If unsure as to whether a particular piece of information may be confidential it is your responsibility to treat it as such unless and to seek advice from your line manager before proceeding. You must follow the guidance as set out in the Data Protection and Data Security policies. Breach of either policy may lead to disciplinary action.

Any notes, photographs, reports or personal records that may be used as part of your day-to-day role must be stored securely and used for the purpose they were obtained only. They must be returned at the termination of any relevant project or at the termination of employment.

You might be responsible for managing or reviewing confidential information (for example pupil and learner records). You are responsible for ensuring that you maintain security of these records and do not take them from AaA/AaAST premises in line with the detailed protocols laid out in the Data Protection and Data Security policy. Failure to follow these procedures can lead to disciplinary action. You may be required to sign a confidentiality agreement as an essential requirement of your role.

## **5. Attendance and Punctuality - applicable to all employees and agency staff**

Good timekeeping is essential to ensure that pupils and learners are fully supported throughout the day, that all services run efficiently, and that all staff are treated fairly. Staffing levels must remain in line with the demands of AaA and AaAST at all times of the day. Repeated or persistent lateness will be viewed as misconduct.

Staff are responsible for ensuring that they record accurately the time they arrive onto any of our premises.

Each employee's contract defines the minimum hours of work that he/she is contractually required to work, including start time, finish time and provision for breaks.

- Employees, should arrive at work early enough to enable them to begin work at their appointed start time.
- Similarly, employees are required to remain at work until the finishing time defined in their contracts, unless granted permission by their line manager to leave work before that time.
- It is accepted that some circumstances are outside an employees' control, for example if a traffic accident has caused long delays on the roads. However, a high volume of traffic causing delays that is a regular occurrence, or can reasonably be anticipated, will not be regarded as a valid reason for lateness.
- Employees also need to be aware of timekeeping while at work, in particular with respect to meetings (for example, morning briefings at School and College).

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If an employee is late to work, a meeting, or other work commitment:

- The line manager should speak to the employee informally (and privately) to establish the reason for the lateness, and how the employee might be supported to achieve improvement.
- The line manager/SLT at our settings will be responsible for keeping records of lateness.

School and Ambitious College employees:

If an employee is likely to be late for work, he/she should call ahead before the contracted start time to explain the situation and give an estimated arrival time.

If an employee has three or more occasions of lateness within any six month period, AaA/AaAST may follow its disciplinary procedure.

Central Team employees:

All contracts of employment state an employee's start time, and if flexibility is required on an ad hoc basis this must be agreed with the line manager.

Employees and line managers should be mindful of the service delivery and customer service needs of the organisation, and ensure that a service is provided by the department between the working hours of 9am-5pm.

Day to day adhoc changes should be approved and monitored by line managers. Employees should make colleagues within their team aware of any variance in working patterns by noting this on their Outlook calendar.

If an employee is likely to be late for work, he/she should call ahead before the contracted start time to explain the situation and give an estimated arrival time.

If an employee has three or more occasions of lateness within any six month period, AaA/AaAST may follow its disciplinary procedure.

**6. Dress Code**

Clothing should be smart, practical and appropriate to your role. Care should be taken that clothing is not revealing – this is particularly important because of the client group we work with in the Schools and at Ambitious College.

The only parts of the body that can be acceptably exposed are:

- Arms (shoulders should be covered)
- Neck and face (chest should be covered)
- Lower legs

Feet should be covered to protect you from injury (again this may depend on your role) e.g. by another person stepping on them, furniture, bikes running over feet. Footwear should be such that you are enabled to work directly with children or young people and to move swiftly and safely in all environments.

Hair should be tied back, where appropriate, and protective equipment worn, where required, to reduce the risk of injury.

Staff should not wear clothing with slogans inappropriate to their professional status and position as role models or for children, e.g. FCUK, or any reference to drug or alcohol use/abuse.

It is not acceptable to expose underwear at work.

Jeans and trainers or other casual clothes are acceptable for staff working directly with the children/young people. There may be occasions – e.g. meetings with parents or LAs – when smarter, business clothing should be worn. Staff are expected to adopt the style of dress appropriate to representing AaA/AaAST within a given forum, and to match their style of dress to the environment.

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Jewellery can hurt children/young people and it is not sensible to wear anything which may injure a them or the wearer, or be easily broken. Body piercings must be covered. Ear or facial piercings should be limited to simple studs within the workplace for all those staff working directly with children/young people.

Visible tattoos, unless part of the individual's faith, are not protected characteristics under the [Equality Act 2010](#). However, AaA/AaAST values diversity and accepts that tattoos can be expressions of individuality. For this reason visible tattoos are acceptable, providing they could not reasonably be interpreted as:

- discriminatory
- offensive
- likely to frighten pupils or students
- indicative of attitudes or views which are inconsistent with AaA/AaAST's or relevant professional bodies, philosophies, standards or codes of conduct

Decisions about the appropriateness or otherwise of tattoos are solely for the relevant Manager within AaA/AaAST.

Inappropriate dress, tattoos or jewellery will be brought to the wearer's attention by his/her line manager and should be remedied as soon as is feasible and no later than the following day. In extreme cases, a staff member may be sent home. It is the responsibility of all the staff team working with someone dressed inappropriately to bring this to the wearer's attention if he/she seem not to be aware (e.g. low-cut trousers that expose flesh when seated).

## 7. Press & Media

AaA/AaAST works to raise the profile of children and young people with autism and their families in the media and elsewhere. We are at times asked to comment on issues relating to our work or activities on site and in the community. Such interest is generally welcomed. However, the messages that go out to the media have to be carefully considered and should be in the very best interests of the organisation. Positive comments and open discussions can at times be distorted or misconstrued. For this reason you are asked not to talk directly to the media at any time without first contacting the Communications Team.

## 8. Mobile Phones & Social Media

Each area of the organisation will have different rules in relation to the use of personal and work mobile phones. These should be followed at all times.

AaA/AaAST has in place a comprehensive Social Media Policy, which outlines which forums the organisation uses, how you can contribute and gives guidance on do's and don't with regard to both work and personal use in work time.

All employees and volunteers are required to become familiar with this policy and to follow the guidance. Failure to comply may result in disciplinary action.

## 9. Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing happens when an employee raises a concern about malpractice or a potentially dangerous activity, that they are aware of through their work or from colleagues and they raise the matter so that it may be investigated and where necessary corrected. It is important that concerns can be raised in a confidential manner with no detriment to the whistle blower. For this reason AaA/AaAST has a Whistleblowing Policy in place which outlines the steps to be taken by any employee who wishes to raise a concern. Should the concern relate to a Safeguarding matter, the Safeguarding Procedures must be followed.

## 10. Acceptable language at work

Language used in the workplace should be professional and considered (especially in areas where you are working with children or young people or which are open to the public). Sexist, racist, homophobic, language which does not promote fundamental British values \*\* or any other abusive language is not acceptable. Swearing is not acceptable within the Schools or the College, or their grounds or when you are out on AaA/AaAST business. Avoid intimidating workplace culture, including

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harassment, sexual harassment, bullying, bias and discrimination.

*\*\* fundamental British values are upheld as part of the government's Prevent Programme and refers to: democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance for those with different faiths.*

### **11. Spoken Language at work**

AaA/AaAST is proud of the diversity and inclusion of staff within the workplace and recognizes the multi-cultural variety of languages spoken by our staff. However, within the workplace and in support of professional business practice, English will be the spoken and written language to be used for all staff and learners.

### **12. Alcohol & Drugs**

AaA/AaAST recognises the importance of the health, including mental health and the welfare of its employees. We realise that the misuse of alcohol and drugs is a health problem and, as such, will be treated sympathetically. However attending work or events outside of normal work hours on behalf of AaA/AaAST when under the influence of alcohol or drugs is likely to be considered as gross misconduct and appropriate disciplinary action may be taken. Please see the Drugs and Alcohol Policy for further information.

### **13. Money & Donations**

Employees should never put themselves under any financial obligation to individuals or organisations that might influence them in their judgement or performance of their duties.

AaA/AaAST receives public and private funds to support its work and has a duty to fully account for these resources properly and effectively. You have a duty to comply with the financial procedures as laid out and appropriate to your role. All financial transactions must be properly authorised and recorded and wasteful or unnecessary expenditure must be avoided at all times.

From time to time employees may receive gifts including from funders, suppliers or parents. To ensure the highest standards of probity any gift, regardless of value, must be notified to your line manager or team head. In respect of gifts of a value above £50 consideration will be given as to how they can best be used to benefit the organisation as a whole.

### **14. Resources**

Valuable equipment must be stored and secured appropriately as directed. We all have a duty to ensure that good care is always taken of property and finite resources. This includes items in your care such as work mobile phones.

### **15. Relationships at Work**

#### **Pupils and students**

Physical handling should be gentle but firm and be within the physical intervention methodology and philosophy is use. Physical prompts should comprise no or minimum force. Children and young people should be prompted rather than forced to undertake tasks. Physical contact with children and young people should always be pupil or student lead and in the interest of the child or young person not the member of staff. Staff should never be negative, critical or undermining in the way they talk about pupils within or outside of their hearing. Where possible children and young people should be included in any discussion about themselves in their presence. Inappropriate discussion about the child, young person, parents/carers or other pupils or personal matters should not occur.

#### **Parents and Carers**

Relationships with parents/carers must always remain professional. Employees should ensure that they do not develop personal relationships that could compromise the essential professional relationship. Communications between parents and staff should, in almost all situations, take place during working hours, and should be framed in a positive and professional manner. Staff personal telephone numbers should not be given out. School/College staff should never discuss pupils or student with their parents/carers and never with the parents of another student. Further guidance on professional boundaries appropriate to role will be supported by line managers and school/college leaders.

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## Trustees and Governors

Relationships with trustees and Governors must always remain professional. Employees should ensure that they do not develop personal relationships with Trustees or Governors that could affect their professional relationship. Employees should not discuss individual pupils or students with Trustees or Governors except where essential for professional reasons.

## Staff & Team Relationships

AaA/AaAST recognises that work is demanding and at times can be stressful. Good supportive relationships between colleagues are essential. Staff are expected to treat each other with respect being always helpful and polite to all those with whom we have direct contact or through emails. Intolerance and harassment are not acceptable and will be treated seriously. AaA/AaAST is committed to operating in such a way as is compatible with confidentiality. In return, staff are expected to display a positive attitude at work.

All personal information about staff and volunteers or about those applying for roles at AaA/AaAST should remain confidential and only shared on a strictly 'need to know' basis.

All employees are encouraged to offer each other positive feedback, constructive criticism and support. It is not acceptable to criticise a colleague or a volunteer in front of a pupil or student or their family or in front of a representative of another organisation. Communication should remain courteous and respectful with all other members of staff. Staff should be praised in public and only ever reprimanded in private.

Should a grievance or dispute arise between colleagues the grievance or disciplinary procedures will be used as appropriate. Guidance in their use emphasises the importance of aiming to resolve such difficulties with more informal, open dialogue and mediation arrangements, which may involve your line manager in the first instance, rather than moving directly to more formal procedures. This approach will only be appropriate in some cases.

## 16. Personal Relationships at Works

The organisation recognises that employees who work together may form personal friendships and in some cases close personal relationships. While it does not wish to interfere with these personal relationships, it is necessary for the organisation to ensure that all employees behave in an appropriate and professional manner at work. The following principles have therefore been devised, and apply to all employees regardless of their job or level of seniority.

- Any employee who is involved in a close personal relationship with a colleague, contractor, client, customer or supplier must not allow that relationship to influence their conduct while at work. Intimate behaviour during work time, for example kissing, touching or holding hands, is expressly prohibited. This rule applies during all working time, whether at the normal workplace, on clients' premises or elsewhere. Any breach of this rule will be regarded as a disciplinary offence leading to disciplinary action.
- Any employee who embarks on a close personal relationship with a colleague working in the same department/section must declare the relationship to their manager. If the relationship is between a manager/supervisor and an employee whom they supervise, the relationship should be declared to a senior manager. The information declared will be recorded on the personal files of both employees and treated in strict confidence.
- To avoid a situation in which an employee has managerial authority over another with whom they have a close personal relationship, the organisation reserves the right to elect to transfer one or both of the employees involved in the relationship to a job in another department/section. In these circumstances, the organisation will consult both of the employees and seek to reach a satisfactory agreement regarding the transfer of one or both of them.
- In such a situation, if it is not possible to transfer at least one of the employees (for example if no suitable vacancies exist, or if an employee refuses to transfer), the organisation reserves the right to dismiss one or both employees (with notice in accordance with the employee's contract, or pay in lieu of notice). Dismissal would, however, be undertaken only as a last resort in circumstances where no other course of action was reasonably open to the organisation.

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- Similar principles apply to an employee who begins a close personal relationship with a client, customer, contractor or supplier. If the employee's job allows them authority over the client, customer, contractor or supplier (for example if the employee has the authority to decide to whom to award contracts), the relationship must be declared to the employee's manager. In these circumstances, the organisation reserves the right to transfer, or as a last resort to dismiss, the employee following consultation with them.

## 17. Conflict of Interest

- a) You will devote the whole of your time, attention and skills to the business and affairs of AaA/AaAST. Any paid or voluntary work undertaken outside of the organisation must have the prior agreement of your line manager, and written approval from the divisional ELT member. For the avoidance of doubt, "conflict" for the purposes of this clause is understood to include both conflicts as to the nature of the work/activities undertaken and also as to the amount of time entailed. Any breach of this clause may render you liable to serious disciplinary action, which could result in your summary dismissal if the circumstances so warrant.
- b) It is a condition of employment that you do not provide voluntary or paid assistance to parents/carers of AaA/AaAST pupils/learners or visit their homes without the prior agreement of your line manager and written approval from divisional ELT member of AaA/AaAST. Any assistance provided under such approval shall be deemed to have been provided in your capacity as an individual and not as an employee of AaA/AaAST.
- c) It is also a condition of your employment that you do not, during your term of employment, without AaA/AaAST prior written consent, directly or indirectly trade or carry on a profession on your own account or in partnership with any other person or persons or act as servant, agent, or officer of any other person, firm, company or organisation without the prior agreement of the line manager and written approval of the divisional ELT member.

## 18. Political impartiality/neutrality

As a registered charity we are obligated to be politically impartial and must make sure that any involvement we have with political parties is balanced.

You are expected to act impartially in relation to political parties. It is a matter of professional discipline that any personal party political allegiance does not influence our work.

We support members of staff to be active within their community and recognise the importance of individuals' involvement in conventional political activity. This includes being members of political parties if they wish to. We would expect to have a broad range of political allegiances across our staff group, and amongst our supporters.

You should separate work use of social media and personal use of social media if you want to discuss your support or otherwise of political parties or candidates, including those who support or do not support particular policy issues. Individuals should be mindful of how such personal use could reflect on the charity's image and act responsibly to avoid any damage to the charity's reputation. (Please refer to the social media and external communications policies).

A vital part of charity political impartiality is maintaining the public perception of it. That is why it is important that staff in senior roles who speak on behalf of the charity and those involved in our organisation's campaigning and policy work do not hold or stand for office with a political party at the same time. This applies to, but is not limited to, trustees, Chairs of Governors, members of the Executive Leadership team, and members of the organisation's policy and campaigns team.

Any staff member who wishes to stand for election to local government, the UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly, London Assembly or as a local mayor or Police and Crime Commissioner must seek approval from the Director of External Affairs and Development to ensure there is no conflict of interest.

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