Interpersonal Relationships among Staff, Volunteers and Clients

1. INTRODUCTION

This policy serves to uphold Cottage Cove Urban Ministries’ high standards of professional and ethical conduct, specifically with respect to interpersonal relationships. The intent of this policy is to provide assurance that all employees, volunteers, and clients are able to learn or work in an environment where they can be objectively supervised, instructed, or evaluated — all in a safe setting. This policy further provides assurance that Cottage Cove’s reputation will not be harmed by improper conduct or through circumstances enabling allegations of the same.

This policy defines the types of interpersonal relationships among staff, volunteers, and clients that by their very existence create potential conflict of interest affecting their ability to be objectively supervised, instructed, evaluated, or served. This policy also proscribes conduct with respect to interpersonal relationships among staff, volunteers, and clients including improper relationships between volunteers, employees, and clients and provides for disciplinary action for policy violations.

The spirit and intent of Cottage Cove’s Code of Conduct (an addendum to Cottage Cove’s Charter and By-Laws) remains in view at all times. Our goal is to serve and represent Christ in a positive fashion through all we do.

2. DEFINITIONS

All staff and volunteers are subject to Cottage Cove’s Employment Policy Concerning Age and Accountability plus Cottage Cove’s Nondiscrimination Policy. All definitions should be interpreted in view of those additional policies.

2.1 Volunteers

2.1.1 Regular Volunteer: A regular volunteer is anyone who volunteers in a Cottage Cove program 4 or more times per year without compensation or expectation of compensation and does not qualify as a Special Case Volunteer.

A volunteer must be officially accepted and enrolled by Cottage Cove prior to performance of any task.

2.1.2 Special Case Volunteer: A special case volunteer is anyone who:
- Volunteers in a Cottage Cove program fewer than 4 times per year OR
- A parent or guardian of a participating child and volunteers not more than 1 hour per week in their child’s program with Cottage Cove staff present.

Special Case Volunteers require special supervision due to their limited familiarity with Cottage Cove and un-vetted status. Special case volunteers are not required to be given an orientation, or undergo a full background check, unless they wish to do so. Notwithstanding, any person volunteering at Cottage Cove may be required to have an orientation and submit to a background check under the concern and recommendation of any staff member.
2.2 Staff

2.1.1 Regular Staff: Any individual employed and paid by Cottage Cove on a long term weekly basis.
2.1.2 Part Time Staff: Any individual employed and paid in a part time capacity by Cottage Cove.
2.1.3 Work Study Staff: Any individual employed by Cottage Cove receiving outside remuneration, whether financially or academically.
2.1.4 Intern Staff: Any individual employed by Cottage Cove on a term basis, whether receiving remuneration from Cottage Cove, self-funding, academic credit, or through outside sources.
2.1.5 Jr. Interns: Any minor (youth) employed by Cottage Cove on a term basis, whether receiving remuneration from Cottage Cove, self-funding, academic credit, or through outside sources.

2.3 Amorous Relationship

A relationship when two individuals voluntarily engaged in a romantic partnership (i.e., dating, engaged, sexually intimate).

2.4 Familial Relationship

A relationship between two related persons. For purposes of this policy, “related persons” includes:
- Husband/Wife
- Domestic Partner
- Parent/Child
- Brother/Sister
- Grandparent/Grandchild
- Aunt/Uncle and Niece/Nephew
- First Cousins
- Guardian/Ward
- Anyone living in the same household or whose relationship is so closely identified with another as to suggest a conflict
- Ex-, Step-, Half-, and In-Law relationships as appropriate based on the above list.

2.5 Client Responsibility

Responsibility that includes, but is not limited to, instruction; evaluation; considering disciplinary action; field trip participation; Jr. Intern employment; or any other action related to the services Cottage Cove provides.

2.6 Employment Decision

A decision that includes, but is not limited to, one relating to the search, selection, or appointment of an individual to employment; establishing the terms and conditions of employment; determining compensation; evaluating work performance; voting for or otherwise considering reappointment, promotion, or tenure; issuing disciplinary action; or any other action that assesses, determines, or influences work performance, career progress, or other employment status.
3. DUTY TO DISCLOSE

The inherent fact or semblance of a conflict of interest created by an amorous or familial relationship should be disclosed in order to avoid a potential violation of this policy. In the small faith-based workplace of Cottage Cove familial relationships commonly exist among staff and volunteers. When disclosed, and accounted for, these are not necessarily a problem. Likewise amorous relationships are frequently part of staffing and among volunteers. Cottage Cove does not seek to police such relationships, merely to acknowledge their existence and to make sure that suitable propriety is maintained among staff and volunteers.

4. PROHIBITED CONDUCT

The prohibited conduct in this section shall be considered misconduct subject to disciplinary action. Cottage Cove’s Social Media Policy, Cottage Cove’s Client Transportation Policy, and Cottage Cove’s Molestation, Abuse, and Sexual Misconduct Policy are also in view in regards to relationships between employees, volunteers and clients. Witnessed or suspected violation of these policies must be brought to Senior Staff, the Executive Director or, if pertaining to the Executive Director, the Board of Directors.

4.1 Improper Relationships with Clients

4.1.1 A Cottage Cove employee shall not engage in sexual activity, or the appearance of sexual activity, with any student enrolled at Cottage Cove.

4.1.2 Cottage Cove staff and volunteers may not be alone with a child in an area or location where they cannot be observed by other staff or volunteers (in person or via cameras). Staff or volunteers aiding a child who has soiled themselves must make another staff member or supervisor aware of the need and limit their involvement to only what is necessary. The child’s parent or guardian should be notified that day of those circumstances. Transportation runs are an exception to this requirement, if absolutely required, with normal planning to have either multiple students or an additional adult. Drivers must notify their supervisor or other staff at departure and return when one child must be transported. Emergency situations are the only additional exception and a supervisor or other staff must be notified as quickly as circumstances allow.

4.1.3 Staff and volunteers will refrain from any interactions outside of the program activities with children under eighteen years of age that are participants in Cottage Cove’s programs. Casual and brief acknowledgement of a child in a public setting, such as a mall or grocery store is permitted. Interaction in an additional restricted setting, such as at a school function or church, is permitted as long as the policies of that setting are being followed AND the intent of this policy is maintained, including refraining from private and unmonitored contact. Staff and volunteers having familial relationship to clients must immediately declare this relationship to their supervisor or other staff, with an expectation that they may have family based interaction outside of the program. Notwithstanding, familial relationship does release any expectations concerning interactions in Cottage Cove’s programs or in Cottage Cove’s facilities. There are no further exceptions to this policy.

4.1.4 Conversation and actions of volunteers and staff with children must not have the appearance of initiating any sexual contact. Volunteers and staff are advised to take care in this regards and to think through all aspects of their interactions with the children. Cottage Cove’s basic rules for the children specifically ban sitting on the lap of staff or volunteers, upholding the intent of this regulation.
4.1.5 Staff should refrain from non-program related electronic communications with clients, especially minor children, whether at Cottage Cove or otherwise. This includes but is not limited to phone calls, texts, emails, Facebook and other social media. No contact should ever include anything of a sexual or personal nature, or that could be construed in such a manner. Unsolicited or inappropriate contact initiated by any client must be reported to Senior Staff or the Executive Director.

4.1.6 Cottage Cove staff and volunteers must maintain professionalism during interaction with the parents of the children in our programs. All counseling and personal interactions, especially between individuals of differing sexes, should be only in visible locations (actual or electronic) or in the presence of another staff member. This policy does not prevent the declared development of amorous relationships between staff or volunteers and a single parent of a Cottage Cove child. Staff should pursue such relationship outside of Cottage Cove or treat it as a staff and volunteer relationship during Cottage Cove’s program and in Cottage Cove’s facilities.

4.2 Improper Relationships between Staff and Volunteers

4.2.1 A Cottage Cove employee shall not engage in sexual activity, or the appearance of sexual activity, with any volunteer at Cottage Cove (other than his or her spouse) who is a minor under the age of 18.

4.2.2 Cottage Cove staff and volunteers should endeavor to not be alone with one another during Cottage Cove programs or in Cottage Cove’s facilities, except in public areas or locations readily observed by other staff or volunteers (whether in person or via cameras). It is important to maintain an appearance of propriety at all time and there should be no expectation of privacy or intent to create such an environment.

4.2.3 Married staff members should take extra care to not be alone with, or counsel, volunteers of the opposite sex. Seeking a public location (with actual or electronic visibility), or the presence of an additional staff member, is the proper course of action.

4.2.4 Actions and language that could be construed as attempting to initiate or perpetuate an amorous relationship are not to be part of the Cottage Cove workplace, unless between individuals who are engaged or married.

4.2.5 Staff should maintain professionalism in all program related electronic communications with volunteers or staff. This includes but is not limited to; phone calls, texts, emails, Facebook and other social media. The question to ask yourself is “Would you be embarrassed or incriminated if this communication became public?” Remember, there is no expectation of privacy on Cottage Cove’s communications, network, or premises. No contact should ever include anything of a sexual or intimate nature, or that could be construed in such a manner, unless married (even then, remember it may not be private). Unsolicited or inappropriate contact initiated by another staff member or volunteer must be reported to Senior Staff or the Executive Director.

4.2.6 Hugs, or greetings with physical contact, should be asexual, brief, and only between those so inclined. All such contact should cease if any discomfort is sensed or expressed – and only take place in a public location.

4.3 Employment Decisions

Cottage Cove employees or volunteers may have employment or supervision responsibilities over someone whom the individual has a declared amorous or familial relationship. They must endeavor to not discriminate against, or favor, any staff member or volunteer due to that relationship. If such action
is suspected, it must be brought to Senior Staff, the Executive Director, or, if pertaining to the Executive Director, the Board of Directors.

4.4 Client Care

Cottage Cove staff and volunteers have a client responsibility to not discriminate against, or favor, any client due to familial relationship. If such action is suspected, it must be brought to Senior Staff, the Executive Director, or, if pertaining to the Executive Director, the Board of Directors.

4.5 New Employee / Student

When hired, each employee or volunteer has a duty to disclose any familial or amorous conflict of interest to Senior Staff or the Executive Director. Further, during their time at Cottage Cove, upon becoming aware of any newly occurring conflict of interest, these are to be declared upon discovery (e.g. a related student or volunteer starts).

4.6 Change in Status

A change in an individual’s status (i.e. relationship) that would establish a potential violation of this section (where one did not exist previously) creates a duty to disclose the conflict of interest by contacting Senior Staff or the Executive Director.

4.7 Failure to disclose

Failure to disclose a conflict of interest or failure to disclose in a timely manner shall constitute a violation of this policy.

5. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Upon appropriate disclosure pursuant to section 4 and as appropriate, Senior Staff or the Executive Director will oversee the development, approval and monitoring of a conflict management plan to avoid a policy violation. Failure to adhere to an approved conflict management plan shall constitute a violation of this policy.

6. DISCIPLINARY ACTION

Violations of this policy will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Such disciplinary action shall be conducted in accordance with existing Cottage Cove policies and procedures.

7. RESOURCES

Questions concerning this policy should be referred to the Executive Director, or the Board of Directors.