

# Sunbeams

A haven for children and  
young adults with Autism

## 58. Work and Relationships Policy

### Policy statement

The reputation of Sunbeams Play depends on the achievement of the highest standards of care for service users but also in ensuring that charity business is conducted in a professional and proper manner.

It is recognised that close personal relationships can and are sometimes formed at work. Employees may sometimes be in existing personal relationships with prospective employees, customers, suppliers and service users and carers. Such relationships can give rise to challenges about professionalism, integrity and to suggestions of favouritism.

Whilst Sunbeams respects the right of employees to privacy and family life and will not interfere unduly in an employee's private life, Sunbeams has a legitimate right to protect the interest of the charity, service users and other employees and to act when close personal relationships either have the potential to or do impact upon the Sunbeams services.

Sunbeams has no objection to employees forming personal relationships with other employees or employing other family members. However, Sunbeams must ensure that its decisions are based on objective and relevant criteria and that no subjective or irrelevant factors are considered. Sunbeams expects that no favouritism is shown in business, management of employees or decisions re services.

Sunbeams has put the following principles and processes in place to ensure that where relationships exist there is no possibility of a lack of professionalism, integrity, or favouritism within the working environment and that all actions are open and transparent.

### Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- ensure that working relationships are harmonious.
  - ensure that bias does not influence managerial decisions including recruitment and promotion or access to learning and development.
  - protect the operation of the charity's services,
  - ensure that issues relating to personal relationships at work are managed in a way that is as unobtrusive as possible to the private lives of those involved.
  - prevent harassment at work (in particular stemming from the end of a relationship)
  - ensure that all employees or colleagues feel confident of fair and consistent treatment
  - protect the health, safety and welfare at work of colleagues
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- ensure that the Sunbeams facilities and building are not used inappropriately,
  - ensure that those involved in relationships at work behave appropriately avoiding situations where there is potential for conflict of interest,

- ensure that situations do not develop where other colleagues feel unable to speak openly and honestly, or feel that a relationship is having an adverse impact on their own employment,
- ensure that there is no impact on service users care at any level,
- eliminate the risk of professional or personal relationships compromising any individual(s) or Sunbeams in the delivery of high-quality care to service users or in contact with families and carers.
- prevent the potential for fraudulent activity
- facilitate and encourage the development of an organisational culture where employees feel confident to voluntarily declare personal relationships.

This policy applies to all employees and colleagues of Sunbeams and in addition to volunteers, students, contractors, and employees of other organisations that provide services to Sunbeams. It also applies to job applicants in the recruitment process. Job applicants will be required to declare on their application any personal or work relationships issues as this may cause a conflict of interest.

Employees are expected to behave in a professional manner respecting all Sunbeams policies and confidentiality requirements regarding information which one employee may have authorised access to but not the other. Any adverse impact on their work, the team's work or the functioning of the team is not acceptable, such as:

- neglecting work
- communicating confidential information to each other which is not associated with their employment,
- behaving in a way that may cause difficulty or embarrassment to others, for example, arguing in the workplace or open displays of affection,
- not communicating with each other because of disagreement or the breakdown of the relationship,
- communicating with each other in a way that excludes others,
- inflexibility in working arrangements, this may be of particular importance within small teams where cover is already difficult.

It is the negative impact of the relationship and not the relationship itself, which is not acceptable, which is why all employees are expected to always behave in a professional manner.

### **Managers**

- Will be responsible for ensuring they are familiar with this policy and procedures contained within it.
- Deal promptly and sensitively with issues involving close personal relationships at work.
- Will make active and objective decisions, which must be recorded, to avoid or minimise the possibility of perceptions of favouritism, lack of professionalism or a lack of integrity.
- Conduct matters involving close personal relationships at work in a consistent, fair and reasonable manner, maintaining confidentiality where possible. Where practical arrangements necessitate the need for sharing the information the individuals will be informed of this prior to the information being shared.
- Will declare any relationships formed with an employee to trustees.
- Will ensure employees are aware of and understand the policy and ensure, where appropriate, employees attend necessary training

### **Employees or colleagues**

- Will be individually responsible for ensuring that any close personal relationship at work does not interfere with their duties and responsibilities.
- Should familiarise themselves with the content of this policy and should speak to their line manager if they are unsure of any aspect of their responsibilities.
- Will declare the existence of close personal relationships or when they develop as required under this policy to the relevant manager

- Will take active steps that are reasonable and practical to ensure that any close personal relationship at work does not interfere with or prejudice their employment thereby impairing their judgement.

Relationships for the purpose of this policy are deemed to include:

- family relationships e.g. brother, sister, daughter, son, mother, father
- being related by marriage or civil partnership e.g. brother-in-law, sister-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, father-in-law, stepchildren etc
- married partners, co-habiting partners and civil union partnerships
- sexual or intimate relationships
- a close friend

A relationship can also be with an existing or prospective employee, a volunteer, a contractor or supplier, a non-executive director, a commissioner, carer, a service user such as a child or young person or vulnerable adult client whom an employee meets because of their employment.

### **Personal relationships with colleagues**

In any organisation there is a chance that some employees will be related to one another or develop a personal and or sexual relationship, and, if they are in a close working relationship in the same workplace, the potential for conflict between personal or family loyalty and work responsibilities may arise.

Sunbeams requires that a high standard of care and skill in its work is achieved and in so doing requires its employees to conduct themselves in a manner which will ensure this. Whilst it is not Sunbeam's intention to infringe upon the private lives of its employees, it does expect colleagues to conduct themselves in a way they do not bring the charity and its work into disrepute.

This policy sets out principle standards of conduct to assist and protect employees whilst at work and these are set out below:

- If the employee has a personal or intimate or close relationship with a colleague whom they manage or work closely with, they must inform their line manager and senior manager immediately.
- If an employee has a personal or intimate or close relationship with a colleague they should not display any obvious signs of affection in the presence of third parties. This is to prevent any potential or apparent embarrassment to their colleagues and to maintain a professional image with service users and employees with whom they have contact.
- If the relationship breaks down, the employee should ensure that no acts that could be interpreted as arguments or disagreements occur at work. The employee may wish to discuss the situation with their line manager.
- The employee should ensure that their relationship does not bring the reputation of Sunbeams into disrepute. An example of a breach of this would be if the employee deliberately damaged a former partner's property, even outside of working hours. Additionally any other behaviour that could, or did lead to a prosecution by the police.

### **Relationships between employees where there is no line management relationship.**

This type of relationship at work does not of itself constitute a difficulty. However, employees are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner and to deal sensitively with any confidential information which one or both individuals may possess. Employees are encouraged to bring to the attention of their manager any difficulties they are experiencing which may not be apparent.

A relationship, particularly between two employees working in the same team, may begin to have an adverse effect on the care they provide, their own and or their colleagues' work.

The following list is not exhaustive but includes some examples of this:

- neglecting work
- communicating confidential information to each other which is not a necessary part of their work,

- behaving in a way which may cause difficulty or embarrassment to others, e.g. arguing in the workplace, ignoring, excluding, “cold shouldering” colleagues,
- not communicating with each other as the result of a disagreement or the break-up of a relationship,
- inflexibility in working arrangements,
- reluctance to acknowledge and report inappropriate actions or behaviours within the work environment.

This relates to any behaviour which has a negative impact on work that would cause this policy to be applied, not the relationship itself.

### **Personal relationships with contractors**

No special favour should be shown in the tendering process to businesses run by or employing, friends, partners, or relatives. If an employee is asked to participate in the tendering process, for example, by providing expert advice, they should declare any such relationships. A close personal relationship between an employee and a contractor is not acceptable if it involves:

- an abuse of the employee’s position of trust,
- a breach of the standards of propriety expected in the post,
- a compromise of professional standards,
- a conflict of interests.

### **Personal relationships with service users**

Employees must not engage in personal relationships with service users whom they meet because of their employment. If this type of relationship develops the situation can be regarded as:

- an abuse of the member of staff’s position of trust,
- a breach of the standards of propriety expected in the post,
- a compromise of professional standards or code of conduct and, as such must be reported to the manager, deputy manager, or safeguarding lead for a recommendation on further action,
- a breach of the contract of employment.

In cases where a close friend, partner or spouse or relative is, or becomes, a service user, it is the responsibility of the employee to inform their line manager that such a relationship exists.

Employees must not access service user records, as this will be classified as a non-authorised access to confidential records and this will be considered a breach of trust policy, which could result in dismissal for gross misconduct.

Where personal or business relationships precede the professional relationship, or where dual relationships exist e.g. where within a small community an employee may already be a personal friend of a service user, it is the responsibility of the employee to maintain each relationship within its own appropriate boundary. Where such a relationship exists, the employee must inform their line manager and supervision should be used to regularly discuss and explore any potential boundary conflicts.

### **Recruitment and selection**

Job applicants, including internal applicants, are required to declare any relationships with trustees or employees of the trust on their job application form. If an employee is involved in a recruitment and selection process and realises that there is an application from someone with whom they have a relationship they must declare an interest to their line manager and withdraw from the process. Failure to declare any interests may result in disciplinary action.

Similarly, an employee who has a relationship with another should not act as a referee for that person for both internal and external positions.

## **Managing situations when a personal relationship adversely affects the workplace.**

In most cases where a personal relationship causes issues in the workplace these should initially be capable of being addressed and resolved informally. Issues arising should be dealt with promptly and sensitively by the relevant manager and not allowed to continue unchecked. Where action is necessary consideration should be given to re-arrangement of the work or working patterns if this is a viable first option.

Consideration should also be given to the use of mediation if appropriate to the circumstances. Advice can be sought through Sam Corrigan, trustee and qualified counsellor.

### **Raising concerns**

Any employee who feels that the close personal relationship of other team members or colleagues is adversely affecting their employment, the functioning of the team or the provision of services is encouraged to share their concerns at the earliest opportunity with their line manager or more senior manager if they prefer.

Where an employee is not comfortable with either of these options they may consider raising their concerns to the board of trustees. This also applies to employees in a close personal relationship who feel they are being disadvantaged because of the relationship.

### **Confidentiality**

Wherever possible confidentiality regarding the existence of a close personal relationship will not be disclosed, however, should this prove necessary then a disclosure will be made following consultation with the line manager and the employee/s concerned. If alternate working practices or patterns are necessary then it may be necessary to inform other members of the team regarding these arrangements and the reasons for them.

### **Training implications**

There are no specific training needs in relation to this policy, but line managers will need to be familiar with its contents as well as any other individual or group with a responsibility for implementing the contents of this policy.

All employees need to be aware of the key points that the policy covers. Employees can be made aware through a variety of means such as:

- part of their induction
- one to one meetings or supervision.

This policy was adopted on

20<sup>th</sup> May 2023

Policy updated

24<sup>th</sup> April 2024

Date to be reviewed

April 2025

Signed on behalf of the management committee

Name of Signatory: Susan Carr

Role of Signatory: Manager

Reviewed By	Date
Sue Carr	24/04/2024