



GUIDANCE NOTES FOR RESIDENTIAL STAFF WORKING WITH VULNERABLE STUDENTS & YOUNG PEOPLE

OPERATING AS A UNIT

As a team leader one of your first priorities should be to establish a team identity and encourage and motivate the entire membership - students and staff, in essence to function as a “family unit”. Every student should be encouraged to contribute towards the success and achievement of every activity and chore, but remember that this must be within the individual’s capabilities. Each student should be expected to do his or her own best, not necessarily yours!

SAFETY

All staff must be fully conversant with the site’s safety rules for specific activities, e.g. swimming, climbing, cookers etc. These should be explained at pre-course briefings, as well as a comprehensive written risk assessment being distributed to all staff members. All potentially dangerous items should be pointed out and other implements such as tools, tent pegs, sports & games equipment, bamboos, gas appliances, firelighters, matches etc. should be stored under lock and key when not in use.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Make time for each student and where possible befriend them. Let them get to know you and be sure to establish your own (realistic) boundaries sooner rather than later. Stick with them. You are responsible for their safety and well being in the same way as a ‘reasonable parent’ would be. Make sure you know where they are at all times and could give a proper description of each one if required. Ensure they are properly supervised when engaged in any potentially dangerous activity (ratio 1:4).

WORKING TOGETHER

Join in with every task and lead by example. Teach by showing and then by assisting. Don’t take over tasks that the students are capable of doing themselves but, equally, do not just stand back and ‘order’. Keep your standards realistic and always be alert to safety precautions and particularly when open fires or gas appliances are in operation.

COMPETITION AND BEHAVIOUR

Encourage healthy competition between your own and other teams but always within fair guidelines. Do not encourage cheating; it can easily and quickly get out of hand! Run your own rewards system particularly with younger or less-able students and ideally on a daily basis. Always acknowledge and reward effort and good behaviour, be less quick to admonish.



Try to develop a sense of pride in the teams area and accommodation. Discuss and practice the Country Code throughout the course and encourage respect for other people's property and possessions. Be alert to petty theft - both on and off-site and particularly from each other's bags. Discuss and draw up your own teams set of 'rules' and encourage each member to stick to it. Don't expect drastic changes, you must recognise that behaviour patterns and attitudes have been developed over many years.

PUNCTUALITY AND "STUDENT FIRST" PRINCIPAL

Get up/arrive at least half an hour before your students. Be dressed, washed and ready before them. If you are sloppy, they will be! Males are expected to shave daily unless bearded. Always serve the students first and yourself last. Ensure the students are safe and comfortable before you go to bed and make sure they know where and how to contact the duty staff. Don't wander away from activities or leave the team or site unless agreed with your team leader. Never assume that somebody else has done, will do, or will even think of doing anything. When you are moving around with a team of students be constantly alert to what the students are doing. Be just as aware of what is happening at the back of the team as to what is going on at the front. If a student drops back, slow down the ones at the front.

COMMUNICATION

Communicate with students at their level. Either kneel, squat or sit down. Maintain eye contact and do not wear sunglasses. Some students will have very limited vocabulary and will be frustrated in trying to explain and communicate a whole range of things. Be patient and sensitive. Listen and reflect before making judgements or decisions. Never show up, 'talk down' or deliberately embarrass your students. Try not to shout and never swear at them. Always say "please" and "thank you". Try to lead by example and to earn their respect.

CONTROLLING ANGER AND RESPONDING TO AGGRESSION

Do not be rough with students and don't involve yourself in horseplay or competitive games other than as a referee. Be aware of "wind-ups" and try not to respond with anger. Be alert to bullying, racism and any form of "initiation ceremonies". Confront bullying first by separating the victim and offender(s), then calming the situation. Discuss all instances and your concerns with your team leader. If you or anybody else is subjected to physical violence and there is really no other way to suppress it other than by holding the student, do so in as non-intrusive way as possible and with force only sufficient to prevent him or her from damaging themselves or others. Talk gently to the student. Stay in control of yourself whatever is being said or done to you. Do not chase a student unless they are running into danger. If you are being verbally abused, walk away.

HYGIENE AND FIRST AID

Ensure and encourage sensible standards of hygiene and personal cleanliness but do not be overbearing with students who do not wish to undress in any way or to swim/bathe.



Ensure that any spilt body fluids - blood, vomit, urine, excreta are dealt with by a member of staff speedily and without fuss. Cover your own cuts and scratches and ensure that student's wounds, however trivial, are similarly treated. You will find that such treatment is popular and you will go through quite a lot of plasters, but better too many than too few. For on-site injuries always refer the student to the nominated medical coordinator but when this is not possible, treat yourself and later ensure that the medical coordinator knows what you have done and that the treatment is recorded in the accident book. Try to discourage spitting. Air sleeping bags daily and note any bedwetting. Discuss discretely with team leader who will advise on action to be taken.

DRESSING AND UNDRRESSING

Under no circumstances should you share your own sleeping accommodation with students. Make sure another adult of the student's sex is present if you have to change a student's clothes. Change or undress yourself out of sight and well away from the students. Do not go into showers, tents or any other accommodation alone with a student unless in an emergency and, in that event, always let another adult know where you are and why you are doing it. Be modest in your own behaviour, dress, body language and comments, and avoid stereotyping.

STUDENT ABUSE – RECOGNITION & RESPONDING

The consequences of Student Abuse in all its forms - physical, sexual, emotional and neglect are horrifying and, in many instances, can seriously harm a student's natural development long into adulthood. Many of the students with whom you will work have been abused, or are at risk of abuse - and in a safe environment, such as residential programmes, may wish to tell you about the things which can have happened to them.

There are a number of signs in a student's behaviour which may mean he or she is being abused: improbable excuses for physical injuries or refusal to discuss them; constant hunger, overeating or loss of appetite; tiredness, unwillingness to bathe or to undress; disturbed sleep, nightmares, bedwetting; extreme changes in behaviour or moods including aggression and severe tantrums; an air of detachment or disregard about personal comfort or safety; marked distrust of some adults, particularly close relatives or withdrawn or watchful behaviour; minor unexplained and apparently untreated stomach and other pains or illnesses; running away, attempted suicide or self-inflicted wounds; regression to much younger 'clinging' and attention seeking behaviour, 'secrets' with other students.

On their own, many of the above signs can also be simply those of 'growing up' and are not positive proof of abuse. However, the more signs there are together, the more likely it is to be the case. You should therefore be alert to these indicators and be prepared for approaches by any students who wish to speak to you about his or her experiences.

Honour any wish expressed by a student to talk to you privately. Do so out of earshot but always within the view at least of one other adult. In the first instance always suggest that the student speaks to the course director (with whom you are obliged to share information



however 'confidentially' it is, passed to you). If the student is only willing to speak to you, do not commit yourself to keeping secrets but always react with belief in what the student is saying to you, and with sensitivity. Never show shock, embarrassment, disgust or disbelief. Try to remember what the student said in his or her own words, not your interpretation of them. If possible, write them down as soon as you can, noting date, time, circumstances, etc. Do not probe or push the student for more information, it is likely that you will be told only fragments of the story at any one time because the student will be very sensitive to your own reactions to what is being said. It is vital that you share such disclosures with the course director discretely and as soon as possible so that you can be advised and properly supported, and that measures can be taken where necessary to protect or support the student back home.

APPROPRIATE & INAPPROPRIATE TOUCHING

There must also be boundaries both for the student's sakes and for your own protection against compromise and possible misinterpretation. Do not cuddle or kiss a student. Gently discourage them from sitting or lying in your lap. Do not carry a student unless absolutely necessary. Do not give "piggy-backs" or shoulder rides. Do not pat or tickle and try not to handle a student below the shoulder unless there is a justifiable reason for doing so. Be prepared for sexual advances from students of any age and either sex. Don't make them an issue but gently and firmly tell the student that it is not appropriate. Discretely discuss such advances with your team leader.

Most of the above is bound to happen to you and there is as much potential damage if you insensitively reject the student's advances. The watchwords must therefore be "caution" and "backup". Gently disengage yourself from embraces and firmly distance yourself from inappropriate touching. Never leave yourself alone with a student or team of students. Leaders must watch out for each other – use the "buddy buddy" system. Try to ensure that another adult can see what is happening and can sensitively intervene and distract attention as necessary, and always be prepared to extricate others from possibly compromising situations. Also be aware that a major role of the course director and other key personnel is to discretely observe activities and defuse any potentially embarrassing or compromising situation. Please follow any advice given and please accept that it is as much for your own protection as it is for the student's.

REPARATION

Students find it very difficult to say "sorry". It can be intense and humiliating for them. If things are wrong between you and a student they will have varied and different ways of trying to make good - they might offer you a sweet, make you a cup of tea etc. It might be just a smile or a grin. If this happens then acknowledge it as just that, a token of the disagreement being settled. "Are you alright now?", "that's settled then" is all you need to say, but remember that the correct tone of your voice and its genuineness is important. If the apology/reparation doesn't happen then you may have a serious problem and it would be advisable to talk to the course director with a view to arbitrating the issue. It is often useful when in dispute to check it out with a third party before becoming too committed to one



position. Try never to start a new day with unresolved relationships issues either with students or other staff.

SMOKING

There is no effective way of preventing smoking by students who are committed to doing so and who, by whatever means, manage to obtain cigarettes. A ban will only drive it underground and into tents where the dangers are obvious and are wholly unacceptable. Purchasing cigarettes can be controlled to a degree by restricting issue of pocket money and by alert adult supervision of likely outlets. A “photograph for the parents” is also an effective method of countering “I’m allowed to do it at home” (which is the fact in some cases). If you smoke, please do so away from students and never in vehicles, near tents, food or during mealtimes, nor in bed! Never buy or provide cigarettes for students, and never accept a cigarette from a student. Prevent cigarette bartering, encourage your students to spend rather than “save” their daily pocket money and use quiet times to introduce health dangers and other allied issues into your team discussions.

VEHICLES

Never allow students unsupervised access to any vehicle or other keys and do not let them into any vehicle unsupervised even when cleaning it. Keep keys on you at all times. At least one adult should travel in the rear of minibuses - awake and alert, and all vehicle doors should be locked when underway. Be particularly alert to side-sliding doors. No students under 16 should be carried in front seats, and no students should be driven alone in any vehicle unless in an emergency. Seat belts if fitted should be worn. Check the exhaust pipe on the last day of camp - for potatoes etc, and also check your tyres - some students might not want to go home!

ALCOHOL & DRUGS

The consumption of alcohol and misuse of drugs or substances is banned at any time during the programme.

KNIVES

The possession of any fixed-blade knife is also banned. A small penknife on a lanyard is acceptable for adults and will be useful, but it is wise not to lend it to your students.

TORCHES

Ensure you possess a dependable, robust torch with spare fresh batteries and bulb. It is again unwise to lend it to your students.



CONFIDENTIALITY

Please remember that any information about the student's personal circumstances you have discovered during the camps, should be safeguarded and not used in any manner that will identify the individual concerned. In all situations use your common sense and act on your own judgement. Things will inevitably go wrong - most can be put right. The over-riding consideration at all times must be the safety and well being of the students, and each of us must act in the best interests of the students. If anything awful were to happen, we would each be judged on the 'reasonableness' of our actions. None of us know all the answers, nor can we be expected to.

If in doubt about anything, always ask and if you are unhappy or uncomfortable in any situation don't delay in speaking to the course director.