

## **Guidelines for Employee-Student Communication & Interaction<sup>1</sup>**

One of the hallmarks of a Webb education is the close relationships students build with each other and with adults in our community. At the heart of these relationships is the belief that all students and adults must be treated with dignity, respect, sensitivity and fairness. Healthy boundaries help to maintain the trust that is the framework within which teachers can help guide students in their education and their lives. Adults at Webb must help to set limits with students and follow these guidelines. This document aims to ensure that such relationships are healthy by articulating shared guidelines for student and adult interactions in our community.

### **Appropriate communication**

Good communication between students and Webb employees is paramount. We want students to seek academic support from their teachers, request advice or share a story about their day with their advisors, and in general to feel comfortable reaching out to Webb faculty and staff for guidance. In all of these interactions, Webb employees must set appropriate boundaries with students, including being mindful about sharing private matters with students and using age-appropriate language.

Utilizing Webb systems such as school email or Haiku to communicate with students should always be the first choice for non in-person conversations. Given the nature of our residential community, faculty, staff and students often communicate via text messages using personal cell phones. While this is permitted, both parties should be thoughtful and clear in their use of this technology. Individual texting must only be used for time-sensitive exchanges, not as a replacement for email or in-person communications, and should be professional in content and tone.

### **Examples of inappropriate communication**

- Friending or connecting in any way with students through personal social media accounts
- Corresponding with students using a personal email account
- Communicating with individual students by text on matters that are not time sensitive

### **Appropriate interaction, especially outside of the academic day**

Students and faculty/staff relationships at Webb go beyond the academic day, and faculty may host students at their homes for movie viewings or extra study labs or take them off-campus for social events. Webb believes that these interactions help to build close faculty-student relationships, leading to a richer educational experience in the classroom, as well as create the feeling of a home away from home for students.

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<sup>1</sup> These guidelines are based in best practices in independent schools, as outlined in the TABS/NAIS report *Prevention and Response: Recommendations for Independent School Leaders from the Independent School Task Force on Educator Misconduct* (2018). Some language for this document is drawn directly from the TABS/NAIS report.

In general, student interactions with adults should be “readily interruptible and observable. This means that students interacting with an adult are or could be within hearing or visual range of another adult and/or other students generally.”<sup>2</sup> Faculty may only enter student dorm rooms for check-ins, room checks, advisor-advisee communications, and other security and maintenance checks. They should never be in a closed dorm room with a student and may not host a student alone in their home.

When Webb employees do take students off campus, they are advised to use Webb vehicles for transporting students for insurance purposes, though they may use their personal cars. Webb employees are encouraged not to drive with one student alone off-campus. There are exceptions to this guideline. For example, health center drivers taking a student to a medical appointment or advisors taking a student to coffee. In these cases, faculty must let other adults on campus know when they leave, where they are going, and when they have returned.

Whether on or off campus, faculty should always follow the highest standard of behavior when around Webb students.

#### **Examples of inappropriate interaction**

- Meeting with a student alone in a faculty on-campus or off-campus home
- Meeting with a student alone in the student’s dorm room with the door shut
- Arranging to meet with a student alone in any place on campus that is isolated
- Hosting a student overnight at a faculty home without the written permission of the Dean of Students
- Engaging in the use of, or being under the influence of, alcohol or drugs in the presence of students
- Arranging to meet students off-campus during school breaks without the written permission of the Dean of Students.

#### **Appropriate physical contact**

Webb students and employees forge close relationships as most students live here on campus, away from their families. Casual hugs and pats on the back are typical. The handshake or hug line after chapel speaks to this practice. Likewise, nurses or dorm faculty may touch a student to ascertain if they have a fever or inspect an injury. In some sports, physical contact may be part of the coaching process.

Adults and students are encouraged to ask for consent before giving a hug to another adult or student.

#### **Examples of inappropriate physical contact**

- Overly intimate or lengthy hugs

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<sup>2</sup> TABS/NAIS Report, 11.

- Any contact that is sexual or may be interpreted as sexual
- Any physical discipline

### **Counselors & Nurses**

Given the need for access and privacy in student-counselor and student-nurse relationships, Webb recognizes that school counselors and nurses follow separate professional guidelines and that many of the restrictions outlined here are not in keeping with the requirements of their role with students.

### **Child Care**

Webb students who are interested in providing child care for Webb faculty and staff should register with the Dean of Students, who will verify parental permission. Webb faculty and students agree to California minimum wage as compensation for child care. Webb faculty agree to inform the Dean of Students' office when Webb students provide child care, including the name of the student, the date and times. Webb faculty should not excuse students from Webb commitments or make students late to check-in due to child care commitments.

### **Reporting**

If any student or Webb employee sees interactions between adults and students that do not follow these community boundaries, they must report this immediately. Webb does not tolerate sexual misconduct and abuse, and Webb forbids retaliation against anyone who reports a violation of these community boundaries in good faith. Reports can be made to any of the following: one of the counselors, the director of human resources, a senior administrator or the head of schools. Reports can also be made anonymously through the School's reporting service, online at [www.lighthouse-services.com/webb](http://www.lighthouse-services.com/webb), by telephone at 833-430-0007 (Spanish speaking at 800-216-1288), or via email to [reports@lighthouse-services.com](mailto:reports@lighthouse-services.com).

Employees who willfully violate the provisions outlined in this policy will be subject to discipline, up to and including termination.