



# The Acorns School

## Confidentiality Policy

***All staff and school helpers of any description are required to follow our school confidentiality policy.***

***This requires everyone to follow a strict code of confidentiality, knowing that everything that is spoken or written in school is not for general public knowledge, and should only be discussed in house with appropriate staff members.***

***In your position of trust, we expect that you strictly adhere to this policy and respect such confidences.***

### **Rationale and statement on the importance of confidentiality**

We believe that the safety, wellbeing and protection of our students is the paramount consideration in all decisions staff at this school make about confidentiality. The appropriate sharing of information between school staff is an essential element in ensuring our students' well-being and safety. It is an essential part of the ethos of our school that trust is established to enable students, staff, and parents/carers to seek help both within and outside the school and minimise the number of situations when personal information is shared to ensure students and staff are supported and safe. Students, parents/carers and staff need to know the boundaries of confidentiality in order to feel safe and comfortable in discussing personal issues and concerns, including sex and relationships. The school's attitude to confidentiality is open and easily understood and everyone should be able to trust the boundaries of confidentiality operating within the school. Issues concerning personal information including sex and relationships and other personal matters can arise at any time. Everyone in the school community needs to know that no one can offer absolute confidentiality. Everyone in the school community needs to know the limits of confidentiality that can be offered by individuals within the school community so they can make informed decisions about the most appropriate person to talk to about any health, sex and relationship or other personal issue they want to discuss.

### **Definition of Confidentiality**

The dictionary definition of confidential is "something which is spoken or given in confidence; private, entrusted with another's secret affairs" When speaking confidentially to someone, the confider has the belief that the confidant will not discuss the content of the conversation with another. The confider is asking for the content of the conversation to be kept secret. Anyone offering absolute confidentiality to someone else would be offering to keep the content of his or her conversation completely secret and discuss it with no one. In practice, there are few situations where absolute

confidentiality is offered in school. We have tried to strike a balance between ensuring the safety, well-being and protection of our students and staff, ensuring there is an ethos of trust where students and staff can ask for help when they need it and ensuring that when it is essential to share personal information child protection issues and good practice is followed. This means that in most cases what is on offer is limited confidentiality. Disclosure of the content of a conversation could be discussed with professional colleagues but the confider would not be identified except in certain circumstances. The general rule is that staff should make clear that there are limits to confidentiality, at the beginning of the conversation. These limits relate to ensuring children's safety and well-being. The student will be informed when a confidence has to be broken for this reason and will be encouraged to do this for himself or herself whenever this is possible. Different levels of confidentiality are appropriate for different circumstances.

1. In the classroom in the course of a lesson given by a member of teaching staff or an outside visitor, including health professionals. Careful thought needs to be given to the content of the lesson, setting the climate and establishing ground rules to ensure confidential disclosures are not made. It should be made clear to students that this is not the time or place to disclose confidential, personal information. When a health professional is contributing to a school health education programme in a classroom setting, s/he is working with the same boundaries of confidentiality as a teacher.
2. One to one disclosures to members of school staff (including voluntary staff). It is essential all members of staff know the limits of the confidentiality they can offer to both students and parents/carers and any required actions and sources of further support or help available both for the student or parent/carer and for the staff member within the school and from other agencies, where appropriate. All staff at this school encourage students to discuss difficult issues with their parents or carers, and vice versa. However, the needs of the student are paramount and school staff will not automatically share information about the student with his/her parents/carers unless it is considered to be in the child's best interests. Adults who are likely to come in to contact with students to discuss sensitive issues that are likely to require varying levels of privacy are trained thoroughly in Information Sharing guidance and Child Protection procedures. This training is updated regularly. Designated Child Protection Coordinators in the school are always available to staff for discussion and advice regarding disclosure, information sharing and confidentiality. (Note: That is, when concerns for a child or young person come to the attention of staff, for example through observation of behaviour or injuries or disclosure, however insignificant this might appear to be, the member of staff should discuss this with the Designated Child Protection Co-ordinator as soon as is practically possible. More serious concerns must be reported immediately to ensure that any intervention necessary to protect the child is accessed as early as possible. Please see the school Safeguarding Policy.

We expect all staff, including voluntary staff, to report any disclosures by students or parents/carers, of a concerning personal nature to the designated child protection co-ordinator as soon as possible after the disclosure and in an appropriate setting, so others cannot overhear. This is to ensure the safety, protection and well-being of all our students and staff. The designated child protection co-ordinator will decide what, if any, further action needs to be taken, both to ensure the pupil gets the help and support they need and that the member of staff also gets the support and supervision they need.

**Please note that: -**

Confidentiality issues need to be understood if a child divulges information they are being abused. A child may only feel confident to confide in a member of staff if they feel that the information will not be divulged to anyone else. However, education staff have a professional responsibility to share relevant information about the protection of children with the designated statutory agencies when a child is experiencing child welfare concerns.

It is important that each member of staff deals with this sensitively and explains to the child that they must inform the appropriate people who can help the child, but that they will only tell those who need to know in order to be able to help. They should reassure the child and tell them that their situation will not become common knowledge within the school. Be aware that it may well have taken significant courage on their part to disclose the information and that they may also be experiencing conflicting emotions, involving feelings of guilt, embarrassment, disloyalty (if the abuser is someone close) and hurt.

**Child Protection Officers:**

Joanne Hodson

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