



# The Miami Sudbury School

Do School Differently.

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## Staff Handbook

2018-2019

### **Guiding Principles of Education at The Miami Sudbury School**

1. Children are naturally curious.
2. People at every age deserve respect.
3. Mixed-age community promotes growth for all members.
4. The deepest learning happens when pursued by the learner.
5. Freedom with responsibility is essential to personal growth and development
6. All people are motivated and creative when allowed to develop their unique talents.

Here, students enjoy self-directed learning and have an equal say in school governance. Students control how and when to pursue their interests, and they determine the extent of staff involvement in their pursuits. Staff neither plan unsolicited activities nor unilaterally establish or enforce rules.

### **Staff Expectations & Responsibilities**

Staff are expected

- 1) Responsibility and Courtesy
  - a) On time or early
  - b) Daily presence and availability
  - c) Advanced notice for sub/replacement need
  - d) Clear and respectful communication
- 2) Safety
  - a) Protocols: Student census, safety & emergency procedures when necessary
  - b) Ethical and responsible conduct at all times
- 3) Confidentiality
  - a) Judicial Committee proceedings
  - b) Parents - limits on sharing information: for basic avoidance of gossip but also to avoid any kind of tracking/monitoring of a student - students can choose to share what they did in the day. Speak with the student present whenever possible.
- 4) School Community Involvement and Development
  - a) School Meeting attendance
  - b) Judicial Committee Meeting participation as needed
  - c) Re-hiring: Happens at School Meeting annually by secret ballot



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Staff members act as role models of successful adulthood, facilitate student access to resources, and perform a wide variety of administrative and maintenance tasks. Staff ensure that the school lives up to its philosophy, anchoring its culture to values of freedom, respect, responsibility, and trust. Honoring the choices of students, they rely on the school's judicial system to effectively resolve rule infractions. They thrive in an environment with frequent distractions and interruptions, and work well both independently and as a part of diverse teams.

Staff duties include: guidance and assistance as requested; participation in the democratic structures of the school; outreach (e.g., marketing, social media); parent support; and upholding the Sudbury model of education. A person accepting a staff position is agreeing to show a high level of initiative, even when work must occur during non-scheduled hours (e.g., evenings, weekends, holidays/breaks). Specific tasks and responsibilities are shared among all staff members.

When problems and conflicts arise, we use mediation and The Judicial Committee (JC) to find solutions. Mediation sessions are held daily as needed. Any student or staff member can request mediation with any other student or staff member. The mediation process is inspired by Nonviolent Communication (NVC). When mediation doesn't solve the problem, the issue may be referred to JC. JC meetings are held as needed and are comprised of 2 students and 1 staff member or trained student mediator. Every student spends time serving on the JC throughout the year. The JC helps facilitate conversation and find solutions. As Sudbury Valley School founder, Daniel Greenberg, says, "Peer justice is amazingly effective.")

## **Conduct**

In addition to adhering to the by-laws and school law book, staff are expected to model safe, respectful, and nonviolent, nondiscriminatory behavior. Encouraging or engaging in hurtful, teasing, unsafe play, or rude or disrespectful behavior may be grounds for dismissal. Respect the physical and verbal boundaries of other members of the school community: Ask for consent, or err on the side of caution. Use of language that can reasonably be construed as racist, sexist, or otherwise discriminatory (e.g., towards people with disabilities or particular religions or sexual orientations), may be grounds for dismissal. Engaging in roughhousing or excessively careless behavior, as well as willful negligence regarding shared or personal property, may also be grounds for dismissal. Sexual harassment will not be tolerated. For a definition of sexual harassment, see Attachment A. Staff accused of violating conduct expectations may be placed on unpaid leave pending investigation.

## **Ethical Standards**

The Core values of our school is "FORT" which stands for Freedom, Opportunity, Respect, and Trust. As a staff member at The Miami Sudbury School Staff are to maintain professionalism with all students and staff at all times. All staff must abide by the following Notice of Nondiscriminatory Policy for the school:

"The Miami Sudbury School, does not and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion/creed, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, national and ethnic origin/ancestry, or ability. Students, families, and employees have access to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available. It does not discriminate on the basis of any of the above in administration of its



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educational policies, admissions policies, tuition assistance programs, employment, and athletic and other school-administered programs.”

The school is a public place and all contact (physical/verbal) at school must reflect this fact. Also keep public all interactions with students. Remind students of the type of information that staff must report before starting a discussion. Also remember that you are not a social worker or therapist for the students. Discussions are the avenue to use when trying to inform a student of their responsibility rather than dictating or demanding a specific action. Be aware of who can hear the conversation and temper the discussion accordingly. Control your emotions during these discussions to allow yourself to hear and understand the student’s point of view. Be flexible and patient, and realize when to let go. Show trust in students ideas and actions. Catch students when they are good. Use positive reinforcement by focusing on what was done right. Do not curse at students. Do not hit students. Understand that talking loudly can be construed by students as being yelled at. Model appropriate behavior, staff need to be extremely self-reflective, making certain that they are modeling positive behaviors. Do not intentionally expose a student to unnecessary embarrassment or disparagement. Do not intentionally violate a student’s legal rights. Do not exploit a relationship with a student for personal gain or advantage.

Staff must keep in confidence school/personally confidential information obtained in the course of professional service, unless disclosure serves professional purposes or is required by law.

What is school/personally confidential information?

- Tuition contracts and payment plans
- School Meeting information, agendas, minutes, reports, and computer files relating to School Meeting Members
- Bulletin Board information
- Committee and SM Corporation agendas and minutes
- JC information, reports, records, and computer files

Restrictions for access to and use of school/personally confidential information:

- Discussions with Staff and parents about students should happen with the student present
- School Meeting may vote to allow the discussion of relevant confidential JC information
- Never share student information with others outside of Staff

Awareness of the importance of maintaining respect and confidence of colleagues, of students, of parents, and of the community, staff of the school must display the highest degree of ethical conduct. This commitment requires:

- Maintain honesty in all professional dealings
- Shall not interfere with a colleague’s exercise of political or civil rights and responsibilities
- Shall not engage in harassment or discriminatory conduct which unreasonably interferes with an individual’s performance of professional or work responsibilities or with the orderly process of education or which creates a hostile, intimidating, offensive, oppressive environment



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- Shall not make malicious or intentionally false statements about a colleague.

## Personal Space and Boundaries

- Staff shall never be in the restroom at the same time as a single student.
- It is always preferable for Staff to be in a public space or with the door open if alone with a single student.
- Staff need to be constantly aware of personal space with students. They can ask if a student wants a high five or a short hug, but must be aware of personal boundaries. Staff should also maintain their personal space and boundaries at all times, clearly requesting it when necessary.
- There should never be a shadow of a doubt that anything inappropriate could possibly be happening between a staff member and a student both on and off campus.

## Required Training

All staff are required as a condition of employment to complete training on these standards of ethical conduct.

## Reporting Misconduct by Staff

All staff have a duty to report alleged misconduct by other staff which affects the health, safety, and welfare of a student. Examples of misconduct include obscene language, drug/alcohol abuse, prejudice/bigotry, sexual innuendo, physical aggression, or accepting/offering favors. Reports of misconduct by staff should be made to the Ombudsman (Erika Caputo). Legally sufficient allegations of misconduct by Florida certified educators will be reported to the Office of Professional Practices Services.

## Reporting Child Abuse, Abandonment, or Neglect

All staff and agents have an affirmative duty to report all actual or suspected cases of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect. Call 1-800-96-ABUSE or report online at: [www.dcf.state.fl.us/abuse/report/](http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/abuse/report/). Signs of physical abuse: i.e. bruises, cuts, burns and a child may seem withdrawn/depressed, afraid to go home, shy away from physical contact, be aggressive, or wear inappropriate clothing to hide injuries. Signs of sexual abuse: the child may have trouble walking or sitting, pain or itching in genital area, or a STD, or have unusual knowledge of sex, or gain/lose weight suddenly, or shy away from physical contact. Signs of neglect: the child may have unattended medical needs, little/no supervision at home, poor hygiene, or be frequently tired or hungry, or overly needy for adult attention.

## Liability Protections

Any person, official, or institution participating in good faith in any act authorized or required by law or reporting in good faith any instance of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect to the department or any law enforcement agency, shall be immune from any civil or criminal liability which might otherwise result by reason of such action. (FS 39.203)



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An employer who discloses information about a former or current employee to a prospective employer of the former or current employee upon request of the prospective employer or of the former or current employee is immune from civil liability for such disclosure or its consequences unless it is shown by clear and convincing evidence that the information disclosed by the former or current employer was knowingly false or violated any civil right of the former or current employee protected under chapter 760. (FS 768.095)

## **Key aspects of Sudbury School life:**

### **School Meeting**

School Meeting is held weekly and handles the day-to-day operations of the school. The meeting includes announcements, agenda items, discussions, and voting. Common agenda items may include new rule proposals, budget approvals, or discussion about an issue in the community. The meeting is attended by students and staff who each have one vote. The annual staff hiring process happens at these meetings.

### **Judicial Committee (JC)**

JC meetings are held daily and are comprised of an elected JC Clerk, rotating JC members representing a variety of age groups as well as a staff member. Every student spends time serving on the JC throughout the year. The JC helps facilitate accountability to the School Laws.. As Sudbury Valley School founder, Daniel Greenberg, says, "Peer justice is amazingly effective."

### **Corporations**

Corporations are formed by students through School Meeting to support student interests. Some examples of corporations are the music corporation, electronics corporation, games & toys corporation, animal corporation and art corporation. They take responsibility for materials, equipment, and other items related to their corporation. They also create guidelines and determine certification procedures for using the equipment.

### **Lawbook and Policies**

The most basic rule is this: "We are responsible for taking care of our school through actions that contribute to freedom, order, respect, and trust (FORT)." Specific policies are created, as needed, to support this rule. These policies are related to the functioning of the school and safety of our students. Some policies are created by corporations for the use of particular materials (like art supplies or electronic devices). Some policies are related to using equipment (such as the microwave) or keeping the space clean. Rules and policies are a work in progress and constantly evolving. Current rules and policies are challenged, removed, and amended, while new ones are proposed, discussed, and added with a majority vote. This is one of the many ways students are empowered at a Sudbury school.