



# Youth Work Handbook

Version 1

# Your Details

Please insert below

Name .....

Job Title .....

Start date .....

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

Welcome to The Trust for Developing Communities (TDC). Our strength as an organisation is due to the skills and dedication of our team of people and we're really happy to have you as part of it!

We expect our staff to act with integrity at all times; this handbook is intended as a useful reference to help ensure that your work with the TDC is supported by policy and best practice that has been developed over many years. This way we can give the best service to the young people we work with, our partners and the wider community in order to achieve our TDC vision.

## 1.2 The TDC Vision

In 2018 The Trust for Developing Communities set out our strategic vision “**Community Led Solutions to Tackling Inequality**” which lays the path for us to become a healthy and sustainable organisation delivering a dynamic programme of radical community-led solutions that reduces the unacceptable inequality in Brighton and Hove.

## 1.3 Our Youth Work Mission

To create **safe** yet **transformational spaces** that are owned by young people

To inspire **achievement** and the **overcoming** of life's challenges

To foster **youth power** and **agency**

## 1.4 Our Values

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...And we believe that:

-  All young people matter, and everyone has a role to play
-  Young people's individuality and creativity should be nurtured and promoted
-  We should strive to be excellent youth workers because #YouthWorkWorks!

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## 2. FUNDAMENTAL PHILOSOPHIES

### 2.1 The TDC Ethos

In order to create safe and transformational youth work that has a massive impact on young people's lives, and on outcomes and inequalities for the wider community, we must put young people at the heart of what we do.

The TDC aspires to create the conditions for young people to fully participate in the services we provide. This may well start out with newer members choosing what to eat the following week or being part of the establishment of a club's ground rules. However, given time and successive opportunities, young people can and should lead the planning of our work and become volunteers, employees and Trustees.

We must have the courage to share our power with young people if we are to help them beat the odds for themselves and change the odds for others. Everyone has something to bring to the table; by including all young people we ensure empowerment for all.

We are open about successes and challenges so that we can learn and grow together. We use the whole team to help us reflect, affirm strengths and improve upon areas we've identified for development.

### 2.2 Core Conditions

As part of our person-centred approach, we draw upon the hugely influential work of Carl Rogers who gave us 3 core conditions relating to counselling that translate beautifully into Youth Work.

1. **Empathy** – We seek to understand the lived experience of young people we work with. This means we must learn from them (and with them) about their lives and try to see the world as they see it. Working empathically takes conscious effort and must be practiced.
2. **Congruence** – We are 'real' with young people; The person we show them is the real us. This means, whilst maintaining appropriate professional boundaries, we give a bit of ourselves and done properly helps us to get more in return from young people.
3. **Unconditional Positive Regard** – We are not judgemental of the young people we work with or their behaviour and maintain a positive view of them whether or not they have done bad things. If poor behaviour comes from needs not being met, we can strive to understand and help meet these needs, but a person is not the sum value of their behaviour; young people are allowed to make mistakes and push boundaries – it is how they learn!

By consciously implementing these core conditions we can improve and develop our relationships with young people so they can learn and grow effectively when they are with us.

## 3. CODE OF CONDUCT

### 3.1 Overview

We have the privilege of working with some of the most interesting, unusual and potential-filled people in the world! In order to support them as best we can, our conduct needs to be appropriate and professional; this is how we inspire safe and transformational youth work.

### 3.2 Conduct at work

Whilst at work, we are committed and active professionals; We uphold high standards relating to how we behave with young people, with colleagues and with other members of the community. This involves good timekeeping, appropriate language, respectful and inclusive behaviour that reflects well upon the wider organisation as well as ourselves. Whether we would choose it or not, we are role models to those we work with.

### 3.3 Smoking & Drinking

These are perfectly legal, adult activities but out of consideration for their damage to health and to the community's perception of our professionalism, it is asked that staff and volunteers keep these separate from their work time when directly delivering with young people.

If you have been drinking or using substances the day of your youth work delivery, you may be sent home unpaid, even if sufficient time had passed for you to no longer be under the influence as it may be possible to smell alcohol/substances on you – this would be at the discretion of your manager.

If you have taken medication that may affect your performance, you must let your manager know in advance of delivery so that we can support you and get the best outcome for both you and our beneficiaries.

### 3.4 Online

The TDC has a social media policy that outlines appropriate online conduct in more detail. The abridged guidance would ask that:

- Staff and volunteers keep their personal online profiles locked down to an appropriate level so that young people and community members cannot view your personal information and photos.
- Staff and volunteers keep separate their online personal and professional lives. Adding and following young people to personal profiles is not permitted.
- Avoid adding 'friends' that you don't know in real life; others may see our friendship as an endorsement of a profile.
- Seek to only work online during normal office hours – this helps us all promote appropriate professional boundaries and expectations from young people on when we might be available.

### 3.5 Dress code

The nature of youth work is that we engage young people on their terms, correspondingly our dress code is very relaxed. However, care should be taken so that it is not possible to consider outfits as sexually suggestive or representing offensive/discriminatory language or ideas.

Avoid wearing clothing that promotes a particular political agenda when working with young people. Exploring political topics is good – pushing your own agenda upon others is not. Avoid wearing overtly party-political items whilst at work; the TDC must work effectively with all local political parties and anything that damages those relationships may be interpreted as a form of misconduct. If unsure, please check with your manager before wearing items to work.

## 4. SAFETY

### 4.1 Prior planning prevents particularly poor performance

**4.1.1 Risk assessments** are our way to demonstrate that we have thought ahead and considered the risks that may occur for any given activity. They must be completed by session leaders whenever a new risk is introduced. One assessment for each ongoing session is fine, but if a potentially hazardous activity is being introduced part way through then this needs to be added to the risk assessment. In the worst cases, when an accident happens and incidents go to court, the risk assessment may be used to demonstrate competence or negligence – they are critically important!

**4.1.2 Session Planning** is key to ensuring that we have thought through the necessary parts of what will happen during a session, including what the flashpoints could be. Have session plans ready alongside notes from the previous session and include the whole team in briefings.

### 4.2 During sessions

**4.2.1 Communication** - Managing safety during sessions is a challenging thing in youth work. We expect all staff to be vigilant to aspects of a session that might escalate and communicate with the rest of the staff team about these things. Communication is critical to anticipating and diffusing risky situations and ultimately keeping staff, volunteers, young people and members of the public safe.

**4.2.2 – Ratios** - Ratios for all group, club and detached activities and outings must be as follows, where at least half of the minimum number of staff/adult volunteers are paid staff members:

Number of Young People in attendance	Minimum number of staff/ Adult volunteers
1 – 16	2
17 – 24	3
25 – 32	4
33 – 40	5
41 - 48	6

If more young people keep arriving than we have capacity for because of worker ratios, this needs to be appropriately managed so that sessions remain safe for all and so that it can be demonstrated that policy was being followed in the event of an incident. The following methods of managing ratios could be applied:

- **Restrict** - More young people are prevented from joining the session – a worker remains on the door to stop additional people from joining.
- **Disgorge** - The session moves outside where it becomes easier to manage the dynamic and resources.
- **Close** - The session closes, and all young people must leave – staff also leave or move away to debrief.

Critically, in each case, action must be taken with primary consideration for the safety of staff, volunteers and young people.

**4.2.3 – 1:2:1 Work** – For you to conduct 1:2:1 work with young people where you are removed from a wider session, this must be discussed and agreed in advance with your line manager unless this is an explicit part of your job description. When taking individual young people to one side within a session you must let the session leader know that you are doing so and how long you expect to be. If possible, avoid being behind a closed door.

**4.2.4 – Drink & drugs** – The primary concern when young people are under the influence of substances is their safety and the safety of others. Officially, we support our sessions to be spaces where young people are free of alcohol and substances. In reality we know that young people will try to engage with our services whilst under the influence. Once the safety of a situation has been established, it may be that the course of action in the best interest for the young person is to have them stay, sober up, eat some food and discuss their use with staff. This non-judgemental approach allows young people to understand that they can come to us to discuss issues of substance use. However, we should continue to assert that substance use is wholly inappropriate at our sessions.

**4.2.5 – Weapons** - If a weapon is shown in conjunction with a threat to someone’s safety, the police should be informed, and steps taken to prevent harm to staff and attendees.

If an illegal weapon is shown calmly through conversation, then the person in question should be asked to leave and informed that we will advise the Police. If the staff team agree that this course of action would not be in the best interest of the young person then the team may decide but this **MUST** be followed up through discussion with line management and with the young person in question.

If it is disclosed that someone has a weapon, but it is not confirmed, then speak to the young person in question and explain the consequences of their actions if it were true.

**4.2.6 – Lifts for Young People** – It is usually inappropriate to give lifts to young people we work with. The exceptions for this are under circumstances where:

An explicit request is made to the young person's parent for each lift and is agreed in advance. The reason for the necessity of the lift is described clearly.

Ideally the worker is not alone in the car with a young person. If it is not possible to avoid this, then consider sitting the young person in the back where it is easier to avoid false allegations, should that be a risk.

### 4.3 Following up

We follow up as required – incident and safeguarding record of concern forms have a named person on them for actions.

If an accident occurs at one of our sessions or activities, the risk assessment may need to be updated to reflect new measures to ensure safety.

If staff require support following incidents that may have caused stress or triggered staff's own concerns, this should be brought up with your line manager in supervision where support can be offered.

## Section 5: EXCELLENT PRACTICE

### 5.1 Overview

We do our best work when our staff team feel valued, motivated and supported and they can see the work that they do is impactful and fulfilling. Communication forms a critical part of this and we strive to communicate as effectively as possible towards these aims.

### 5.2 General practice

- We put **young people's interests** before our own.
- We **represent the voices of young people** congruently – anything we say about them we should be able to say in front of them.
- We **proactively engage** in challenging and risky conversations as a way to promote learning and relationship development.
- We seek appropriate levels of **resource** to do the work effectively.
- We put **value on planning and evaluation** so that we can learn and get better.
- We have the **courage** to change direction when things aren't working.
- We try to work as a team and **problem solve together**, valuing the experience and insight of all team members.
- We **work openly and in partnership** where it best serves young people.
- We show **congruence, empathy** and **unconditional positive regard** to young people we work with.

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- We seek to work **creatively** and **involve young people** in exciting, new and challenging experiences.
- We believe in the benefits of **continual professional development** and seek out training to help us improve.
- We work **positively** and **enthusiastically** with **other organisations** in ways that support our mission.
- **Youth work is not a passive activity** – we plan for both intended and unintended learning.

### 5.3 During sessions

- We seek to **work as a team**, communicate effectively, and back each other up.
- We **arrive on time** and help to set up as a team. We seek out the work that needs to be done to feel ready and prepared for the session.
- We **clean and tidy up as a team** after sessions and commit time to evaluation that helps us learn and grow and better support emerging youth needs – we all **leave sessions together**, for safety purposes but also so that no one is left finishing all the last tasks.
- We make all **young people feel welcome and valued**. We do this by **acknowledging their arrival, using their names** and by trying to understand their behaviour to inform our responses.
- We actively **seek out those who are not as involved** to help them be/feel included.
- We have an **appropriate level of staffing** in each session and have conducted all the checks and risk assessments necessary to create safe yet exciting spaces for young people.
- We **ask open-ended questions** and **promote discussion and debate** that informs learning.
- We **seek out the fun** in what we do and present ourselves **positively** and **constructively** to young people and colleagues.
- We help young people to be aware and proud of the things they achieve through our youth work, **giving positive feedback** and encouraging social, creative, collaborative and responsible behaviours.

## Section 6: WELLBEING

### 6.1 Being well, staying well

The TDC will take joint responsibility with you for your wellbeing whilst at work. We hope that with our support through things like regular supervision meetings, team meetings, staff social events and session planning & debriefs, you will be well and stay well whilst working for TDC. We seek to take issues of mental ill health as seriously as those of physical ill health.

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## 6.2 What you can expect from TDC

We would like to create a workplace that listens and hears when there are issues with staff and volunteer wellbeing – please share issues that you may have, and we will work with you to find the best solution for all.

The TDC will seek to build in time throughout the year where the youth team can come together to look at elements of wellbeing and self-care. We will also plan social events that sees the team come together to let off some steam and grow our relationships outside of the work setting – we hope that you will want to be part of these optional events.

## 6.3 Positivity

Youth work can be quite a stressful job and staying positive is not always easy. When things go wrong, or young people's lives seem so troubled, or behaviour at the youth club has been difficult to manage – remember:

### **You are in a team!**

Expressing that you are finding something difficult is a strength. We have control of own reactions to these situations and how we manage them and how we follow up with self-care and support from each other. The TDC will provide ongoing supervision support from a line manager; this is an excellent place to bring the challenges, worries and anxieties and try to work through and change cycles of behaviour that cause sadness in the first place. Under certain circumstances, agreed through line-management, you may be able to access free clinical supervision on work-related matters through the TDC too.

# Section 7: MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

## 7.1 What is challenging behaviour?

Challenging behaviour is negative verbal/physical/emotional expression of an unmet need that disrespects others, the space or themselves.

## 7.2 Why manage challenging behaviour?

Young people are at a stage in their psychological development that is dependent on taking risks and pushing boundaries in order to learn. Combined with a host of contextual and/or individual needs that can manifest as challenging behaviours, we need to be well prepared to work with young people to manage those safely and in a way that they can progress and learn.

For those young people who have chaotic and disruptive lives, the enforcing of boundaries offers consistency and psychological safety. They may show disdain for it at the time but the safety our boundaries provide is meeting a very basic need – keep it up!

### 7.3 The 3-Strike System

Young people are actively encouraged to develop their own ground rules in sessions, in negotiation with workers. These should be realistic and manageable, so don't set yourself up to challenge every last swear word (for example) if this represents an unwinnable ongoing task.

Once a set of ground rules are in place, they should be displayed prominently and reinforced using a 3-strike system.

#### **Brief points on the 3-strike system:**

- Any staff member or volunteer can give out strikes for breaches of the ground rules.
- The system works when deployed consistently by all staff and when staff talk to each other about strikes given out. It may be that one staff member 'holds' all info on strikes given for the night and each time a member of staff gives one out, they report to the 'holder'.
- Illegal or unsafe behaviour could lead to a 'straight red' – where a young person is asked to leave straight away.
- Once a young person has 3 strikes they are asked to either leave the session straight away – if they choose not to leave then they will receive a ban for the following week.
- Where a young person has been banned they must speak to the lead worker on the session about their behaviour before being allowed back to the session.
- 3 bans in one year should lead to automatic 1-month ban. Ongoing issues related to safety may result in a longer ban.
- Where 1-month or longer bans are in place, staff should give additional support to the young person in the form of a letter home or a 1:2:1 meeting outside of the session.
- Any member of staff can revoke a strike **if** the outcome/learning from doing so is considered to be greater than if the strike were to be given.

### 7.4 Fights, weapons etc

Your safety is critical as a worker or volunteer. The TDC wouldn't have you put yourself at unnecessary risk but unfortunately, even after prior planning and risk assessment, things can escalate in unpredictable ways.

If you are present during a physical fight between young people, follow this suggested guide to find a resolution:

- Firstly, try to **stay calm**; you will be a lot more effective if you can rationalise what's going on and what your response should be.
- **Call the Police** – this should be offered in situations of violence/physical assault so that evidence can be gathered appropriately, witnesses handled effectively and should the matter progress to court, the TDC have been supportive to the process.

- **Use your voice** – this non-physical intervention may be enough for some fights to cease altogether.
- **Keep safe** – whilst the situation may be unsafe for the young people involved which makes us want to intervene in any way we can, you must avoid making yourself another casualty of the fight. Consider the levels of danger, your own physical stature and strength in relation to those fighting and only intervene physically if you know you can remain safe.
- Your intervention should be **informed by your relationship** – if you know them then they are more likely to be responsive to what you are saying and doing. If you don't know them, you won't necessarily appreciate all of the risks that might surround trying to break up an altercation with them. Will they be carrying a weapon? Will they accuse you of using the opportunity to handle them inappropriately?
- If **weapons** are involved or young people are **under the influence of drugs/alcohol** this changes the risk factors dramatically. Do not engage physically in these altercations, reduce the risks for as many people as possible – staff and young people and call the Police.
- Play fights, whilst often seen as a natural part of adolescent behaviour, should be managed and discouraged so that they don't escalate. Consider how they might look to members of the public and whether the play fighting is actually being used to assert power or control over someone.

## Section 8: LASTLY

### 8.1 Lastly

We really hope that you have found this handbook useful and clear. If there's anything that doesn't quite make sense or there's a whole subject that hasn't been covered that you think should be in here, please let us know. This handbook is intended to be iterative and develop over time to be the best it can be – much like us!

Thank you



**WE ❤️ YOUNG PEOPLE**