

OREGON YOUTH AUTHORITY

Policy Summary



Information on Professional Boundaries Between OYA Staff and Youth/Families

The following is only a summary of [OYA Policy 0-2.2 Relationships with Youth and Their Families](#). Please refer to the policy for full details and as the official policy record. For other policies, visit <https://www.oregon.gov/oia/aboutoia/pages/policies.aspx>.

At the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA), we prioritize safety, trust, and positive interactions between staff and the youth and families we serve. To ensure respectful and professional relationships, OYA has guidelines about how staff should interact with youth, former youth (defined below), and their families.

Why Are Professional Boundaries Important?

OYA staff work closely with youth and their families to support the youth's growth and reformation. However, it is important to maintain clear boundaries to:

- Ensure objectivity and fairness.
- Protect youth and staff from conflicts of interest.
- Build a safe, supportive environment for youth.

When Do These Guidelines Apply?

1. Before a Youth Enters OYA Custody

- If an OYA staff member already knows a youth or the youth's family before the youth enters OYA custody, they must inform their supervisor immediately.
- OYA will take steps to avoid any conflict of interest or favoritism.

2. During and After Custody

- OYA staff must maintain professional boundaries from the time they first meet a youth until the youth leaves OYA custody—and even for three years afterward if they stay in touch.
- Staff cannot develop personal or business relationships with youth, former youth, or their families. A "former youth" includes youth under 18 years old who are no longer in OYA's custody and youth 18 or older for up to three years after they leave OYA's custody or finish community supervision related to their case.
- Staff can continue professional relationships with former youth. This means that they can respond to former youth phone calls and emails using their OYA accounts if the topics discussed are related to their professional relationship. They must notify their supervisors when this happens.

What is Not Allowed?

To maintain professional boundaries, OYA staff are not allowed to:

- Have personal or romantic relationships with youth, former youth, or their families. This is because relationships may compromise staff and youth safety or objectivity. Romantic relationships with current youth are against the law.
- Business Relationships: Staff (and their immediate family members) cannot have business dealings with youth, former youth, or their families. This includes:
 - Lending or borrowing money.
 - Working together in any business, like being partners or giving business advice.
 - Exception: Staff can buy items made by youth through OYA's educational or vocational programs, as long as those items are sold to the general public in the same way.
 - If there is no choice but to have a business relationship (like in a small community), the staff member must fill out a conflict of interest notification for OYA.
- Give or receive gifts, money, or items.
- Share personal contact information (e.g., personal phone numbers, social media accounts).
- Involve youth in personal activities or business matters.
- Access or share confidential information about a youth without permission or business reason.

What Happens if There's a Conflict of Interest?

A conflict of interest is when a staff member's personal connection could impact their work with a youth or family. If this happens, the staff member must:

- Report it to their supervisor right away and fill out a conflict of interest notification.
- Avoid making decisions or accessing information about the youth or family involved.
- Work with their supervisor to make sure there is no bias or favoritism.

What About Social Media?

- Staff cannot connect with youth, former youth, or their families on personal social media accounts.
- If a staff member uses a professional social media account (like LinkedIn), they must get approval from their supervisor before connecting with youth or families.

Protecting Youth and Families

OYA is dedicated to protecting youth and supporting families by ensuring all interactions are professional, respectful, and focused on the youth's well-being. If you have any questions or concerns about staff interactions, please reach out to your youth's Juvenile Parole and Probation Officer (JPPO) or facility manager.

These guidelines help OYA create a positive, safe environment for all youth and families.