

**ORANGE COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY  
ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL**

**Subject: Rules of Conduct**

**Number: C 32**

**Approved:**

**Date: 05/19/09**

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**I. PURPOSE**

To establish guidelines for Social Services Agency (SSA) employees to avoid inappropriate conduct or relationships with clients, co-workers, supervisors, and persons in the community.

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**II. POLICY**

The agency goals and standards require the highest level of responsible service to the community and the workplace. SSA employees shall carry out their duties and responsibilities with integrity, honesty, sound judgment, courtesy, efficiency, and cultural sensitivity. Failure to follow the directives in this Policy and Procedure may result in disciplinary action including discharge

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**III. DEFINITIONS**

**Client-** any person, and any member of the person's immediate family who has applied for, or is receiving aid, or services from the Agency, or who has received aid, or direct services from the Agency within a two-year period.

**Co-worker-** any person currently employed in any agency, department, region, etc., by the County of Orange. This includes persons employed on a contractual basis, temporary-help employees, consultants, interns, vendors, and volunteers with the County of Orange.

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**IV. PROCEDURE**

**A. General Rules of Conduct**

SSA employees shall conduct themselves in the following manner related to the course and scope of their employment or work related functions by:

1. Respecting the dignity and worth of individuals.
2. Behaving in an honest and trustworthy manner.
3. Maintaining the confidentiality of information including but not limited to records, conversations, and other information gained in the course of their employment.
4. Using sound judgment in all relationships with SSA clients, co-workers, and the community.
5. Dealing with clients, co-workers, and the public in a courteous and professional manner.
6. Understanding and following SSA and applicable County policies, procedures, and directives.
7. Understanding and following applicable professional standards.

B. Examples of Inappropriate Actions

The following are examples of inappropriate actions. The list is not inclusive of all actions that are inappropriate for SSA employees.

1. Financial Misconduct
  - a. Sharing housing as a roommate, landlord, or renter with a client.
  - b. Purchasing, renting, or leasing goods, or services from a client or for a client, unless authorized to do so within the scope of one's job.
  - c. Giving money or other items of value to a client unless authorized to do so within the scope of one's job.
  - d. Selling to or influencing a client to purchase goods or services from which the employee benefits.
  - e. Receiving financial compensation or other consideration for the referral of an Agency client to another organization or individual.
2. Inappropriate Social Relationship
  - a. Soliciting, establishing, or maintaining a social or sexual relationship with a client.
  - b. Engaging in sexual conduct or inappropriate physical contact with a client, co-worker, or member of the community where the conduct is related to one's ability to perform one's job duties.
  - c. Transporting clients except as authorized by supervisor or job description.
  - d. Continuing contact with a client after client's case or dependency has been terminated.
3. Abuse of One's Position or Authority
  - a. Using a County position to exploit or extract favors, money, or other things of value from anyone.
  - b. Using confidential information acquired by virtue of County employment for one's own or another's gain or advantage.
  - c. Using one's position with the County outside the scope of one's employment to advocate for an issue, client, co-worker, or member of the community.
  - d. Threatening a client with retaliation if the client submits a complaint to the agency about the employee.
  - e. Discriminating against a client, co-worker, or member of the community because of the person's race, religion, color, sex, age, ethnicity, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, organizational affiliation, or sexual orientation.
  - f. Misappropriating, causing willful or negligent destruction or unlawfully taking County equipment, property or supplies, or property of clients, co-workers, or members of the community.
  - g. Accepting money or other consideration by an employee from any person, except the County, for the performance of an act which the employee would be required, or expected to render in the regular course of hours of his/her County employment, or as a part of his/her duties as a County employee.
  - h. Using one's influence, or power to aid, or hinder another in the employment setting or situation because of a personal relationship (nepotism).\*
4. Disclosing Confidential Information  
Except as otherwise required by law, failing to maintain confidentiality of SSA client information or other confidential information regardless of whether it has been received directly from a client or co-worker, overheard or obtained from a test, applications or other means.
5. Committing Any Dishonest, Corrupt or Fraudulent Act
  - a. Encouraging or assisting in the falsification of program eligibility information. This applies to programs not only administered by this Agency, but by other government departments and agencies.
  - b. Being dishonest in a job hiring test, including but not limited to, unauthorized possession, use or distribution of examination material.

- c. Submitting false time or financial records (e.g., time sheets, mileage).
  - d. Falsifying, concealing, removing, mutilating, or unauthorized destruction of County reports or documents.
  - e. Intentionally withholding information from superiors.
  - f. Intentionally issuing benefits, or authorizing, or providing services to an individual who the employee knows or should have known is ineligible for the services.
  - g. Using items that belong to or donated to the county for distribution to clients for personal gain without authorization.
  - h. Falsifying and/or omitting information in any court report(s) or court related document(s).
  - i. Submitting false educational or work history information on any County employment application.
6. Abusive or Inappropriate Verbal or Physical Behavior
- a. Engaging in a physical confrontation or using abusive, or threatening language.
  - b. Possessing firearms, other weapons, or objects intended to be used as weapons. Possession shall include on one's person, in one's vehicle, or anywhere in a County facility.
  - c. Being involved in any act of sexual abuse or battery with a client, co-worker, or member of the community or committing an act punishable as a sexually related crime.
  - d. Causing physical or emotional harm to a client, co-worker or member of the community either intentionally or through negligent performance of one's job.
7. Professional Misconduct
- a. Committing an act that brings discredit to the agency.
  - b. Providing false or intentionally inaccurate information in court reports and/or other case documentation.
  - c. Being convicted for a crime related to the duties and responsibilities of the agency employee.
  - d. Being grossly negligent or grossly incompetent in the performance of County duties.
  - e. Misrepresenting of professional qualifications, special status, or affiliations to a client, co-worker, SSA, or member of the community.
  - f. Attempting to impose on or solicit support from clients for personal, political, or religious beliefs.
  - g. Purchasing, storing, offering, selling, or sharing in the consumption of any controlled substance or illegal drug with a client, co-worker, or member of the community.
  - h. During working hours, attempting to date or establish a social relationship with a person conducting business at a SSA facility.
  - i. Providing services or assistance, or influencing any co-worker to provide services or assistance, to any person known to the employee from outside the scope of his/her employment.
8. Unauthorized Facility Access
- a. Using key cards to access or provide access to others in SSA facility for non-county related business or activities.
  - b. Being present in SSA facility during non-working hours, except as authorized by supervisor or job description.
  - c. Using County equipment to run criminal background/Department of Motor Vehicle checks for personal use.
- C. Reporting Conflict or Unacceptable Conduct

1. Employee  
In the event an employee becomes involved in a relationship or activity that has been or could be prohibited by this procedure, the employee shall immediately inform his/her first line supervisor. The employee shall indicate whether the conflict has ended or request in writing an exemption to continue the relationship. Unintentional social contact with a client must be immediately reported to employee's supervisor, an appropriate manager or, SSA Human Resources and Career Development (HRCDC). If an employee is in doubt about whether a report needs to be filed he/she should consult with a supervisor or SSA HRCDC. No disciplinary action will be taken for unintentional social contact that is reported immediately.
2. Supervisor
  - a. Upon obtaining knowledge that a potential violation of this policy and procedure may exist, supervisors are responsible for immediately advising their manager and investigating the circumstances of the alleged violation. Supervisors should be cognizant of an employee's right to union representation when being questioned for potential disciplinary action. When discussing the situation with the employee, as soon as the supervisor determines there may be cause for disciplinary action, the supervisor will immediately stop the meeting and the appropriate Program or Regional Manager and SSA HRCDC shall be consulted.
  - b. If a supervisor receives a request for an exemption, the supervisor shall make his/her recommendations and forward through the chain of command to the Division Director for determination.
  - c. The supervisor shall direct the employee requesting the exemption as to any actions necessary to avoid an actual violation of this policy and procedure. The supervisor and management, if necessary, shall adjust case assignment and take other necessary actions to avoid an actual violation while the exemption is reviewed.
  - d. Based on the Division Director's decision regarding the exemption, the supervisor shall inform the employee of the necessary and appropriate conduct and shall verify that the employee understands the direction given.
3. Division Director  
Upon receiving a request for exemption from the supervisor via the chain of command, the Division Director shall determine whether to grant or deny the requested exemption. The basis for granting an exemption shall be that the relationship does not create conflict or appropriate mitigation will be taken to avoid a conflict. The Division Director shall provide a written response to the employee. A copy of an approved exemption shall be forwarded to the SSA Director and to SSA HRCDC to be filed in the employee's HRCDC file. The decision shall be communicated to the employee in a timely manner.

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## V. REFERENCES

Administrative Policies and Procedures Manual, P&P C 30, Conflict of Interest

Administrative Policies and Procedures Manual, P&P I 6, Use of E-mail, Personal Computers, and other SSA Computer Resources

\*\* "Personal relationships" include, but are not limited to, associations with individuals by blood, adoption, marriage, and/or cohabitation; e.g., husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, grandparent, grandchild, uncle, aunt, first cousin, nephew, niece, in-laws, stepfather, stepmother, stepson, stepdaughter, stepbrother, stepsister, half brother, half sister, and two people living together outside of marriage. (see Administrative Policies and Procedures C28)