STEP IN SUPPORT SERVICES

Staff Code of Conduct & Professional Boundaries

Supporting Reintegration Every Step of the Year

Policy owner	Step In Support Services Directors
Approved by	Directors
Version	1.0
Effective from	October 2026
Review due	October 2027 or earlier if guidance/legislation changes

1. Purpose and scope

This code sets the expected standard of professional behaviour for everyone representing Step In. It is particularly important because our model involves intensive 1:1 work, therapeutic relationships, outreach and contact with families.

This policy applies to all Step In directors, employees, sessional practitioners, associates, volunteers and contractors. It applies to work delivered in schools, homes, community venues, online where agreed, and other off-site locations.

Step In supports young people aged 11-18 through bespoke reintegration programmes combining attendance and engagement work, therapeutic/wellbeing support, educational support, social and personal development, family liaison and multi-agency working.

2. Expected conduct

- Act in the young person's best interests and maintain respectful, non-discriminatory relationships.
- Keep relationships professional, boundaried and focused on agreed outcomes.
- Use language, humour and behaviour appropriate to a professional relationship with a child.
- Work within competence, qualifications and agreed role; seek supervision or specialist input when required.
- Record and report safeguarding, attendance, risk and significant incidents promptly.
- Avoid favouritism, dependency, secrecy or relationships that could be perceived as exploitative.

3. Communication, Online Contact and Remote Working

The same standards of professional conduct and boundaries apply to remote and online work as to face-to-face intervention.

- Practitioners must use Step In or commissioner-approved professional communication channels wherever possible.
- Practitioners must not add, follow or accept young people on personal social-media accounts or communicate with young people through personal social media or disappearing-message services for casework.
- Remote sessions must take place through agreed professional platforms and form part of the young person’s agreed Step In support arrangements.
- Practitioners must conduct remote sessions from an appropriate professional environment that protects confidentiality and maintains professional boundaries.
- Language, appearance and behaviour during remote sessions must remain professional and appropriate to the practitioner’s role.
- Contact outside scheduled sessions or agreed working hours should only take place where there is a legitimate service reason and through agreed professional channels.
- Parents/carers and commissioning schools should understand how routine and remote communication will operate, while respecting the young person’s confidentiality, safeguarding needs and the nature of any therapeutic work.
- Practitioners must maintain clear boundaries around their availability and ensure young people understand how and when Step In practitioners can be contacted. Step In does not provide an emergency or crisis-response service.
- Practitioners must not photograph, screenshot or record a young person during remote intervention unless there is an exceptional and legitimate professional reason, appropriate authorisation has been obtained and relevant safeguarding and data-protection requirements have been considered.
- Any communication or behaviour during remote work that raises a safeguarding concern must be recorded and reported in accordance with Step In’s Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy.
- Where a young person becomes dependent on, seeks inappropriate personal contact with, or attempts to move communication outside agreed professional channels, the practitioner must maintain appropriate boundaries and seek supervision or management guidance where necessary.

4. Therapeutic and counselling boundaries

- Explain the purpose of the work, confidentiality and its limits at the outset.
- Do not promise secrecy.
- Do not practise beyond competence or present therapeutic mentoring as a clinical service where it is not one.
- Use appropriate professional supervision for counselling/therapeutic work.
- Where needs exceed Step In's remit, discuss referral/escalation with the young person, family and commissioner as appropriate.

5. Gifts, money, transport and personal arrangements

- Do not lend or borrow money from young people or families.
- Gifts should be modest, transparent and consistent with organisational expectations; significant gifts must be declared.
- Transporting a young person must be specifically authorised, risk assessed and covered by appropriate insurance; it is not assumed as part of the service.
- Practitioners must not invite young people to their own homes or arrange private contact outside Step In's service.

6. Physical contact

Physical contact must be appropriate, necessary, proportionate and sensitive to the young person's needs and wishes. Practitioners should avoid contact that could be misinterpreted. Any significant physical intervention or incident must be recorded and reported.

7. Concerns about colleagues

Practitioners must report conduct that may breach safeguarding or professional standards. No person will be penalised for raising a genuine concern in good faith.