



# Academy for Autism

## School & Therapy Clinic

A 501(C) (3) Organization

11 East Lancaster Road, Orlando, FL 32809

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## Standards of Ethical Conduct

At Academy for Autism, we are committed to fostering a safe, inclusive, and empowering environment for all students, staff, and families. Our ethical standards reflect the values we uphold as educators, caregivers, and advocates for neurodiverse learners.

### 1. Core Values and Guiding Principles

We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. Our mission is rooted in:

- The pursuit of truth and academic excellence.
- The acquisition of meaningful knowledge.
- The cultivation of democratic citizenship and personal responsibility.
- The protection of the right to learn and teach freely.
- The guarantee of equal opportunity for all, regardless of background or ability.

These principles guide our daily decisions, interactions, and long-term vision for our school community.

### 2. Commitment to Student Safety, Growth, and Integrity

Our foremost responsibility is to protect and nurture the well-being and potential of every student. All employees are expected to:

- Prioritize student safety, both physical and emotional.
- Demonstrate integrity, professionalism, and sound judgment.
- Engage in continuous professional development to better serve our students.
- Maintain appropriate boundaries and uphold trust in all student relationships.

#### *Grooming and Boundary Violations*

Academy for Autism enforces a zero-tolerance policy for grooming and inappropriate boundary-crossing. These behaviors are unethical, harmful, and strictly prohibited.

- **Definition of Grooming:** Grooming is a calculated process used to manipulate and exploit trust for abusive purposes. It may initially appear as mentorship or care but is intended to gain inappropriate access to a student or group.
- **Examples of Grooming Behaviors** (including but not limited to):
  - Seeking excessive or secretive one-on-one time with a student.
  - Disregarding supervision protocols, such as the “Two-Adult” rule.

- Offering or requesting physical contact that is unnecessary, overly familiar, or concealed from others.

All staff are expected to recognize, report, and prevent grooming behaviors. Training will be provided to ensure full understanding of these risks.

### **3. Ethical Responsibilities Toward Students**

Instructional personnel must uphold the highest standards of care and professionalism in their interactions with students. Specifically, they shall:

- Make reasonable efforts to protect students from conditions harmful to learning, mental health, physical safety, or emotional well-being.
- Encourage independent thinking and support diverse perspectives.
- Present academic content truthfully and without distortion.
- Avoid actions that cause embarrassment, ridicule, or emotional harm.
- Respect and uphold students' legal rights and privacy.
- Prevent and report any form of harassment or discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, political beliefs, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, or family background.
- Never exploit student relationships for personal gain or advantage.
- Maintain confidentiality of personally identifiable information unless disclosure is legally required or professionally justified.
- Ensure that all employees and volunteers have FBI fingerprint clearance prior to working with students.

### **4. Professional Conduct Toward Colleagues and the Community**

Employees of Academy for Autism must maintain respectful, ethical, and collaborative relationships with colleagues, families, and the broader community. This includes:

- Practicing honesty and transparency in all professional dealings.
- Avoiding discrimination in access to professional benefits, opportunities, or organizational participation.
- Respecting the civil and political rights of all colleagues.
- Preventing harassment or conduct that disrupts professional responsibilities or creates a hostile, intimidating, or abusive environment.
- Refraining from malicious, defamatory, or knowingly false statements about colleagues.

We believe that a culture of mutual respect and accountability strengthens our school and enhances our ability to serve students effectively.

## **Training Requirements**

All instructional personnel, support staff, and administrators are required to complete ethics training as a condition of employment. Training will include:

- In-depth education on grooming prevention and boundary awareness.
- Procedures for reporting misconduct and abuse.
- Additional modules as directed by the Director or designated leadership team.

Training is designed to ensure that all staff are equipped to uphold our ethical standards and respond appropriately to concerns.

## **Reporting Misconduct**

Academy for Autism maintains a zero-tolerance policy for misconduct that jeopardizes the health, safety, or welfare of students. All employees are required to report violations, including but not limited to:

- Use of obscene or inappropriate language
- Drug or alcohol use on campus
- Disparaging or prejudiced remarks
- Sexual innuendo or suggestive behavior
- Cheating or testing violations
- Physical aggression or threats
- Offering or accepting favors that compromise professional boundaries

### **Report employee misconduct to:**

- Zulma Rivas-Vetell, Director – 917-518-7942
- Gabriell Major, Assistant Director – 772-341-2495

### **Report administrator misconduct to:**

- Casie Cruz, HR Administrator – 407-569-6882

Legally sufficient allegations involving Florida-certified educators will be reported to the Office of Professional Practices Services. Reporting procedures are posted in the kitchen bulletin board and on our website: [academyforautism.org/home.aspx](http://academyforautism.org/home.aspx)

## **Reporting Abuse, Abandonment, or Neglect**

All employees and agents have a legal and ethical duty to report suspected child abuse, abandonment, or neglect.

- Call: 1-800-96-ABUSE
- Online: <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/abuse/report/>

## Recognizing Abuse

- **Physical Abuse:** Unexplained bruises, burns, broken bones, fearfulness, aggression, or attempts to hide injuries.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Pain or discomfort in genital areas, sexually transmitted infections, inappropriate sexual behavior or knowledge, fear of specific individuals.
- **Neglect:** Poor hygiene, lack of supervision, untreated medical needs, frequent hunger, or excessive need for adult attention.

A single sign may not be conclusive, but patterns of behavior or physical indicators must be taken seriously and reported immediately.

## Legal Protections

- Individuals who report abuse in good faith are protected from civil or criminal liability under Florida Statute 39.203.
- Employers who disclose employee information to prospective employers are immune from liability unless the information is proven to be knowingly false or discriminatory under Florida Statute 768.095.

## Disciplinary Action

Violations of this Code of Ethics will result in disciplinary action, which may include:

- Written warnings
- Immediate corrective measures
- Termination of employment or contract

Academy for Autism is committed to maintaining a safe and ethical workplace. All staff are expected to uphold these standards without exception.

## Acknowledgment

I acknowledge that I have received, read, and understand the Academy for Autism Code of Ethics. I agree to comply with all policies, standards, and procedures outlined herein and understand that failure to do so may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

**Employee Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Title:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Supervisor Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Title:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_