

#ABCConduct

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Educators have a visible place in their communities. The choices they make, even when well-intended, can affect their jobs, families, schools and profession. The Ohio Department of Education, Ohio Education Association and Ohio Federation of Teachers, supported by BASA, OASSA and OAESA, offer this series of tip sheets on how to recognize situations that can get good educators in trouble.

Athletic coaches, music directors and club advisors make a life-shaping impact on their students, but they also face unique situations. They often spend long hours with students, interact with them outside school and manage public funds. These scenarios present added professional risks.

When a Good Coach Goes Afoul

Darren Burwell just got his first education job teaching ninth grade and coaching high school basketball. He wants his players to like him, so he decides to relate to them at their level. He notices the seniors gave all the freshman nicknames like Beiber, McLovin' and Dumbo. Believing it will help team bonding, Coach also uses these nicknames.

The season is going well, but Coach Burwell notices some players start

slacking. When he catches a group of players skipping weight lifting, he yells, "You bunch of sissies don't give a rat about your team." The group doesn't miss another weight-lifting session.

One day, Dumbo asks Coach Burwell for a ride to the game in his car. Coach agrees; he is proud of the connection he is making with his players.

During the season, Coach Burwell

collects money from parents to throw an end-of-season team banquet. He deposits the money in the school's basketball account. In the meantime, his car windshield shatters, and he won't have the cash to repair it until his next paycheck. He uses some of the banquet money to replace the windshield then refunds it as soon as his paycheck comes. At the end of the season, the banquet goes off without a hitch.

Where did Coach go Wrong?

The basketball season was a success for Coach, but it could have ended badly. Many of his choices could have put his licenses at risk:

- Foul 1:** Coach should have used caution when calling students by nicknames. Coaches, directors and advisors may think nicknames promote team spirit, but they may be contributing unintentionally to hazing or bullying.
- Foul 2:** Coach shouldn't have called the students "sissies" or any derogatory name, even when trying to motivate or reprimand students. Coaches, directors and advisors should never disparage their students.
- Foul 3:** Coach shouldn't have given the student a ride in his car. Coaches, directors and advisors should follow all district policies and get parental approval before transporting students. This promotes student safety and guarantees proper student-teacher boundaries.
- Foul 4:** Coach should not have "borrowed" basketball funds. He could face criminal charges. Coaches, directors and advisors should follow district policies, manage team or club funds transparently and keep accurate records.



DO's & DON'Ts

—with—
Crystal Clear



- ✔ **DO** remember the Licensure Code of Professional Conduct applies to coaches, directors and advisors, 24/7.
- ✔ **DO** plan all travel with safety and professional standards in mind.
- ✔ **DO** collect money and carefully manage funds following district and booster guidelines.
- ✔ **DO** give your supervisor and parents a schedule showing when, where and how you plan to interact with students.
- ✔ **DO** use only open-group messaging that your school leader and the parents can see.

- ❌ **DON'T** transport a student alone in your personal car, regardless of gender.
- ❌ **DON'T** try to motivate by ridiculing, disparaging or name-calling.
- ❌ **DON'T** make purchases, encourage or cover for students using illegal or performance-enhancing substances including nutritional supplements.
- ❌ **DON'T** fail to report any bullying, hazing, abuse, neglect or threats by students or other school staff.

Play it Safe!

A softball player asks her pitching coach for an unscheduled evening session. Fair or Foul?

Foul:

Remember your risks when interacting with an individual student, especially outside scheduled hours.

A French Club member texts Madame at 11 p.m. about the next club field trip. Should Madame respond? Oui or Non?

Non:

Do not text individual students. This violates student-teacher boundaries.

A student invites the art club advisor to a community art show he has entered. Van Gogh or Van No?

Van Gogh:

Go have fun and support the student, but be sure to follow any relevant district policies.

Parents invite the drama club advisor to use their ski house for a weekend vacation. To ski or not to ski?

Not to Ski:

Say "No, thank you." Don't accept any gift that would suggest favoritism, now or ever.

A violinist regularly asks her orchestra director for relationship advice. Play or Rest?

Rest:

Don't become overly involved in students' personal matters. You are an educator, not a best friend.