

## **Ridhwan Guidelines for Community Conduct**

**In the spirit of our love for the truth and love for our path, we offer you the following guidelines, which were written by both students and teachers for all members of the Ridhwan School community. It is our sincere hope that these guidelines will create a holding environment that is clear, resilient and in alignment with the truth for the School and all of its members.**

### **The Purpose of Guidelines for Community Conduct**

These guidelines are meant to be a support for our community in the following ways:

- By illuminating how our behaviors, actions and interactions can be an expression of mature and conscientious relating as we more deeply align with the qualities and dimensions of true nature.
- By providing a basis for our personal reflection on what kinds of actions and interactions enhance the values of the teaching we all cherish, and what actions and interactions are counterproductive to the creation and sustenance of a mature and mutually respectful spiritual community.
- By fostering a sense of shared responsibility for our communal field in service of the unfoldment of truth as we inquire into our experience and interact with one another.
- By inviting all members of our community to contemplate how we can each uniquely contribute to our evolving community as well as benefit from it.

### **The Need for Guidelines for Community Conduct**

Throughout history, anywhere humans gather, including in spiritual communities, there arise interpersonal difficulties and conflicts that cannot be avoided or resolved only by doing inner work and adhering to spiritual practices. Despite our best efforts and however realized we might be, we humans are vulnerable to reactivity and conscious or unconscious acting out. It happens that we can be inconsiderate, disrespectful, and hurtful to others, either intentionally or unintentionally. The creation of these guidelines is intended to support the field of the teaching and its practitioners as we develop a deeper inner conscience and a capacity to interact harmoniously with one another as a spiritual community.

In our school , we come from different countries, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, religious imprints, types of families; we are different races, ages, genders, sexual orientations; we live with different disabilities and privileges; we come from different financial, political and social contexts. We recognize in our teachings that every person and every aspect of our environment

(physical, social and cultural) is ultimately an expression of true nature and deserves to be treated with respect, care and understanding. But sometimes our differences can also make it difficult to appreciate and understand each other, and our perceptions, views, emotions and actions are often filtered through our own histories, obscurations and personal limitations, as well as being influenced by various kinds of group dynamics. The richness and complexity of our community coupled with our shared love to know and to live the deepest truths call for standards of behavior that can guide us individually and collectively as we learn and develop as human beings capable of real relationships.

## The Principles of Guidelines for Community Conduct

Our path and practices are already imbued with a shared culture of spiritual courtesy known in our school as *adab*, which supports the context in which the teaching is received and practiced. We recognize that our actions have an impact on others and on the whole environment. Examples of *adab* include arriving to meetings on time, being in silence before meditation, respecting confidentiality, not analyzing or attacking each other, not consuming alcohol or other recreational drugs before or during meetings, etc.<sup>1</sup>

The following guidelines are both an application and an extension of our culture of *adab*. They apply to all interactions between Ridhwan community members both within the scope of teaching activities and outside them, whether the interactions are in-person or virtual. In addition to these guidelines of conduct, the Ridhwan Foundation has also established ethical guidelines for teachers.<sup>2</sup> Teachers are held to even higher standards of conduct with more specific considerations because of their particular roles and responsibilities in the school.

The core principles that orient and guide the operation of the school and our behavior as individuals are implicitly informed by true nature. In our community, the following principles from our teaching are particularly useful: **truth, freedom, life, heart, and discriminating intelligence**. These principles are more fully articulated in the school's Visioning Document<sup>3</sup>, and have specific relevance to the area of community conduct as follows.

Love of **truth** and a steadfast commitment to it are fundamental values of the Ridhwan School. We want to function and interact with truthfulness, sincerity, and integrity. In our actions and interactions we intend to practice the 'wisdom of right living' to the best of our ability, and endeavor to express what we know to be the deepest truth of our nature, while also being mindful of context and specific circumstances.

We want to support and respect the personal and unique qualities each individual has realized and naturally expresses as an outflow of his or her **freedom** and autonomy. Autonomy includes taking personal responsibility for our actions and respecting appropriate boundaries in our

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<sup>1</sup> Overview <https://www.diamondapproach.org/page/adab-overview>

<sup>2</sup> Ethical Guidelines for Teachers <https://www.diamondapproach-org.s3.amazonaws.com/Ethical%20Guidelines%20for%20Ridhwan%20Teachers%20-%20What%20Students%20Need%20To%20Know.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Visioning Document [The Ridhwan School Visioning Document](#)

interactions. Our love for personal freedom is naturally aligned with the realization that the other human beings we interact with deserve our utmost care and respect.

We want to live and operate responsively in ways that enhance **life** according to the true needs of the situation, thus embodying and manifesting life's vibrancy and optimizing creativity.

We want human **heartfulness** to inform and guide our interactions and decision-making, so that we function with love, courage, compassion, sincerity, attunement, and selflessness. We value inquiring into any obstacles that keep our heart closed or our actions devoid of heart, as much as working with and through disagreements and conflict with one another to resolve misunderstandings and bring about greater harmony.

**Discriminating intelligence** helps to guide the expression of wisdom, objectivity, and efficiency in our actions. It leads us to value differences and to appreciate subtlety and creative discovery. It guides us in our explorations, both internal and in contact with one another, for instance when we explore how our actions and interactions can be inspired by true conscience rather than dictated by our superego.

While it may not always be possible to express these principles in their fullness, we are committed to doing our best to live, act, and operate according to them. We endeavor to take personal responsibility for our interactions and expressions, and to value and uphold presence, integrity and respect for ourselves and each other.

## Categories of Unacceptable Behaviors

Although we intend to align our behavior with the core principles that reflect the values of our teaching, we also need to acknowledge that we are human beings who make mistakes and are not always conscious of our intentions and actions. Therefore, we also need to explicitly agree on what kinds of behaviors are not acceptable.

In these guidelines, we recognize and delineate two categories of unacceptable behaviors between or among community members:

- *inappropriate behaviors* occurring within or outside of the teaching situation that do not reflect spiritual courtesy and need to be recognized and inquired into rather than acted out. These include behaviors like being disruptive to or disrespectful of others, the teaching space or the teaching.
- *prohibited behaviors* that are unethical and/or are clearly unacceptable to the wider community as well as to members of our community.

There are situations in which these two categories may overlap or form a continuum without a clear delineation. A behavior that begins as inappropriate and is not addressed by the individual and/or the community may develop into a prohibited behavior. Sometimes the entire context of the specific situation may need to be considered to determine in which category a particular behavior belongs.

These are behaviors that are often unconscious and have adverse effects on ourselves, others, and our community as a whole. Usually such behaviors stand out in contrast to conduct and interactions that are generally recognized as integrous, considerate and respectful. We have an established community consisting of our peers and our teachers who can support and guide us in recognizing these behaviors. Our central practice of inquiry can help us to explore and work through the underlying issues.

## **EXAMPLES OF INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS**

The following lists are not exhaustive, but are meant to illustrate different kinds of inappropriate and/or prohibited behavior.

- Attempting to assert one's power over another community member or group of community members for personal gain. This could include psychological, emotional, social, sexual, political, professional or financial situations.
- Engaging in sexual contact or conduct in any and all forms with another member of the Ridhwan School without consent. Consent involves mutual agreement, awareness of context, timely negotiation and clear communication among parties. Also, students should be mindful about the appropriateness of expressing sexual or erotic thoughts, desires or gestures toward, or in the company of, a fellow student without agreement and consent to do so.

*Regarding physical touch one needs to be sensitive to the fact that there are different cultural and individual norms and habits about what is appropriate and what is not. A gesture that may seem like a natural physical expression of affection to one person may be felt as inappropriate and boundary crossing to another, depending also on the context and the moment.*

- Personally harassing, attacking, disparaging, discriminating, dismissing, victimizing or vilifying another individual or group either inside or outside the school on any grounds, including race, sexual orientation or gender identification, disability, cultural affiliation, or political affiliation. This includes bullying, mobbing, gossiping, intentional misrepresentation of a person's views or character. It could also include behavior where negativity is being expressed indirectly, for instance by excluding, ignoring, 'forgetting', withholding, etc.
- Breaching the confidentiality of individual or group processes, such as making public the specifics of another student's or group of students' personal process without their consent.

*The confidentiality rule does not apply in the relationship of any student with their private, small group or large group teachers. Students should feel free to openly inquire with their teachers. Also, as stated in the Information Statement signed by each student, teachers can consult with other teachers about their students if needed.*

- Acting out in a way that disrupts the teaching or teaching field.

- Being disrespectful of community members in online settings. This includes sending inappropriate private messages, pinning videos not for teaching purposes but as a way to impinge on the privacy of another, taking screenshots without consent, etc.
- Using Diamond Approach events and activities to actively solicit recruitment for other purposes without permission.
- Using group or school contact lists without permission for any purpose not directly relevant to the activities of the Ridhwan School.
- Soliciting money, gifts, favors, or obtaining information that is designed to engage others in financial or business dealings unrelated to the Ridhwan School.
- Violating school policies regarding the use and distribution of teaching materials and recordings, such as sharing recordings or transcripts with non-school members, with members who have not received those teachings, or with people who haven't paid for those teachings.<sup>4</sup>
- Enabling, assisting, or being complicit in inappropriate behaviors.
- Obstructing both formal and/or informal attempts to address inappropriate or prohibited behavior.

## **EXAMPLES OF PROHIBITED BEHAVIORS**

These are behaviors that are objectively harmful, and it is essential that our Ridhwan community recognize these behaviors, which include physical, sexual, verbal, and psychological harassment. Although clearly defining objectively harmful behavior is not always easy, it is imperative, and some kind of response or action is necessary. The following lists examples of prohibited behaviors.

- Sexual abuse, assault, or harassment of any kind. Persistent sexual misconduct is also prohibited. [See Inappropriate Behaviors second point, above]
- Physical abuse or harassment of any kind.
- Targeted, persistent or pervasive verbal abuse or harassment; victimization, vilification, threats, intimidation, or coercion of an individual or group for any reason, including, but not limited to, race, sexual orientation, gender identification, disability, political affiliation. [See Inappropriate Behaviors third point, above]
- Any violation of personal privacy by making an audio and/or visual recording of a community member without that person's express consent, using it for unethical purposes and/or sharing it without that person's knowledge and consent.
- Soliciting money, gifts and/or favors, or obtaining information that is designed to engage others in illegal financial or business dealings.
- Assisting any of the above behavior.

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<sup>4</sup>Teaching Library Policy <https://www.diamondapproach.org/page/teaching-library-policy>

## Recommendations and Resources

Community members have both the power and the responsibility to contribute to developing the field of this teaching through their conduct in relation to themselves, their teachers, their fellow students, their environments, and all those who support our work and our school.

Our practices help us to develop a robust capacity for being present with conflict or discomfort, in general, and also with judgments and feelings we may have about people and circumstances that we perceive in a negative light. In these situations, right action includes inquiring into one's own reactions, motivations and conditioning, and taking responsibility for our own positions and projections.

In some situations, however, right action also includes taking appropriate actions to respond to particular circumstances or even to defend ourselves and the group field when necessary. If you are directly involved in a situation that you perceive as inappropriate or prohibited, or if you see or hear something that concerns you, both teachers and students carry a certain responsibility, and need to feel empowered to address the situation by openly discussing what is inappropriate or unacceptable conduct.

Depending on the nature of the situation, there are a number of processes and resources available to you as a member of the school. Plus, new ways of self-organizing and responding may spontaneously arise as circumstances require. For example, some groups have already created structures that offer guidance and help to one another in different areas, and mature communication could be one of the focal points of such communal support.

In any case, an initial step would be to aim to resolve the issue between and among those involved directly, potentially with assistance from teachers and peers. Then, if the situation remains unresolved after taking whatever steps are possible, and utilizing the resources that are most readily available in any given situation, the exploration and/or investigation into inappropriate or prohibited behaviors could further involve:

- Asking facilitation from CARE. Communication Assistance Resource for Everyone (CARE) is a joint student-teacher volunteer initiative to offer anyone in the school help with interpersonal conflict. The aim of a CARE process is not to arrive at a final assessment of what exactly occurred, to place blame, or to impose consequences but to assist community members to arrive at mutually workable outcomes.<sup>5</sup>
- Consulting with the Central Review Committee (CRC), which handles ethical breaches by teachers, and might be able to assist if the situation is beyond the scope of CARE.<sup>6</sup>
- Engaging law enforcement agencies when a situation is beyond the skills or authority of the structures and resources of the Ridhwan School or Foundation.

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<sup>5</sup> CARE <https://www.diamondapproach.org/group-home/14821>

<sup>6</sup> CRC <https://www.diamondapproach.org/page/welcome-central-review-committee-crc>

In principle, in any resolution process or investigation, confidentiality will be maintained within the circle of people who are involved, including those who participate in the resolution process or investigation in an advisory or problem-solving role. However, at some point it may be necessary to waive confidentiality when circumstances require disclosure beyond this circle.

Engaging in inappropriate or prohibited behaviors and/or refusing to participate in school processes and procedures to address these behaviors may result in further actions such as suspension from small group and/or big group, and/or termination of membership and participation in Ridhwan School functions.

**The students and teachers who have developed and refined these guidelines have done so out of care and love for all members of our school. We hope these guidelines will be understood and embraced as part of our collective, ongoing practice, will contribute to a continued awakening and embodiment of our values, and will support a rich and thriving spiritual community.**