

# Factsheet: Respectful Supervision of Graduate Research Students

Monash is a vibrant and diverse place, built on the foundations of respect and inclusion. Respect underpins and enables communicative, supportive and healthy working relationships between students and their supervisors.

This factsheet is designed to be read with joint supervision guidelines and support staff to:

1. Understand the power imbalance within student/supervisor relationships.
2. Identify obligations under the staff/student personal relationships procedure.
3. Identify support services and reporting pathways.

## Relationships and Power Imbalances

Monash relies on many staff to work directly with students, whether that be in their learning, their research, as volunteers and/or in dual roles of student-staff. There are particular responsibilities and duties on staff to manage these relationships with care and respect. The [Staff/Student Personal Relationships Procedure](#) provides detail on student/staff relationships, recognising that staff will socialise and develop friendly relationships with students, however relationships must at all times remain professional.

In supervisor - graduate research student relationships, higher levels of collaborative activity and the requirement to support the development of independent research skills create further need to carefully manage power imbalances and relationships. Staff need to be aware of this imbalance of power, and ensure they conduct themselves respectfully and professionally around any students they engage with as part of their role. The onus is on the staff member to recognise the power imbalance, and not engage in any conduct that abuses their position.

## Personal relationships with graduate research students

Personal relationships with graduate research students may be present or arise, and can be understood more specifically as two types of relationships:

- Intimate personal relationships - a relationship which goes beyond the bounds of a platonic or working relationship, regardless of gender. E.g., dating, romantic, sexual etc. which is consensual.
- Close personal relationships - a friendship, relative or cultural family relationship, or financial dependence.

If such relationships arise, supervision must immediately be terminated.

## Coercive and exploitative relationships

A coercive personal relationship is one where a staff member, in this instance a supervisor, misuses their power over a student, or uses force or improper threat to persuade a student to do something. An exploitative personal relationship is one which makes use of a situation or relationship to gain a personal advantage of benefit. For example:

- Unsolicited sexual conduct, repeated calls or requests for unwanted dates;
- Contacting a student outside of agreed hours;
- Making a student perform research, marking, etc. which should be performed by the supervisor, or without University overseen remuneration.

## Setting boundaries

The best way to manage the power imbalance in the student/supervisor relationship is by setting clear professional boundaries. The responsibility to set and uphold boundaries in this relationship lies primarily with the staff member who supervises the student. Consider the following options:

1. **Appropriate channels and times for communication:** Use your University email and telephone for communications, and refrain from contacting students after hours. Avoid social media (such as Facebook or Twitter). You should not share your personal contact details with students.
2. **Appropriate locations for meetings:** Do not conduct one-on-one meetings with a student about University matters at a private residence or secluded place.
3. **Know the boundaries of your role:** Students may come to you for support. Respond empathetically to students' concerns but refer them to a relevant University support service.
4. **Your responsibilities extend beyond the office:** The same guidelines should apply in fieldwork, conferences and other University activities away from your usual workplace.

## Being an Active Bystander

As a Monash staff member you also have a responsibility to call out any misuse or abuse of power that you witness. We expect all students and staff in our community to look out for and support one another, and this means addressing problems or concerns if they arise.

### Seeking Advice or Making a Report

Any student or supervisor engaged in a joint supervision arrangement should contact their Graduate Research Coordinator in the first instance to notify any issues arising. The Graduate Research Coordinator can seek advice from their ADGR. A number of Monash services are detailed below where advice can also be sought.

Staff can also choose to submit an anonymous [Notification of unacceptable conduct](#) to the University. Anonymous notifications are taken seriously, but may not result in direct action to an incident. They will be used to inform the development and delivery of targeted training or other intervention programs.

## Getting support

Service	Details
Safer Community Unit	The <a href="#">Safer Community Unit (SCU)</a> can provide advice and support to all members of the Monash community about a range of unacceptable and harmful behaviours, including sexual assault, harassment, stalking, family violence and threats. SCU can provide information on available support services and formal reporting options.
Counselling Services	<a href="#">Counselling</a> can help all members of the Monash community with problems like coping with stress, anxiety and depression, loneliness, drug and alcohol abuse and addictions, negative feelings and suicidal thoughts, relationship and family issues. Staff receive up to six free counselling sessions. This service is provided by an external provider through the <a href="#">Monash Employee Assistance Program (EAP)</a> . Contact (03) 9905 3020.
SECASA	The <a href="#">South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault (SECASA)</a> provides free specialist counselling and support for victim/survivors of sexual assault and family violence. Make an appointment through <a href="#">counselling services</a> , SCU or by contacting SECASA directly.
Monash Security	<a href="#">Monash Security</a> works 24 hours, 7 days a week to ensure the safety of our community. Emergency on campus, call (03) 9905 3333. Inquiries / non-emergencies: (03) 9902 7777.
Monash bSafe App	Download the <a href="#">Monash bSafe</a> App for easy access to all of Monash's support services, resources and safety information at Australian campuses.

## Policies, Procedures and Internal Resources

[Staff Code of Conduct](#)

[Student Code of Conduct](#)

[Conflict of Interest Procedure](#)

## External Resources

[Australian Council of Graduate Research - Respectful Research](#)

[Principles for Respectful Supervisory Relationships](#)