



Code of Ethics Applicable to Staff Members and to
Any Person Called Upon to Work With or be in
Contact With Students With Disabilities

Giant Steps Autism Centre
(hereinafter *Giant Steps*)

Effective Date: September 2025

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Preamble

In accordance with section 54.0.1 of the *Act respecting private education* (chapter E-9.1), a private educational institution such as Giant Steps (“À pas de géant”) must adopt a code of ethics, in the form prescribed by the Minister, applicable to its staff members and to any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or to be in contact with them.

This code of ethics must indicate the expected practices and behaviours of individuals who work with students with disabilities or who come into contact with them. It must also provide for the obligation to promptly report to Giant Steps any breach of its provisions that could reasonably raise concerns about students’ physical or psychological safety. Finally, it must be published on Giant Steps’ website and otherwise made accessible to anyone who requests it.

This code of ethics is a reference tool to which all Giant Steps staff members and any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must adhere. It sets out the principles that must guide their actions in terms of ethics, as well as certain expected practices and behaviours.

These expected practices and behaviours are not exhaustive, do not limit Giant Steps’ management rights, and must be interpreted broadly and liberally. The absence of a specific expected or prohibited practice or behaviour does not exempt a staff member or any person working with students with disabilities or in contact with them from responsibility for inappropriate or inadequate conduct.

This code of ethics does not replace nor limit the scope of any obligation related to the conduct of a staff member or person working with students with disabilities or in contact with them that is set out in a law, regulation, collective agreement, policy, agreement, contract, any other governing framework, or the rules of conduct adopted by a board of directors. It also does not replace any other code of ethics that applies to a staff member or individual due to their membership in a professional order or association.

Legal and Regulatory Framework

The code of ethics applies in accordance with the current legal and regulatory framework, including:

- the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Constitution Act, 1982*, Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982* (U.K.), 1982, c. 11;
- the *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* (CQLR, chapter C-12);
- the *Charter of the French Language* (CQLR, chapter C-11);
- the *Civil Code of Québec* (CQLR, chapter CCQ-1991);
- the *Act respecting the laicity of the State* (CQLR, chapter L-0.3);
- the *Act to foster adherence to State religious neutrality and, in particular, to provide a framework for requests for accommodations on religious grounds in certain bodies* (CQLR, chapter R-26.2.01);
- the *Education Act* (CQLR, chapter I-13.3);

- the *Act respecting access to documents held by public bodies and the protection of personal information* (CQLR, chapter A-2.1);
- the *Act respecting contracting by public bodies* (CQLR, chapter C-65.1);
- the *Act respecting labour standards* (CQLR, chapter N-1.1);
- the *Act respecting occupational health and safety* (CQLR, chapter S-2.1);
- the *Youth Protection Act* (CQLR, chapter P-34.1);
- the *Anti-Corruption Act* (CQLR, chapter L-6.1);
- the *Act to facilitate the disclosure of wrongdoings relating to public bodies* (CQLR, chapter D-11.1);
- the applicable collective agreements;
- the applicable codes of ethics.

Objectives

The code of ethics aims to:

- establish a reference guide regarding the practices and behaviours expected from all Giant Steps staff members and from any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or to be in contact with them;

serve as a tool for reflection and accountability to encourage critical judgment that supports decision-making conducive to the development of moral values and professional ethics;

- build and strengthen the trust of students, parents, the educational community, and the general public toward Giant Steps, its institutions, and the educational system.

Scope

The code of ethics applies to every staff member of Giant Steps and to any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or to be in contact with them.

Definitions

Staff member

Any member of the support staff, management staff, professional staff, teaching staff, and any other person employed by Giant Steps, including out-of-scale personnel.

Person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them

Any person who is not a Giant Steps staff member but who is called upon to work with students with disabilities or to be in contact with them, including but not limited to interns, internship supervisors, volunteers (including parents acting in this role), coaches, extracurricular activity leaders, or any other person providing services under an agreement or contract.

Student with a disability

Any student recognized as having a disability within the meaning of the *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school, and workplace integration* (CQLR, chapter E-20.1), enrolled in an educational institution, a vocational training centre, or an adult education centre, or any child similarly recognized who receives appropriate homeschooling and receives services provided by Giant Steps.

Within the mission of Giant Steps, the notion of “student with a disability” refers specifically to an autistic student and/or autistic participant.

Rules of conduct

Code of conduct, operating rules, or any other similar framework proposed by Giant Steps’ Executive Director and approved by the Board of Directors.

Principals

The code of ethics is based on the following principles, which must guide everyone's actions and decisions :

- Every student, every staff member, and every person called upon to work with students or to be in contact with them has the right to safety, personal integrity, and freedom, as well as the preservation of their dignity, honour, and reputation, and respect for their privacy;
- The school environment must protect and promote the fundamental rights and freedoms of all individuals within it, as guaranteed by human rights charters, ensuring that these rights are exercised with respect for, among other things, the democratic values of Québec society, equality between men and women, the laicity of the State, and the importance placed on the protection of French as the common language;
- With respect for equal opportunity, every student has the right to quality educational services that support their holistic development, success, and social and professional integration;
- Every individual must be able to thrive in a healthy and safe environment—one that is stimulating and conducive to learning, achievement, and the attainment of each person's full potential;
- No form of violence, intimidation, or harassment may be tolerated within the school context and such behaviours must be strongly denounced;
- Adults in the school environment serve as meaningful and inspiring role models for students—figures of authority whose conduct must reflect positive values and meet high standards of exemplary behaviour;
- The school environment must promote a vision of educational success that reflects each student's potential, needs, differences, and aspirations, grounded in values of equality, equity, and social justice.

Expected Practices and Behaviours

1 Respect, Civility and Kindness

- 1.1 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students or be in contact with them must behave with respect, civility, politeness, and courtesy at all times toward students, parents, staff members, and any person with whom they interact in the course of their duties. This applies particularly to verbal and written communications, in order to ensure a high-quality, enriching learning environment and workplace climate.

This duty notably applies when expressing concerns or disagreement to any staff member regarding their opinion or a direction or decision made by Giant Steps.

- 1.2 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must demonstrate consideration, empathy, and kindness by fostering positive relationships, offering support, and promoting an approach grounded in mutual understanding and dialogue when resolving conflicts.

- 1.3 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must ensure compliance with the institution's rules of conduct and the civility standards they include, and promote them accordingly.

2 Justice, Equity and Neutrality

- 2.1 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must act with fairness and equity, taking into account each individual's needs and differences.
- 2.2 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must provide services without distinction, exclusion, or preference based on race, colour, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, civil status, age (unless otherwise provided by law), religion, political convictions, language, social condition, ethnic or national origin, disability, or the use of any means to compensate for that disability.
- 2.3 A staff member or person called upon to work with students or be in contact with them must avoid promoting their political beliefs, as well as their personal or religious convictions, and must demonstrate caution and objectivity when addressing these subjects with students.

3 Professional Conduct

- 3.1 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must maintain a professional posture and demonstrate restraint and judgment.
- 3.2 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must refrain from holding positions or engaging in activities that are incompatible with the responsibilities they carry out on behalf of Giant Steps.

Distancing

- 3.3 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must, by virtue of their position of authority, maintain professional distance with every student, even outside class hours, and must in this regard avoid, in particular:
- establishing relationships with a student that are not purely professional (friendship, intimate or romantic relationships);
 - any situation likely to create ambiguity in their interactions with a student (e.g., accepting invitations or participating in activities or events outside the school context);
 - any communication with a student through social media outside the school context.

Language

- 3.4 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must prioritize the use of French—the common and instructional language—in accordance with the *Charter of the French Language*.
- 3.5 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must take the necessary measures to promote spoken and written French

in their interactions with students, parents, staff members, and any person with whom they interact in the course of their duties..

Dress and Appearance

- 3.6 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must adopt attire appropriate to an educational environment, respectful of any applicable institutional rules of conduct, and must exercise critical judgment regarding their clothing choices and the messages they convey.
This duty applies both in the workplace, during remote learning, and during off-site activities.
4. Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must ensure that their use of social media aligns with the image and role-model responsibilities inherent to their position. This includes questioning the relevance of sharing certain information (photos, videos, etc.) or limiting access to it.

Drugs and Alcohol

- 4.1 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must refrain from consuming, supplying, or serving—on the work premises or while performing their duties outside the workplace—any alcoholic beverage, lawful or unlawful drug, or any other substance likely to impair judgment or compromise the safe performance of work.

More specifically, this does **not** apply to the consumption of an alcoholic beverage exceptionally authorized by Giant Steps, such as during a reception. Plus spécifiquement, n'est pas visée par ce qui précède la consommation d'une boisson alcoolisée exceptionnellement permise par À pas de géant, notamment lors d'une réception.

- 4.2 A staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must not be on the work premises, perform work duties, or be in the presence of students if their faculties are impaired by alcohol, a lawful or unlawful drug, or any substance likely to alter their judgment or compromise the safe execution of their work.

4 Safety, Health, and Well-Being

- 5.1 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must act prudently and take necessary measures to ensure their own safety and health, as well as those of others—particularly the students.
- 5.2 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must adopt attitudes and behaviours free of any form of verbal or physical violence. The following are strictly prohibited, notably:
- aggressive words, behaviours, or gestures;
 - verbal, written, or physical threats;
 - using an aggressive tone of voice (yelling, shouting, etc.);
 - using degrading, racist, sexist, or inappropriate language;
 - words, gestures, or behaviours of a sexual nature;
 - any form of intimidation or harassment;

- ignoring such behaviours or failing to intervene when a situation requires it.

5.3 A physical intervention involving a student must only be used as a last resort, when a risk assessment determines that an emergency requires immediate action for the sole purpose of ensuring the safety of the student or others.

When a restrictive measure must be used with a student and the intervention can be planned, it must be governed by a protocol in accordance with the *Reference Framework on Control Measures in School Settings* and must be reported without delay to school administration.

5.4 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must, when a student or staff member confides in them, remain alert to signs of distress and, when needed, refer the individual to the appropriate resource, including the Director of Youth Protection (DPJ).

5.5 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must collaborate in the implementation of the bullying and violence prevention plan and ensure that no student at the school to which they are assigned is subjected to bullying or violence.

5.6 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them who, in the course of their duties, has reasonable grounds to believe that a teacher has committed a serious fault in the exercise of their functions or an act contrary to the honour or dignity of the teaching profession—particularly one involving behaviour that could reasonably raise concerns about the physical or psychological safety of students—must report the situation without delay to the Minister.

5 Discretion, Confidentiality, and Protection of Personal Information

6.1 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must act with discretion, caution, and sound judgment, respecting the privacy of students and other staff members, regarding any confidential information they become aware of in the performance of their duties, including personal disclosures made to them.

6.2 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must access and use only the personal information necessary for the performance of their duties, and must communicate personal information only in accordance with applicable provisions.

In such cases, communication of information must be done appropriately, safely, respectfully, and in a way that avoids causing undue harm to the person concerned..

6.3 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must respect image rights, notably by obtaining consent from the parent or guardian of a minor student—or from the student themselves, if an adult—for any taking or dissemination of photographs, video recordings, screenshots, etc. They must also ensure that such content aligns with the mission of Giant Steps.

6 Integrity, Honesty, and Transparency

- 7.1 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must act with integrity, good faith, and transparency in order to maintain the confidence of parents and the public in Giant Steps and in the education system.

Use and Management of Property and Resources

- 7.2 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must contribute, in the performance of their duties, to the sound management of public funds.
- 7.3 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must make responsible, safe, and fiduciary use of the educational, material, and technological property and resources made available to them by Giant Steps or one of its institutions, and must avoid using them for personal purposes or for those of a third party unless authorization has been obtained.
This duty includes acting as an ethical digital citizen and adopting a critical and informed posture regarding the use of digital tools.
- 7.4 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must act with prudence, care, and honesty, and avoid participating—directly or indirectly—in theft, fraud, corruption or collusion, falsification of documents, breach of trust, or any other negligence, misconduct, or wrongful act of this nature, particularly in contractual matters.

Conflict of Interest and Gifts

- 7.5 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must avoid placing themselves in a situation where there is, or could be, a conflict between their personal interest and the duties of their position. This includes any situation that may give the appearance of a conflict of interest.

If such a situation arises, they must disclose in writing to their immediate superior any potential, real, or apparent conflict of interest, or any other circumstance of which they are aware and which is reasonably likely—or could reasonably be perceived as likely—to influence their decisions, judgment, or professional conduct.

- 7.6 A staff member or a person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must perform their duties in such a way as not to unduly influence a decision or to obtain, directly or indirectly, a benefit for themselves or for a third party.
- 7.7 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must refuse any gratification (gift, donation, advantage, compensation, favour, etc.), unless it is a token of appreciation of symbolic or modest value that cannot influence, or be perceived as influencing, their decisions, judgment, or professional actions..

7 Professionalism, Competence, and Commitment

- 8.1 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must deliver the expected work performance, fully assume the role assigned to them, and demonstrate regular attendance and diligence in carrying out their duties.
- 8.2 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must demonstrate professionalism and act responsibly, with rigor, objectivity, diligence, and vigilance.
- 8.3 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must perform their duties competently and provide quality services, actively contributing to the student's educational success and development.
This duty includes developing and keeping their knowledge up to date, notably through ongoing professional development.
- 8.4 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must carry out their duties with commitment by fostering collaboration—particularly with colleagues—cooperation, support, and the sharing of best practices.
This duty of collaboration is essential for individuals providing services to a student with a disability or a student with adjustment or learning difficulties for whom an intervention plan has been developed.
- 8.5 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must participate actively and positively in school life by contributing to the development of the school community.
- 8.6 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must know and understand ethical standards as well as the expected practices and behaviours, and must commit to respecting them and promoting compliance with them.

8 Loyalty and Duty of Discretion

- 9.1 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must act with loyalty toward Giant Steps and its institutions, respecting their mission, values, success plan, and educational project, and adhering to them both during and after their employment or mandate.
- 9.2 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must show restraint and moderation when publicly expressing opinions, refraining from making statements concerning Giant Steps or its institutions, partners, employees, students, or their parents that could harm their image or reputation.
- 9.3 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must also avoid participating directly or indirectly in activities that could harm the image or reputation of Giant Steps or any of its institutions.
- 9.4 Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must use the internet, traditional media, and social media prudently, judiciously, and professionally—even outside work hours and off-site—and in a manner consistent with the mission and values of Giant Steps and its institution..

- 9.5 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must avoid speaking on behalf of Giant Steps or any of its institutions—particularly in traditional or social media—or giving the impression that they are doing so, unless expressly authorized.
- 9.6 Every staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them must obtain approval from their immediate superior before publishing a text if its content appears to originate from Giant Steps or one of its institutions, or if it was produced in the course of their duties.

Reporting

Breach of Code of Ethics

Any staff member or any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them who witnesses or is informed of a breach of a provision of this code of ethics must report it without delay to Giant Steps when the breach could reasonably raise concerns for the physical or psychological safety of students.

Procedures for Reporting a Breach of the Code of Ethics

If an employee witnesses a real or anticipated breach of this code of ethics, they must report it without delay to a member of the administration or to the person responsible for human resources.

Dissemination and Application

- Members of the administration are responsible for disseminating and promoting this code of ethics to staff members and to any person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them within Giant Steps, to ensure its proper application.
- Every staff member or person called upon to work with students with disabilities or be in contact with them receives a copy of this code of ethics.
- The Executive Director of Giant Steps, supported by pillar and service directors, is responsible for applying this code of ethics.
- Giant Steps publishes this code on its website and otherwise makes it accessible to anyone who requests it.

Sanction

A breach of this code of ethics may result, based on the decision of the competent authority and in accordance with collective agreements, employment contracts, or any service agreement or contract, in the application of any sanction appropriate to the nature and severity of the breach.

Evaluation and Update

An evaluation of this code of ethics is conducted by Giant Steps at the end of each school year in order to update it when necessary.

Effective Date

This code of ethics comes into effect on **September 17, 2025**.

Appendix 1 – Confidentiality, Private Work with Students/Participants Outside School Hours, and NVCI Principles

Giant Steps is at the forefront of education and inclusion for autistic individuals. Founded in 1980, the Giant Steps School is a private school serving the public interest, funded by the Ministry of Education and recognized for its unique educational and therapeutic programs, which have been replicated around the world. With specialized services and educational programs for autistic adults, Giant Steps develops skills leading to employment—in all its forms—as well as greater autonomy at home and in the community. In addition, Giant Steps plays an essential role in research and in providing autism-related training across all sectors.

The term “disability” appears in this document solely because it is used in certain administrative or legal frameworks. Giant Steps does not favour this term in its everyday language, instead adopting a respectful and inclusive approach inspired by the neurodiversity movement and a strengths-based model.

This approach emphasizes the abilities, talents, and potential of autistic individuals rather than their limitations. In the context of this document, the term “disability” should be understood as a neutral reference to the lived reality of an autistic person, consistent with our commitment to recognizing autism as a natural expression of neurodiversity and promoting the dignity, self-determination, and full social participation of the individuals we support.

Additional Clauses to the Code of Ethics

The following clauses complement the current Code of Ethics and apply to all staff members.

Confidentiality

As part of their duties, a staff member may have access to confidential information as defined in the employment contract or in any other document governing their professional responsibilities. In this regard, the staff member agrees to respect the following principles:

- Not to use confidential information, in whole or in part, directly or indirectly, for personal benefit, for the benefit of a third party, or for any other unauthorized purpose;
- Not to disclose, in whole or in part, the source, content, or nature of confidential information, whether through publication or any other means of distribution, directly or indirectly;
- Not to copy, reproduce, or transmit in any manner any confidential information, software, databases, or any other document containing such information, except upon request and with the express written authorization of the Employer.

Private Engagements Outside School Hours

Any private engagement between a staff member and a family (e.g., paid services, support work, babysitting, transportation, or any other activity outside professional hours and responsibilities) is entirely outside the scope of the Employer's responsibility.

The Employer declines all responsibility regarding any incidents, accidents, or concerns that may arise in the context of such private activities.

To preserve transparency, fairness, and the well-being of all students, staff members are expected to refrain from such arrangements, unless they receive exceptional written authorization from management.

Guiding Principles of Nonviolent Crisis Intervention (NVCi)

Giant Steps is committed to providing a safe, respectful, and supportive learning environment for all students, staff, and families. Its philosophy is rooted in a holistic, person-centered approach that values the dignity, potential, and individuality of each student. Positive relationships and proactive strategies are essential to fostering growth, inclusion, and emotional well-being.

As part of its commitment to a safe and supportive educational environment, Giant Steps applies the guiding principles of Nonviolent Crisis Intervention (NVCi), as developed by the Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI). These principles emphasize:

- Preventing and de-escalating crisis situations through proactive, respectful, and nonviolent strategies;
- Respecting the well-being, safety, and protection of all individuals involved;
- Promoting empathy, communication, and self-regulation among both students and staff;
- Using physical intervention only as a last resort, exclusively by trained personnel, and in compliance with internal policies and applicable laws.

Staff Commitment

Every staff member acknowledges and agrees to:

- Act in accordance with the philosophy and values of the Centre in all professional interactions and responsibilities;
- Respect the principles and procedures presented during the NVCi training provided by Giant Steps;
- Participate in required training, updates, and professional development relating to NVCi and behaviour-support practices;
- Report and document any incident in accordance with Giant Steps policies, and contribute to maintaining a culture of safety, reflection, and continuous improvement.

Declaration and Signature

By signing below, the staff member confirms having read, understood, and agreed to comply with the expectations outlined in the Code of Ethics and its appendix.
Adherence to these principles is a condition of employment at Giant Steps.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, all of the above is signed this _____ day of _____,

_____.

Name of staff member: _____

Signature of staff member: _____