



**A GUIDE FOR VENDORS, CONTRACTORS AND VOLUNTEERS  
WHO PROVIDE SERVICES FOR THE SANTA ROSA COUNTY  
SHERIFF'S OFFICE DETENTION DIVISION**

Engaging in any form of overfamiliar activity with an offender is unprofessional conduct and in violation of department policy.

- Amorous or sexual relationships are inappropriate and illegal when they occur between an offender and any staff member. Offenders depend upon staff to provide for their board and care, ensure their safety, address their health care needs, supervise their work and conduct, and act as role models for socially-acceptable conduct.
- Because of the difference in power between offenders and staff, vendors, contractors and volunteers, there can never be a consensual relationship between the two entities. Here are some factors to consider.
- Some offenders have a history of victimization, particularly in their formative years, which may make them especially vulnerable to the sexual overtures of persons in positions of authority. Their perception of affection/love may be skewed by this background of abuse, making it impossible for them to refuse advances of a staff member.
- In some instances, particularly for female offenders, their survival in the community has been directly related to using their sexuality to obtain the means to support themselves. Coupled with low self-esteem, this carries over into their conduct in prison and while incarcerated in jails.

- Amorous or sexual relationships with an offender are seldom a secret. Such behavior will undermine your professional career by subjecting you to disrespect and manipulation from other offenders that may be aware of your situation.
- Once in a relationship, professional judgment becomes clouded and the normal defenses that exist to protect you will be compromised. When acting on emotions, you may take actions that would otherwise be considered inappropriate in a correctional environment (either in custody or in the community).
- Others will be judging your decisions for professionalism and trustworthiness. Your conduct and the decisions you make reflect not only on your own reputation, but also on that of your peers and the agency you represent.
- Romantic or sexual relationships often end with bitter feelings. If this occurs, you may be vulnerable to a host of problems—such as loss of respect from your peers, a damaged reputation, and loss of employment.

- Sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, is a serious offense – and is against the law.
- Depending on the investigation findings of an alleged incident, disciplinary action may result in dismissal and the advanced possibility of criminal charges. In addition, persons accused of sexual harassment in civil or criminal proceedings may be held personally liable for damages to the person harassed.
- Sexual misconduct can take many forms, including but not limited to:
  - Sexual comments about one's body.
  - Repeated staring, comments, and/or propositions of a sexual nature.
  - Conversations filled with sexually-suggestive innuendos or double meanings.
  - Display or transmittal of sexually-suggestive posters, objects, or messages.
  - Demands for acts of a sexual nature.
  - Physical sexual assault.
  - Request for sex in exchange for favors.
- Sexual harassment is any sexual behavior that adversely affects an offender's environment as it pertains to his/her responsibilities of incarceration or supervision. It can occur without conscious intent and is not limited to explicit demands for sex.
- Sexual misconduct and sexual harassment are an abuse of power. No one can predict when romantic or sexual feelings will occur between two people, but acting on those feelings by becoming involved with an offender is unprofessional and the SRSO has a zero tolerance policy.