

# ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP POLICIES WITHIN THE MINISTRY

## INTRODUCTION

It is not within the vision of the Beginning Experience® ministry to foster romantic or intimate relationships among its team members and certainly not among its program participants. (*Beginning Experience* teams are NOT singles clubs or dating services.)

Forming romantic relationships sometimes occurs in the journey through grief. Such relationships have the potential to endanger the spirit or integrity of the ministry's peer focus. Therefore, it is crucial that team members understand their proper role and relationship with participants and with each other.

## POLICY

- It is *Beginning Experience* policy that team members refrain from establishing romantic relationships with participants within three months of the participant's initial support program or weekend.
- It is the policy that team members involved in a romantic relationship with each other may not serve in the same *Beginning Experience* program on the same occasion. The involved team members will be asked to decide which one will be present and which one will wait for another weekend or another session of the support program involved.
- Team members who have married, are involved in a serious committed relationship, or for other reasons have moved on from their grief, must change their area of service from Weekend presenting team to Coordinator of one of the support programs, to appropriate support team activities, to youth programs, or to ministry in the Beyond Beginning Experience™ program.
- Cohabitation (living as married without being married) by a team member is a very serious issue regarding relationships because it is seen as inconsistent with basic denominational teaching. Therefore, it is the policy that the local board of Directors ask the team member or members involved to choose between ceasing the cohabitation or leaving the team.
- If a team member in any of the above situations is unwilling to abide by these policies, it is the responsibility of the local board to enforce the policy.

## RATIONALE

- A participant beginning the journey through grief needs time and space to process the invitation to growth and healing. Encouraging a participant to enter a new romantic or intimate relationship, either directly or indirectly, cheats the participant from fully benefiting from the *Beginning Experience* process.
- Participants are often very vulnerable. This vulnerability must be respected both for that individual's healing process and to prevent the ministry from incurring any possible legal and/or ethical liability.



- The presence of any two people involved in a romantic relationship (whether participants, presenting or non-presenting team) for any part of the same *Beginning Experience* weekend or the same support program designed for the early stages of the grieving process (“Coping with Life Alone” or “Continued Beginnings”) significantly alters the peer focus of that level of ministry.
- Situations altering the peer focus interferes with the invitation extended to each participant, and to each team member as participant, to enter fully into self-encounter.
- It is strongly recommended that team members who serve on the weekend, or in support programs appropriate to the early stages of grief, refrain from establishing romantic relationships with each other both in respect for their own vulnerability and in order to maintain their focus on the ministry.
- A team member involved in a romantic relationship with someone before that person’s involvement with a *Beginning Experience* program need not terminate the relationship, but should remember that this person, too, needs time and space to process the grief experience.

## **SUMMARY**

All of these policies and guidelines are based on the consideration of the common good of the *Beginning Experience* ministry and that of its participants and are not moral judgments.

Whenever serious questions or conflicts arise as to the suitability of an individual for initial or ongoing team membership, please use the policies stated above to guide your decisions. If, after a serious attempt has been made to apply these policies, the conflict remains unresolved, the local board of directors is encouraged to contact the executive director for assistance.

While we view contact from the board president as normal administrative procedure, this does not preclude individual team members from making contact with the executive director to discuss their specific concerns.

—Beginning Experience International Board of Directors  
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