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|  | **Austin Fire Department**  **Policy and Procedure** | | | General Order  Number  **E206** |
| Subject:  **Personal and Family**  **Relationships in the Workplace** | | | Effective Date:  **11-9-2015** | Rescinds: |
|  | Page:  **1 of 3** |
| Application:  **All AFD Personnel** | | Authorized by:  Rhoda Mae Kerr, Fire Chief | | |

**I. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines governing personal and family relationships in the workplace.

**II. Background**

The expectation for professionalism in personal and family relationships is necessary in order for the Austin Fire Department (AFD) to maintain order and discipline, promote relationships of mutual respect and confidence between supervisors and subordinates and between employees who work together, and to minimize the possible adverse impact on the well-being of our employees. AFD understands that a spirit of camaraderie and familial ties among its members is beneficial to morale, and that it cannot dictate a member’s off-duty relationships. However, a paramilitary organization also lends itself to creating power structures that have the potential to affect proper professional and personal relationships while on-duty, resulting in uncomfortable strain or hostility, as well as perceived and/or actual favoritism, potential misconduct, allegations of sexual harassment and other workplace distractions. Specifically, supervisor/subordinate relationships create an environment that may negatively impact the work performance of the subordinate and/or others. As such, it may have the same influence as harassment.

**III. Definitions**

1. “Family" refers to all relatives, including but not limited to: past and present spouses, past and present domestic partners, relatives by marriage, children (including biological, foster and step-children), parents, step-parents, grandparents, grandchildren, in-laws, siblings (including adoptive or step-siblings), cousins, nieces, nephews, aunts and uncles.

B. “Personal Relationship” refers to an intimate, sexual or dating relationship.

**IV. Policy**

1. Due to the tenuous nature of initial employment and the necessary deference to the existing rank structure, sworn members are strictly prohibited from initiating any type of personal relationship with any Cadet or Probationary Firefighter, regardless of the member’s current assignment or rank.

## Furthermore, AFD prohibits personal relationships between a supervisor and their subordinate and employees who work at the same station on the same shift because such relationships, even when they are consensual, can create compromising conflicts of interest or the appearance of such conflicts.

B. Personal and family relationships shall constitute neither an advantage nor a disadvantage to selection, promotion, salary or other conditions of employment.

1. Uniformed members who are family members or in a personal relationship:

a. cannot work in the same fire station on the same shift.

b. cannot be directly supervised by the family member or the other person in the relationship.

c. should not work in the direct chain of command unless authorized by the Fire Chief or their designee.

2. Uniformed members in staff positions and/or civilians who are family members or in a personal relationship:

a. cannot be directly supervised by the family member or the other person in the relationship.

b. should not work in the direct chain of command unless authorized by the Fire Chief or their designee.

3.One or both uniformed members who are engaged in a personal relationship that is in violation of this policy shall immediately self-initiate a transfer to an open assignment that would not place them in violation of this policy. Members may confidentially request assistance from their Battalion Chief or Division Chief in order to expedite and facilitate a transfer to an open assignment.

However, when a personal relationship that is in violation of this policy becomes public knowledge through self-disclosure or by virtue of its impact on work performance it must be reported to someone in the appropriate chain of command. The member’s chain of command will review the situation in light of all the facts (reporting relationship between the members, effect on co-workers, job titles of the members, etc.) and will determine, at a minimum, which one of the members will be transferred to another assignment.

4. Exceptions exist for temporary assignments including but not limited to training evolutions, emergency scene operations, traveling or non-Operations Added Time, where a supervisory relationship could exist.

C. Refer to E202.1 Harassment Prevention Policy, in the event that a personal or family relationship becomes abusive or obscene and/or involves threatening conduct or communication that is intended to harass, annoy, alarm, torment, embarrass or injure another.

D. Violation of this policy may lead to discipline up to and including indefinite suspension.