

**PolyColumbus Community Conduct Policy**  
**Last updated July, 2018**

**Preface**

PolyColumbus empowers a thriving community of people exploring and practicing ethical non-monogamy. When intimate relationships go well, they are wonderful and bring joy into our lives. When they do not go well, a person's well-being can be significantly affected.

At its simplest, the policy of PolyColumbus is to provide and maintain a safe, comfortable, and welcoming environment for as many of our current or potential Members as possible<sup>1</sup>. This policy is in force at all digital or in-person spaces / events that bear the PolyColumbus name ("PolyColumbus spaces"). When people take actions that compromise these values, we will take the least intrusive action necessary to restore a safe, comfortable, and welcoming environment, which may require removing people from PolyColumbus spaces.

**General Principles of Conduct**

These principles serve to provide guidance in implementing our Code of Conduct and responding to concerns/complaints regarding the Code.

**The First Principle: Consent**

"Consent is the beginning, the middle, and the end of sexual ethics."<sup>2</sup>

PolyColumbus endorses the concept that individuals should seek out enthusiastic affirmative consent in their intimate relationships (regardless of whether those relationships also contain a sexual, BDSM, or power exchange component)<sup>3</sup>. We advocate "Yes means Yes!" over "No means No."<sup>4</sup> We are sex-positive, and encourage consenting adults to determine what it is they wish to experience with other consenting adults. We strive to provide opportunities for people to find these connections and explore those possibilities so they can decide what works best for them. We also strive to provide spaces where those who are not seeking new connections can be confident they will be free of unwanted attention.

<sup>1</sup> The requirements for Membership in PolyColumbus are: 1) attending at least one of our events OR 2) joining one of our social networking pages/platforms.

<sup>2</sup> Dan Savage, "Savage Humanist", The Humanist, November / December 2013, available at <http://thehumanist.com/magazine/novemberdecember2013/features/savagehumanist>.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this document, we use the word "intimate" to indicate, non-exclusively, the nature of relationships such as those that contain a sexual, BDSM, and/or power exchange component.

<sup>4</sup> e.g., Harris O'Malley, "Getting A Yes (Instead of Avoiding A No) – The Standard of Enthusiastic Consent", Paging Dr. Nerdlove (Mar. 29, 2013), <http://www.doctornerdlove.com/2013/03/enthusiasticconsent/>, and Emmaline May, "Consent: Not Actually That Complicated", Rockstar·Dinosaur·Pirate·Princess (Mar. 2, 2015), <http://rockstardinosaurpirateprincess.com/2015/03/02/consentnotactuallythatcomplicated>.

Consent may be withdrawn at any time, for any reason or no reason at all. Consent also applies to access to someone's personal spaces (via Facebook Messenger, text, Skype, etc.). If someone has made clear that they do not consent to contact in any way, continued contact in those mediums is a violation of their consent. Those who rely upon implied consent based on previous interactions/discussion/agreements do so at their own potential risk; "reasonable" reliance on implied consent that did not actually exist still harms the victim.

### **The Second Principle: Building an Inclusive Community**

PolyColumbus is an inclusive community comprised of members of all different backgrounds. Our society has long made it easier to thrive based on certain unearned privileges (e.g., pale skin, monogamy, heterosexuality, presenting as male, socioeconomic classes, etc.).<sup>5</sup> We seek to serve all who endorse our Mission, regardless of how society-at-large historically or presently treats them.

We recognize that victims of harassment and consent violations are disproportionately women, people of color, those who identify as GLBTQIA+, etc. PolyColumbus seeks to treat everyone fairly, recognizing that our society often does not treat everyone equally or provide equal opportunity. We seek to recognize these realities in crafting and implementing our policy.

### **The Third Principle: A Commitment to Reasonable Process**

PolyColumbus is not a government entity. We are not obligated to follow the standards of proof, investigative procedures, or other protections that are applicable in those contexts. We are an independent community with a specific Mission<sup>6</sup>, operating under our board of directors. We often must make difficult decisions based upon incomplete information. We are committed to as consistent and fair of a process as is reasonably possible, including continuing improvements to that process in light of experience.

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<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Toby Morris, "On a Plate: A Short Story About Privilege", *The Pencilsword* (May 22, 2015), <http://thewireless.co.nz/articles/thepencilswordonaplate> (comic).

<sup>6</sup> Our Mission is: PolyColumbus empowers individuals that either self-identify as polyamorous, open, or ethically non-monogamous, or are exploring such possibilities. We build community to provide a safe and inclusive place to not only be ourselves, but also meet like-minded individuals from all backgrounds. We advocate for the equal treatment of the ethically non-monogamous under law, and for broader societal acceptance of the same. We serve organizations with similar goals by documenting best practices and creating other resources for successfully running such an organization. Finally, we educate each other, allied organizations, and the broader community on what it means to be ethically non-monogamous.

### **The Community Conduct Policy**

This policy explains under what situations the PolyColumbus board of directors may become involved in how individuals are publicly, semi-publicly, or privately interacting. This policy also covers potential actions we may take regarding those who act in ways that compromise the safety, comfort, or welcoming nature of our community.

#### **1. We will inform individuals (generally privately) when we become aware of unintentional conduct that makes PolyColumbus spaces feel less safe, comfortable, and welcoming.<sup>7</sup>**

We are a diverse and inclusive community. We do not accept conduct (including speech) that is based in homophobia, transphobia, or prejudice against other traditionally marginalized groups. We recognize that it is often unintentional behavior that causes harm; however, lack of intent does not lessen the actual harm done.

We will respectfully pull folks aside for a conversation when we become aware of unintentional harmful conduct. Our goals in such conversations are to share our concerns, gather other relevant information, and reach agreement on how we can all make our community feel safe, comfortable, and welcoming. We generally do not intend to “punish” for an unintentional first offense when such agreement. Our strong preference is for collaborative education over sanctions or shaming.

The following is a non-comprehensive list of unacceptable conduct:

- Harmful comments related to gender, gender identity, gender expression, biological sex, sexual orientation, consensual relationship style, disability, concern regarding mental health or capabilities, physical appearance, body size, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, or worldview
- Unwelcome comments regarding a person’s lifestyle choices/practices (e.g., food, health, parenting, drugs, relationships, religion, worldview, employment)
- Misgendering or use of “dead” or rejected names
- Gratuitous or off-topic sexual images or behaviour in spaces where they are not appropriate, unwelcome sexual attention, or physical/simulated physical contact (e.g., textual descriptions like \*hug\* or \*backrub\*) without consent or after a request to stop

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<sup>7</sup> This section contains significant (public domain) text originating from work undertaken by the Geek Feminism community, available at [http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Community\\_antiharassment/Policy](http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Community_antiharassment/Policy).

- Threats of violence, or incitement of violence towards any individual, including encouraging a person to commit suicide or to engage in self-harm
- Deliberate intimidation, stalking, or physical following
- Harassing photography or recording, including logging online activity for harassment purposes
- Sustained disruption of discussion, or any pattern of inappropriate social contact, such as requesting/assuming inappropriate levels of intimacy with others
- Deliberate “outing” of any aspect of a person’s identity without their consent, except as necessary to protect vulnerable people from intentional abuse.

The standard of behavior in these cases is the conduct that would be required for a person to be seriously considered as a board member of Poly Columbus.

- Such a person would be committed to the principles underlying this Community Conduct Policy, as well as the principles of civil discussion articulated by philosophy professor Dan Fincke<sup>8</sup>
- Note that while consent to a discussion is implied by visiting a website focused on such discussions, such consent is not implied merely by being in a physical space with others who wish to engage in such a discussion; just because they’re in the bar with you, doesn’t mean they owe you a conversation

To the extent a choice must be made, PolyColumbus prioritizes marginalized peoples’ safety over those who have privilege in society. PolyColumbus will not act on complaints regarding:

- “Reverse” isms, including “reverse racism,” “reverse sexism,” and “cisphobia”
- Reasonable communication of boundaries, such as “leave me alone,” “go away,” or “I’m not discussing this with you”
- Criticizing racist, sexist, cissexist, or otherwise oppressive behavior or assumptions
- Communicating in a “tone” you don’t find congenial

These last several points are consistent with Dan Fincke’s Civility Pledge. While PolyColumbus strongly encourages civility (and requires it from our board members), we do not accept a claim

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<sup>8</sup> Dan Fincke, “The Camels with Hammers Civility Pledge”, Camels with Hammers (Feb. 13, 2013), <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/camelswithhammers/2013/02/thecamelswithhammerscivilitypledge/>.

<sup>9</sup> For those unfamiliar with the term, “cis” is the opposite of “trans,” denoting someone whose gender identity aligns with the gender assigned to them at birth.

of “incivility” as an excuse to shut down preventative and/or boundary-enforcing behavior from those who have been marginalized.<sup>10</sup>

**2. We take steps to ensure that our Monthly Gathering and other spaces are places where everyone can feel safe, comfortable, and welcome without receiving unwanted attention.**

Flirting with people and seeking new connections is welcome in many, but not all, of PolyColumbus spaces. If we announce that flirting or seeking new connections is inappropriate in a particular PolyColumbus space (as we do at every Monthly Gathering), we expect that all participants will comply. This prohibition does not extend to preexisting relationships you may have where flirting is welcome. Traditionally, we offer a social event immediately following each Monthly Gathering specifically to provide space for those who are interested in flirting or seeking new connections.

As the members of Poly Columbus often are involved in multiple relationships that may shift or change over time, all members are encouraged to be mindful in providing resources or connections (broadly defined) for the use of Poly Columbus. Given our limited resources, we ask that you share only what you can financially, socially, and emotionally offer and to clearly communicate boundaries (e.g., how long the offer stands) to minimize the impact of the potential loss of that resource/connection for all involved.

**3. In those PolyColumbus spaces where we encourage flirting or seeking new connections, harassing conduct and/or failure to abide by clear directives on a person’s preferences is still a consent violation.**

We recognize the complexities of potential human interaction, and we cannot exhaustively list acceptable and unacceptable conduct here. We expect that attendees will have a baseline familiarity with social norms.<sup>11</sup> All attendees are welcome to talk with a staff or board member if they have concerns about someone who is providing them with unwanted attention, with the staff or board member resolving the matter in the moment. All attendees are also empowered to tell others “I’d prefer not to interact.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See e.g., David Malki, “The Terrible Sealion”, *Wondermark* (Sep. 19, 2014), [www.wondermark.com/1k62/](http://www.wondermark.com/1k62/) (comic).

<sup>11</sup> e.g., Miri Mogilevsky, “Flirting and Sexual Harassment: Not Actually the Same Thing”, *Brute Reason* (Aug. 21, 2013), <http://freethoughtblogs.com/brutereason/2013/08/21/flirting-and-sexual-harassment-not-actually-the-same-thing/>

<sup>12</sup> PolyColumbus endorses the view that “‘No.’ is a complete sentence,” as is “Go away.”

PolyColumbus presumes that any invitations of an intimate nature are harassment if the invitation is both a) made in a PolyColumbus space and, b) occurs on the same day that the maker has first interacted with the recipient of the invitation. Note that invitations made under other circumstances may still be harassment.<sup>13</sup>

#### **4. Attendees in our spaces are expected to follow the law.**

In PolyColumbus spaces, participants have a right to expect that other participants will follow the law. This is especially the case when PolyColumbus holds an event in a shared public space (e.g. at a bar). This expectation includes prohibitions against sexual acts in public, as passerby have not necessarily consented to being forced to view the act.<sup>14</sup> There are rare exceptions (e.g. an event where we have purchased exclusive access to a hotel, thereby allowing a broader spectrum of conduct that all attendees have consented to in areas that are no longer accessible to the public), but as noted, these are very much exceptions.

Those who own firearms or knives are expected to serve as a positive example of safe and responsible gun or knife ownership, maintaining any relevant permits or licenses and following any venue-specific rules or prohibitions regarding the carrying of firearms or knives. As with any implement, otherwise-legal possession of a firearm or knife that interferes with a safe, comfortable, and welcoming environment is a violation of our Community Conduct Policy. The board of directors is happy to talk privately with firearm or knife owners so we can collaboratively educate ourselves.

#### **5. If private conduct leaves someone feeling unsafe, uncomfortable, or unwelcome in our spaces, we have the right to investigate that conduct so we may keep PolyColumbus spaces feeling safe, comfortable, and welcoming.**

The presence of those who have engaged in consent-violative private conduct may leave others feeling unsafe. Any participant has the absolute right to refuse to discuss/provide such details with us. However, PolyColumbus has the corresponding absolute right to ban someone from our spaces in the light of a credible complaint and a refusal to cooperate.

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<sup>13</sup> Should you believe you have found a mutual connection with someone you have just met and wish to solicit them for intimate activities, consider respectfully inviting that person to a separate, neutral location (e.g. a coffee shop) to discuss possibilities further, rather than soliciting them at the PolyColumbus event. This last sentence is not a safe harbor; while such an invitation is less likely to be harassment than a direct solicitation, the circumstances may result in it still being harassment (and therefore a violation of this policy).

<sup>14</sup> Ohio Rev. Code § 2907.09 (Public Indecency), available at <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/2907.09>.

**We have made the following choices to foster an inclusive community:**

**6. All staff members are to report to a board member any policy violations they become aware of.**

Mandatory reporting of policy violations is a condition of being staff. Staff members who fail to report such violations will be removed as staff.

**7. We do not penalize someone for choosing to delay in reporting conduct.**

The decision to report or not report conduct is often a difficult one. Although a delay in reporting may make it more difficult to obtain facts regarding the incident, we do not use the delay itself as a reason to conclude the report is not credible. The difficulty of obtaining facts may result in the board taking no action beyond noting the concern.

**8. We do not penalize someone for choosing to stay in a relationship with someone who may have violated their consent.**

The decision to end a relationship is often a difficult one. We do not view the presence of a continuing relationship as a reason to conclude the report is not credible.

**9. We do not penalize someone for choosing not to report criminal conduct to law enforcement.**

The decision to report a crime is often a difficult one. We do not view the nonreporting of a crime as a reason to conclude the report is not credible.

**10. We seek to support those reporting policy violations by adopting a perspective of “let’s work to understand the full picture of what took place” rather than “let’s work to find information that disproves the report of a policy violation.”**

This distinction is subtle but important. Those closest to an issue often benefit from an outsider who can see the broader landscape. Doctors, lawyers, and therapists routinely obtain outside assistance for their own personal concerns that are within their professional specialty. In the course of investigation, our goal is to understand what has taken place, not to disprove the report.

**11. We respect the right of individuals to anonymously report violations, or to report a violation personally but insist that their name not be used.**

We take all reports seriously. Unique challenges may exist in investigating reports without contact information of the reporter to clarify information and ask follow-up questions.

We take the following steps to promote consistency and fairness:



**1. All policy violations that are reported will be shared with the full board of directors, unless a board member is the subject of the report or they segregate themselves from the matter.**

The entire board will be kept regularly updated regarding a complaint in order to avoid the ‘silencing’ of complaints and consequences across what appear to be first-time reports. If a board member has one or more conflicts of interest with those involved in the report (e.g. financial, personal or professional), the Multiple Interests policy (available on our website) will be applied to determine if individuals will be segregated off of a matter or if they should be excluded from voting.

**2. Whenever possible, we seek to provide the person being reported the opportunity to present their perspective and other information prior to PolyColumbus taking action adverse to them.**

The gravity of reported conduct and the credibility of the person reporting the conduct may necessitate swifter action in certain circumstances.

We take the following into consideration when determining the consequences, if any, of a reported policy violation. Note: Individual board members may act on behalf of the board in resolving reports when authorized.

**1. We take the least-intrusive action necessary to restore a safe, comfortable, and welcoming environment.**

When someone is sincerely apologetic for unintentional but harm-causing behavior, we can generally resolve the violation through a private conversation with a board or staff member. The appropriateness of a private apology in addition to the private conversation will depend upon the relationship between the involved people.

**2. Sometimes the least-intrusive action necessary to restore a safe, comfortable, and welcoming environment is to remove someone from PolyColumbus spaces.**

Only the Board of Directors may permanently remove someone from any and all PolyColumbus spaces (i.e. a permanent ban). However, in the absence of a contrary board resolution, the Executive Director — and in their absence, the Deputy Executive Director — has the authority to remove someone from any and all PolyColumbus spaces pending board resolution (i.e. a temporary ban pending resolution).

Any board member may remove someone from a particular PolyColumbus space (e.g. a particular Monthly Gathering or a particular webforum). Any staff member whose staff role is



relevant to a particular space has similar authority. Any board or staff member who is considering taking a removal action is encouraged (but not required) to consult with another board or staff member first if feasible.

**3. Consequences are otherwise determined on a case-by-case basis, consistent with the principles noted elsewhere in this policy.**

Most concerns can be handled in the moment or through private conversation. For all other concerns, the board of directors will take action appropriate to the circumstances. We will reach out to the person reporting the policy violation and give great weight to their articulated preferences (but not a veto right) as we investigate and resolve the matter.

**Options for reporting a potential violation of our Community Conduct Policy:**

Note: As all reports of potential conduct violations that come to staff/board members **must** be shared with the Board (see Multiple Interest Policy regarding conflicts of interests regarding potential violations), see our list of poly-friendly therapists on our website if you desire a stronger level of confidentiality.

1. You may talk in-person with any board or staff member at a PolyColumbus event.
2. You may email the entire board of directors via [board@polycolumbus.org](mailto:board@polycolumbus.org)
3. You may email any board member at their PolyColumbus email address (See the About/Board of Directors at [polycolumbus.org](http://polycolumbus.org))
  - [rob.funk@polycolumbus.org](mailto:rob.funk@polycolumbus.org)
  - [michelle.vaughan@polycolumbus.org](mailto:michelle.vaughan@polycolumbus.org)
  - [jessica.roush@polycolumbus.org](mailto:jessica.roush@polycolumbus.org)
  - [laury.nwaru@polycolumbus.org](mailto:laury.nwaru@polycolumbus.org)
4. If you are a member of the (closed) PolyColumbus Facebook group, you may send the board a private message. Note that multiple board and staff members may have access to the PolyColumbus Facebook page message inbox.
5. You may contact any board or staff member that you are Facebook friends with via Facebook Messenger. (If you are not Facebook friends with that person, the message will go to the “Other” mailbox and that person will not receive a notification.)



The core of the PolyColumbus Mission is empowering individuals that either self-identify as polyamorous, open, or ethically non-monogamous, or are exploring such possibilities. Part of this empowerment comes from serving organizations with similar goals by documenting best practices and creating other resources for successfully running such an organization.

Good policies facilitate the orderly and sustainable growth of communities and events that advance the PolyColumbus Mission, whether in the Columbus, Ohio area or elsewhere.

PolyColumbus does not claim a monopoly on wisdom. What we do claim is fifteen years (and counting) as an organization, and leadership with relevant and valuable education, experience, and training. We have confidence in the policies we draft, as well as the humility to revise them when necessary in light of experience.

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