

## **WHY IS A CODE OF ETHICS ESSENTIAL FOR CASTLE VIEW HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT MEDIA AND YOU - THE STUDENT JOURNALIST?**

*As a student journalist for Castle View High School Student Media, you have great power to tell the stories of our students and community while also making ethical decisions. While you will likely be presented with situations that don't necessarily have a "right or wrong" answer, considering the fundamental principles below will help you make the best decision possible and help you to defend your decisions if and when they are called into question. Above all, do the right thing. Trust yourself, be honest, and be brave. Remember - you are essential to keeping our students and community informed. You are essential in the process of sharing valuable, newsworthy information. You and your voice matter. Finally, when in doubt, work collaboratively with fellow reporters, editors, adviser, and consult the Castle View High School staff manual.*

**SEEK THE TRUTH AND REPORT IT: *Ethical journalism at Castle View High School should be accurate and fair. Student journalists should be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.***

*Castle View High School student journalists should:*

- Take responsibility for the accuracy of their work. Take the time to verify information before releasing it and use original sources whenever possible.
- Remember that neither speed nor format excuses inaccuracy. (Ex. Online stories and social media stories are deserving if the same standards as other media.)
- Provide context. Take special care not to misrepresent or oversimplify information when previewing or summarizing a story.
- Gather, update and correct information throughout the life of a news story. Keep reporting until your story is published. Follow the story over time to be able to trust the information.
- Considering "making promises" carefully. Be cautious when making promises, but keep the promises they make. Consider sources' motives before promising anonymity. Reserve anonymity

for sources who may face danger, retribution or other harm, and have information that cannot be obtained elsewhere. Explain why anonymity was granted. (See treatment of minors below.)

- Be skeptical of information based purely on anonymous or biased sources.
- Identify sources clearly. The readers are entitled to as much information as possible to judge the reliability and motivations of sources.
- Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information unless traditional, open methods will not yield information vital to the public. This is especially important when covering controversial topics.
- Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable. Give voice to the voiceless. Remember, however, that the goal is not to "shock and awe." When given the opportunity, work collaboratively with stakeholders.
- Recognize a special obligation to serve as watchdogs over the school, levels of administration and the culture and initiatives of Castle View High School. Seek to ensure that the school's business is conducted in the open, and that public records are open to all.
- Provide access to source material when it is relevant and appropriate.
- Boldly tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience, especially that of being a teenager at Castle View. Seek sources whose voices readers seldom hear.
- Avoid stereotyping. Student journalists should examine the ways their values and experiences may shape their reporting.
- When advocating of an important concept of person, label it. Also label commentary, opinions, and editorials.
- Never deliberately distort facts or context, including visual information (such as photos). Clearly label illustrations and re-enactments.
- Never plagiarize. Always attribute.

**MINIMIZE HARM: *Ethical journalism at Castle View High School treats sources, subjects, peers, teachers, and members of the public as human beings deserving of respect.***

*Castle View High School student journalists should:*

- Balance the reader's needs for information against potential harm or discomfort. Just because a journalist is pursuing an important story doesn't mean he/she can be arrogant or intrusive.
- Show compassion for those who may be affected by news coverage. Consider this: When dealing with minors, victims, illegal activity, and young subjects who are inexperienced, some stories may have many unintended consequences. Consider people (students, parents, families, etc.) when approaching a story and do so with respect for differences in culture and values.
- Recognize that legal access to information differs from an ethical justification to publish or broadcast. Just because a journalist has access to information doesn't mean it should be published or broadcasted.
- Realize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than public figures and others who seek power, influence or attention. (Coverage of the principal might differ from coverage of a freshman girl.) Weigh the consequences of publishing or broadcasting personal information.
- Consider the implications of identifying personal information or criminal suspects.
- Consider the long-term implications of the extended reach and permanence of publication. Provide updated and more complete information as appropriate.
- Be sensitive to politically correct language. Follow current non-offensive usage in reference to race, religion, age, sex, nationality and physical or mental disability.

**ACT INDEPENDENTLY: *The highest and primary obligation of ethical journalism at Castle View High School is to serve the public (students, staff, community).***

*Castle View High School student journalists should:*

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived. Disclose unavoidable conflicts. (Ex. If you are on the football team, it may not be suitable for you to cover an alleged conflict with a coach.)
- Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and other outside activities that may compromise integrity or impartiality, or may damage credibility.

- Deny favored treatment by students, teachers, administration, or community members; resist internal and external pressure to influence coverage.
- Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two. Prominently label sponsored content.
- Be aware of one's own biases and assumptions and seek reliable information that challenges one's own views.
- Be open minded rather than having fixed opinions that can't be changed even with new facts.

**BE ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT: *Ethical journalism at Castle View High School means taking responsibility for one's work and explaining one's decisions to the public. (Pull in technology & internet.)***

*Castle View High School student journalists should:*

- Explain ethical choices and processes to audiences. Encourage a civil dialogue with the public about journalistic practices, coverage and news content. (Make others aware that CV Student Media operates as an public forum.)
- Respond quickly to questions about accuracy, clarity and fairness. When a reporter has questions, be proactive in consulting the editors and the adviser.
- Acknowledge mistakes and correct them promptly and prominently. Explain corrections and clarifications carefully and clearly. If a mistake occurs, consult editor(s) and adviser promptly.
- Abide by the same high standards they expect of others. Student journalists are expected to be the best students and community members as possible.
- Avoid the following: obscenity, invasion of privacy, libel, disruption, copyright violation, hate speech, false advertising, "fighting words", and other forms of expression not protected by the First Amendment.
- Use the internet to take a more active role in becoming well informed and sharing accurate information, not as a substitute for reporting and storytelling.
- Be wary of information online; accurate information is available online, but so is poor quality, misleading information.

- Use the Internet to independently fact check and verify information by looking at multiple information providers. To be well informed, one should get news from multiple outlets representing different perspectives.
- In assessing accuracy of information, consider who is providing it and their sources and whether the information includes verifiable facts and key perspectives as opposed to opinions and unsubstantiated conclusions.
- When possible, show the sources. This is an important way to build trust in reporting. Hyperlink is a powerful way to refer to the sources.
- When possible, collaborate with audience. Avoid thinking of readers as consumers only. Readers can have the expertise and knowledge that can help with the journalist's work.
- When possible, offer disclosures. A journalist should add a disclosure to content when there are personal connections to sources, organizational links to sources, limitations of data, an unusual method of gathering information, etc. It should be placed within the content or at the bottom of the page.
- Curate and attribute information. A journalist should cite sources and provide a roadmap that leads back to all people contacted, the documents read, etc. Mention about the research that helped your work.
- Fix the website and social media errors. Journalists should make every effort to prevent these errors. Verify facts before reporting. If errors are made, correct them.

#### Sources:

- Society of Professional Journalists - Code of Ethics; <https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>
- Main Concepts of News Literacy (Baruch College Professor Geanne Rosenberg and Alan Miller, director of the News Literacy Project)
- Tao of Journalism (<http://taoofjournalism.org/>); Louis Mullins