



MERIDIAN  
HEALTHCARE

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# EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK



2025 - 2026 EDITION

## DISCLAIMER

The employee handbook provides a ready reference for new and experienced Meridian employees when questions arise relating to the terms and conditions of employment. This handbook contains the Employee Code of Conduct. You are required to review this handbook ~~in its entirety.~~ \_\_\_\_\_

This version of the *Meridian Behavioral Healthcare Employee Handbook* supersedes all previous versions of the handbook.

This handbook provides an *abbreviated* version of Meridian's Policies and Procedures. All procedures can be found online on the **Intranet - Meridian Centerwide Procedures**. You are required to become familiar with the location of Meridian's Procedures and review them in order to stay current. In addition to the topics covered in this handbook, your Department or Program may have developed specific policies and procedures that govern your duties. Meridian reserves the right to change and modify policies and procedures at any time. If a conflict exists between this handbook and the policies and procedures, the most current policies and procedures will take precedence.

**This handbook does not create any rights, benefits, or duties which are not set forth in *Meridian's Policies and Procedures, Florida Administrative Code, or federal laws; and it does not constitute a contract with any employee.***

Meridian is an at-will employer. This means that either Meridian or you can terminate your employment at any time, with or without cause. This handbook does not alter that relationship. There is no guarantee of employment for any definite period of time. If you have questions regarding any of the policies, procedures, or benefits covered in this handbook, please contact your supervisor or Human Resources. You are responsible for requesting clarification as needed.

## CHAPTERS

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About the Company	Chapter	1
Meridian Policies & Laws	Chapter	2
Employee Relations	Chapter	3
Employment	Chapter	4
Information Staff	Chapter	5
Development Leave &	Chapter	6
Benefits Ethics &	Chapter	7
Standards of Conduct	Chapter	8
Safe Workplace Policies		

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1.0</b>	About the Company	7
1.1.0	Organizational Structure	7
<b>2.0</b>	Meridian Policies & Federal Laws	8
2.1.0	Meridian Policies	8
<b>3.0</b>	Employee Relations	11
3.1.0	Human Resources	11
3.2.0	Pay Information	13
3.3.0	Grievances	15
3.4.0	Disability Accommodation	17
<b>4.0</b>		19
4.1.0	Accepting Employment	19
4.2.0	Employee Classification	19
4.3.0	Use of Equipment and Vehicles	21
4.4.0	Driving Eligibility	21
4.5.0	Employee Absences	22
4.6.0	Work Schedules	22
4.7.0	Meal Periods	23
4.8.0	Work Breaks	25
4.9.0	Progressive Discipline and Corrective Action	25
4.10.0	Employment Termination	27
<b>5.0</b>		30
5.1.0	Employee Competence	30
5.2.0	Job Classification	31
5.3.0	Registration, Licensure and Certification	31
5.4.0	Performance Appraisals	32
<b>6.0</b>		35
6.1.0	Health, Life and Supplemental Insurance	35
6.2.0	Retirement	35
6.3.0	Unemployment Compensation	36
6.4.0	Workers' Compensation	37
6.5.0	Professional Liability Insurance	37

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

6.6.0	Employee Assistance Program	39
6.7.0	Leave	39
6.7.2	Family Medical Leave Act	46
<b>7.0</b>		51
7.1.0	Ethics	53
7.2.0	Standards for All Staff	54
7.3.0	General Conduct and Policies	66
7.4.0	Professional/Collegial Relationships	69
7.5.0	Employee Relationships with Persons Served	70
7.6.0 s	Florida Abuse Line Reporting	72
<b>8.0</b>		74
8.1.0	Safety	74
8.2.0	Domestic Violence	75
8.3.0	Workplace Violence Prevention	75
8.4.0	Drug-Free Workplace	76



# CHAPTER ONE

## Our Ambition

*Together, we'll transform community from the inside out.*

## Our Purpose

*We restore and build community with life-changing care.*

## Our Profile

*Meridian is more than a crisis center. We're a community. And a community resource.*

## Our Proposition

*We practice whole-person care rooted in hope and empathy.*

Meridian is a private, non-profit organization with roots in the community mental health movement, which began in the 1960s, to bring education about mental illnesses and substance use disorders and treatment of those affected to the local level. Created as a tax-exempt entity in 1972, Meridian has been a part of the lives of thousands; providing a safety net for those in crisis, a source of effective treatment and contributing to the health of the community. Since then, Meridian has expanded across North Central

Florida, touching over 25,000 lives through over 600,000 direct care visits a year.

Our mission is evident in all we do, from developing a continuum of treatment services that are evidence-based for a range of illnesses to participating in our communities as a partner in enhancing the quality of life. It is Meridian's goal to improve the wellbeing and health of our patients and community.

### **1.1.0 Organizational Structure.**

Meridian operates with oversight of the Board of Directors, which is ultimately responsible for the functioning of Meridian. Board members are appointed by the county commissioners in the counties we serve. Each county has at least one representative. The larger counties have additional members as determined by their population. The Board meets monthly and has regular committee meetings to facilitate the smooth flow of policymaking. The Board establishes policy, approves budgets and contracts, and monitors how the agency is meeting its goals.

The Board has entrusted the day-to-day operations to the President/Chief Executive Officer (CEO), an experienced behavioral healthcare professional. The Senior Leadership Council (SLC) is made up of the President, Officers, and Vice Presidents and oversees several committees which study, research and develop best practice approaches to achieving the Center's strategic goals and then monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of processes Meridian employees are involved at all levels to improve service delivery through process review and refinement. As an employee of Meridian, you can expect to be called upon to participate as a member of one or more teams.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MERIDIAN POLICIES & LAWS

#### 2.1.0 Meridian Policies.

##### 2.1.1 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

It is the policy of Meridian Behavioral Healthcare to comply with all federal and state laws concerning the employment of persons with disabilities and to act in accordance with regulations and guidance issued by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commissions (EEOC). It is our policy not to discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities with regards to application procedures, hiring, advancement, discharge, compensation, training and any other conditions of employment. Meridian is committed to providing reasonable accommodations that will allow its employees with disabilities to contribute at the highest level.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) makes it unlawful to discriminate in employment against a qualified individual with a disability. The ADA also outlaws discrimination against individuals with disabilities in State and local government services, public accommodations, transportation and telecommunications. The ADA prohibits an employer from retaliating against an applicant or employee for asserting his rights under the ADA.

The Human Resources department provides guidance and necessary training in the administration of the provisions of the act to all Meridian employees. Employees wishing to file an internal discrimination complaint should contact the Director of Human Resources or Corporate Compliance Hotline. You may contact the Department of Labor for any questions or concerns at 866-4-USA-DOL.

2.1.2 Equal Employment Opportunity Policy. Meridian assures each applicant and employee Equal Employment Opportunity without regard to age, race, color, sex, religion, national origin, political opinions or affiliations, marital status, sexual orientation, or disability except when such requirement constitutes a bona-fide occupational qualification necessary to perform the tasks associated with the position. Equal Employment Opportunity is attained using both objective and subjective merit principles and applies to recruitment, examination, appointment, training, promotion, demotion, compensation, retention, discipline, separation, and other employment practices within Meridian. Any applicant or employee who believes that he or she has been discriminated against may file a complaint with the Human Resources Officer of the Florida Commission on Human Resources within 365 days of the alleged discriminatory act. All complaints shall be treated in accordance with the procedures set forth by law. You may contact the Florida Commission for Human Relations (FCHR) at **800-342- 8170**.

### 2.1.3 Non-discrimination Policy.

No person shall, on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, age or disability be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to unlawful discrimination under any program or activity administered by Meridian.

#### 2.1.4 Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA).

It is illegal to discriminate against employees or applicants because of genetic information. Title II of GINA prohibits the use of genetic information in making employment decisions, and restricts Meridian from requesting, requiring or purchasing genetic information. It is unlawful for Meridian to inquire about an employee's or an applicant's family medical history as well.

#### 2.1.5 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

HIPAA requires Meridian to assure the privacy and confidentiality of protected personal health information of persons served. Meridian employees and volunteers shall not permit the unauthorized disclosure of protected health information except as permitted or required by law. Each employee and volunteer shall be furnished a copy of the Privacy Policy and Management and Protection of Protected Health Information, and is expected to read and comply with Meridian's policy. Each employee and volunteer shall sign the Notice of Privacy Policy at the back of this handbook, a copy of which shall be maintained in the employee's or volunteer's file. New employees and volunteers shall complete training through Meridian's Learning (MeL) System within one week of employment or volunteering with Meridian. Proof of attendance of each employee and volunteer shall be maintained in the individual's training file in Human Resources.

#### 2.1.6 Non-retaliation Policy.

No person shall be retaliated against, harassed, intimidated, threatened, coerced or discriminated against for making a charge, testifying, assisting or participating in any manner in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing; or for opposing alleged unlawful discriminatory practices prohibited by the following federal laws:

- a. Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended
- b. Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, as amended
- c. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, as amended
- d. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended
- e. Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981
- f. Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended
- g. Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended
- h. Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008

Complaints alleging violation of this policy should be made to the Meridian Human Resource Office.

## CHAPTER THREE EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

### 3.1.0 Human Resources.

3.1.1 Employee Personnel File. (*Procedure VIII-GG*) Your official personnel file and employment information is electronically housed within the Human Resources Information System (HRIS). Employee medical files including ADA and FMLA requests are electronically stored in separate format outside of the HRIS system. The personnel file is not a public record and is available for review only by yourself, your supervisor and others as outlined in Meridian Procedure VIII-GG. It is your responsibility to update your personal information on Meridian's Human Resource Information System, Datis. During employment employees are allowed to receive copies of documents within their personnel file, upon separation of employment, the employee can only review the documents.

### 3.1.2 Identification Badges.

You were issued an identification badge. This badge is used to access a restricted areas at Meridian.

It shall be worn at all times while on Meridian property. The badge must be worn in a manner that will allow it to be read and seen. If a replacement badge is required, contact HR as soon as possible. A \$10 fee will be collected or payment arrangements made before a new ID badge is issued. You may authorize Meridian to deduct this fee from your pay by signing a consent form. **A new ID badge will be issued, at no charge, when your name or position changes.**

### 3.1.3 Employment Opportunities.

Meridian recognizes the advantage of lateral and promotional opportunities for employees within the Center. Employees who are interested in information about internal employment opportunities should review the job opportunities posted on Meridian's career opportunities page – [www.mbhci.org](http://www.mbhci.org) or the employee may contact a Talent Acquisition Specialist for more information on internal career opportunities.

### 3.1.4 Background Screening. (*Procedure VIII-B*)

Meridian will conduct background screening in accordance with regulatory agencies, state and federal requirements for staff, independent contractors, and volunteers. The screening may include but is not limited to 1) a local, state, and/or federal criminal history via the use of fingerprints, social security number or other personal information, 2) review of motor vehicle driving eligibility, 3) reference checks with previous employers, 4) verification of educational credentials, 5)

professional license verification, 6) credit checks or 7) other checks deemed necessary. Employees are required to have a satisfactory cleared Level II background clearance through DCF and AHCA prior to the first day of employment. Employees are advised of this requirement prior to appointment. Any employee who refuses to be fingerprinted will be terminated.

### **3.2.0 Pay Information.**

#### **3.2.1 Payday.**

You receive your salary every other Friday on a biweekly basis. If you complete and submit your time sheets correctly and on time, any overtime or additional payments will be included in the same paycheck. You have three payment choices: direct deposit, a payroll card, or a business check.

#### **3.2.2 Salary Deductions.**

Federal income tax, Social Security, and Medicare contributions are withheld from your salary. Voluntary deductions include insurance plan premiums and contributions to the retirement plan. Court-mandated deductions, such as child support payments, are also applied as per the orders. It is important to review your pay stub to confirm the accuracy of these deductions. Promptly notify the Payroll Manager of any errors, questionable deductions, or omissions to prevent potential loss of benefits

#### **3.2.3 Shift Differential.**

In order to ensure adequate coverage during evenings, nights, and weekends, Meridian Behavioral Healthcare offers a shift differential to eligible classified employees who work approved evening, night, or weekend shifts. Meridian Behavioral Healthcare is committed to maintaining a compensation plan that is both non-discriminatory and competitive, aligned with the rates offered for similar positions in the local job market. The President has the authority to approve salary additives for specific categories and conditions, which will be uniformly applied to all individuals in similar circumstances without any form of discrimination. Consequently, a Shift Differential additive will be provided.

Shift differential rates:

Weekdays:

- 7.5% for evening shifts
- 10% for night shifts

Weekends:

- 5% for day shifts

- 12.5% for evening shifts

- 15% for night shifts

CSU LPN:

- Weekday: \$3 for day shifts, \$4 for evening shifts, and \$5 for night shifts

- Weekend: \$4 for day shifts, \$5.50 for evening shifts, and \$6 for night shifts

CSU RN:

- Weekday night: \$3

- Weekend: \$3 for day shifts and \$5 for night shifts

### 3.3.0 Grievances.

Meridian Healthcare. encourages employees to deal openly and directly with each other at all levels. This procedure provides guidelines for resolving problems / conflicts, and exceptions or exclusions from this process. Grievance is defined as any complaint, problem or concern of an employee regarding their workplace, job or coworker relationships and may include reasons such as workplace harassment, health and safety, supervisor behavior or adverse changes in employment conditions.

#### **PROCEDURE:**

##### **Exclusions**

1. Claims of alleged sexual or other forms of unlawful harassment should follow the Sexual and Other Unlawful Forms of Harassment Procedure (Procedure VIII-AA).
2. Suspensions, reductions in pay, layoffs, demotions, scheduling arrangements, and dismissals shall not be subject to the Problem Resolution process.
3. An employee will not have the right to file a grievance against performance evaluations unless it is alleged that the evaluation is based on factors other than the employee's performance.
4. Employees who attain regular status (Full or part time) will be allowed to bring grievances to the attention of the Center. Employees who have not attained regular status (PRN, Interns) may bring grievances only to the attention of the immediate supervisor and the next level supervisor.

##### **Overview**

Regular employees will be given two options for handling any grievance:

- Open communication with immediate supervisor
- Written grievance

##### **Written Grievance Procedure**

1. The employee will make every effort to file a grievance within seven (7) calendar days of the incident giving rise to the grievance.
2. After completing the written grievance, the original will be filed with the employee's immediate supervisor **or** the first level supervisor best able to respond to the grievance. If the grievance involves the first level supervisor, the written grievance may be filed with the second level supervisor. The supervisor receiving the grievance shall immediately deliver copies to the reviewing supervisor and the Director of Human Resources.

3. The supervisor will make every effort to resolve the grievance within seven (7) calendar days from the date it is filed, and will consider the best interest of the Center, the employee and the clients (where appropriate). The original grievance with the supervisor's response will be returned to the employee and copies will be provided to the Senior Vice President of Human Resources and the reviewing supervisor.

4. If the employee is not satisfied with the supervisor's response, the employee shall file the grievance with the next level supervisor within seven (7) calendar days of the employee's receipt from the first level supervisor. The next level supervisor will review and attempt to resolve the grievance within seven (7) calendar days from receipt from the employee. The reviewing supervisor's written response will be provided to the employee with copies to the Director of Human Resources.

5. If the employee is not satisfied with the reviewing supervisor's response, the employee may request that the grievance continue up the supervisory chain. Each movement up the chain shall follow the process outlined above.

6. If the grievance is not resolved through the supervisory chain, the employee may request that Human Resources review the grievance. The Chief Human Resources Officer will respond in writing to the grievance within ten (10) days from the date of the employee notifying the Chief Human Resources Officer. The final level of grievance will be the Chief Human Resources Officer whose decision will be final and binding on all grievances.

7. Employees have the right to report and file a complaint regarding discrimination to external government agencies. The external agencies can include the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC – 1.800.669.4000), U.S Department of Health and Human Services (1.800.368.1019), US Department of Justice (1.202.514.4609), and the Department of Children and Family Services (1.866.762.2237).

**The parties may mutually agree to extend the time limitations for any step in the procedure. Human Resources may grant a reasonable extension of the timeline if one party requests it.**

### **3.4.0 Disability Accommodation**

**PURPOSE:** Meridian Healthcare. is committed to providing individuals with disabilities equal opportunities in all phases of employment. Meridian will in good faith, provide reasonable accommodations for its qualified applicants and employees as required by federal and state laws. Meridian will make every reasonable effort, up to the point of undue hardship, to accommodate an employee or applicant's disability-related accommodation requests.

Retaliation against an individual with a disability for requesting an accommodation is prohibited.

#### **PROCEDURE:**

##### **Pre-Employment:**

1. Applicants may request accommodations during the hiring process or application process itself (such as a modification in the manner in which the application is filed). Applicants can make a request for reasonable accommodations to hiring manager or Human Resources.
2. Hiring managers should make available to the applicant a position description outlining the essential duties, including physical requirements such as lifting, carrying, data entry, restraint/seclusion procedures, etc.
3. Hiring managers or Meridian personnel shall not ask applicants whether they have a disability or ask any questions regarding a disability by the applicant, but may ask applicants whether they are able to perform the essential functions of the job being applied for – with or without accommodation.
4. If an applicant indicates that he or she can perform the essential functions with accommodation, the hiring manager or Human Resources may inquire about the accommodation needed. The qualified applicant must, in response, disclose any disability that requires a reasonable accommodation in order to perform the essential functions of the position. The Center will determine the reasonableness of the request.
5. The hiring manager will not use disclosure of a disability or need for an accommodation against an applicant when making the final hiring decision.

##### **During Employment:**

1. If an employee requires accommodation, such request should be made to the immediate supervisor or Human Resources.

2. Human Resources will coordinate the review of the request. As part of the review process, Human Resources will start the ADA interactive process with the employee. If the disability is not obvious, the employee must provide HR written documentation from a medical provider of their disability and any functional limitations or accommodations recommended for the disability and provide the documentation to Human Resources.
3. Upon receipt of medical documentation, Human Resources in conjunction with the employee, their supervisor (if necessary), and the physician's recommendations will determine the essential functions of the employee's job, identify possible accommodations, and their effectiveness in assisting the employee. While the employee's input regarding the accommodation request will be taken into consideration, Meridian will make the final decision on all reasonable accommodation requests.
4. Inquires about and information regarding requests for accommodations shall be kept confidential. Supervisors and managers may be informed on a need to know basis regarding approved reasonable accommodations.
5. If the accommodation is approved, the supervisor will ensure that the employee's disability remains confidential.
6. If the accommodation is not approved, the Center will explain in writing to the employee why the requested accommodation was not approved. Accommodations requests may be denied if the request poses an "undue hardship" on Meridian. The determination of whether an accommodation creates an "undue hardship" is contingent upon a number of factors and is made by the Human Resources Department.
7. Supervisors must contact Human Resources before disciplining, transferring, or relieving an employee of job responsibilities due to a disability.
8. Employees who are denied an accommodation request may appeal the decision to the Director of Human Resources / Chief Human Resources Officer. The employee may be required to provide additional information or documentation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

#### **4.1.0 Accepting Employment.**

By accepting employment with Meridian, individuals are indicating that they will take appropriate actions to manage their personal affairs to ensure that they report to their assigned workstation drug free, on time, properly dressed, ready for work and fully prepared to perform their assigned duties at the beginning of each work shift.

**4.2.0 Employee Classification.** It is Meridian's Policy to make distinctions in employee classification based upon the number of hours worked in a week, the length of employment, and the expectation of providing employment on an intermittent or regular basis. All employees are expected to satisfactorily perform key job duties. Nothing in this section overrides Meridian's at-will status.

#### **4.2.1 Full-Time Regular Employees.**

Employees hired to work 72-80 hours per two week pay period. Full-Time employees are entitled to full fringe benefits the first of the month after 60 days of employment.

**4.2.2 Part-Time Regular Employees.** Employees hired to work 60 - 72 hours per two week pay period. Part-time employees who work 60 -72 hours per two week pay period are eligible for full fringe benefits the first of the month after 60 days of employment.

Employees hired to work less than 60 hours per two week pay period, are not eligible for full fringe benefits.

**4.2.3 Orientation Status.** Applicable to new employees, the first three months of employment are an orientation period in which the employee is trained and assessed. An employee changing to a new position within six months of hire shall satisfactorily complete a three-month orientation period in the new position before he/she becomes a regular employee in the position.

4.2.4 PRN Status. Employees hired on an as-needed basis. PRN employees do not qualify for fringe benefits (except for retirement benefits) or regular status. If an employee's status changes from PRN to full or part time regular, the employee will be eligible for fringe benefits the first of the month after 60 days of service as a regular employee.

4.2.5 Temporary Status. An employee appointed to fill a vacancy in an established position due to an employee's leave of absence or termination, or when the duration of the assignment is temporary, intermittent, or seasonal.

4.2.6 Trainee Status. An employee who is appointed as such in certain circumstances. The Department Director, Chief Human Resources Officer and the President must approve a detailed training plan. Upon successful completion of the training, the employee may be appointed to the position or a position in the same class, providing he/she is qualified. The employee will be required to complete a three- month orientation period in the position.

4.2.7 Exempt Status.

Under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), an exempt employee is an employee who does not receive overtime pay or qualify for minimum wage.

4.2.8 Non-Exempt.

Under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) non-exempt employees must be compensated with overtime for hours actually worked in excess of 40 hours in a work week.

**4.3.0 Use of Equipment and Vehicles.** Equipment and vehicles essential in accomplishing job duties are expensive and may be difficult to replace. When using Center property, employees are expected to exercise care, perform required maintenance, ensure vehicles interiors are kept clean, and follow all operating instructions, safety standards, and guidelines.

Employees should notify their supervisor if any equipment, machines, tools, or vehicles appear to be damaged, defective, or in need of repair. Prompt reporting of damages, defects, and the need for repairs could prevent deterioration of equipment and possible injury to employees or others. A supervisor or the Facilities department manager can answer any questions about an employee's responsibility for maintenance and care of equipment or vehicles used on the job.

The improper, careless, negligent, destructive, or unsafe use or operation of equipment or vehicles, as well as excessive or avoidable traffic and parking violations, can result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

**4.4.0 Driving Eligibility.** *(Procedure VIII-PP)* Employees who drive a Center-owned vehicle as an

essential function of their job must meet

Center driver eligibility requirements as determined by the Meridian automobile liability insurance and Center Wide Procedures. A motor vehicle report will be obtained on each employee who is applying for driving privileges to determine eligibility. All employees who drive a Center-owned vehicle in the course of their job will be designated an "Approved Driver". Employees are not permitted to transport persons served in their own vehicle or non-persons served in the Center-owned vehicles.

All employees who are approved center drivers are covered under the automobile liability insurance. Each employee is covered per accident for a combined single limit of \$1,000,000.

It is the responsibility of the employee as a Center Approved Driver to maintain a good driving record and to notify the Human Resources Department immediately if there is any change in personal driving status which would affect your driving record (i.e. tickets, accidents, suspension) whether or not the incident occurred on personal time or company time. Failure to notify the Human Resources Department of any change in the status of your license or of any accident/incident could result in disciplinary action up to and including termination. Employees in positions that require center driver eligibility must remain eligible or risk removal from the position.

#### **4.5.0 Employee Absences.**

To maintain a safe and productive work environment, Meridian expects employees to be reliable and punctual in reporting for scheduled work.

- a. In the event an employee cannot avoid being late to work or is unable to work as scheduled, they should notify their immediate supervisor or designee as far in advance as possible of the anticipated tardiness or absence.
  - i. Employees are not to leave a message with anyone and should contact their supervisor directly. If the supervisor cannot personally be reached, it is acceptable to leave a voice mail message.
    - ii. Adherence to established department policies for notification is required if different from this policy.
- b. If the absence is due to illness without a doctor's certification, the employee shall notify their immediate supervisor or designee of their return to work status on a daily basis. If an employee will be out for more than three days for an illness, the employee will speak with their immediate supervisor to determine the action steps necessary to return to work. Such steps may include documentation from a physician that the employee is fit to return to work.
- c. Absences for three consecutive days, without notification to the immediate supervisor or designee, shall be considered as a voluntary resignation without notice and may result in loss of some benefits such as PTO payout and eligibility for rehire.
- d. Poor attendance and excessive tardiness are disruptive, either may lead to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

**4.6.0 Work Schedules.** Full-time regular employees work an eight-hour day, 40-hour week, unless another work schedule is approved. Employees who work shifts must accept the shift assigned. Shift assignments are subject to change. The workweek begins at 12:01 a.m. Friday and ends at midnight Thursday. When seven-day coverage is necessary, the hours may encompass weekends, holidays, or both. Overtime may be needed and in such cases, employees are required to be available. Employees filling positions designated as non-exempt are paid at the rate of one and one-half times the regular hourly rate of pay for all hours of actual work over 40 hours in the seven-day workweek in accordance with the federal Fair Labor Standards Act. Where possible, supervisors should adjust scheduled hours of work within the workweek to reduce or eliminate overtime payment when feasible. Employees filling positions designated exempt are expected to work the hours necessary to fulfill their job responsibilities.

**4.7.0 Meal Periods.** When a meal period is a part of the workday, the period must be at least 30 minutes. In some special situations, employees may be directed to work during their meal periods. In such instances, meal periods are considered time worked.

**4.8.0 Work Breaks.** A work break of up to 15 minutes may be allowed, but is not required under FLSA (Fair Labor Standards Act) during the first half of the work shift and again during the second half of the work shift. An employee cannot combine, accumulate, or use this time to cover late arrival or early departure from duty. Work breaks are considered time worked and employees and supervisors must ensure this privilege is not abused and does not interfere with established work schedules. Nonexempt employees are prohibited from going off site during work breaks and smoking is limited to official lunch breaks off site.

**4.9.0 Progressive Discipline and Corrective Action. (Extracted from: Procedure VIII-DD)** It is the practice of Meridian Healthcare. (Meridian or MBH) to administer equitable and consistent discipline or corrective action for unsatisfactory conduct or performance in the workplace. This procedure provides the protocols for staff discipline and/or corrective action.

#### **I. Basic Provisions**

1. Each situation will be reviewed on its own merits, giving full consideration to the background and circumstances.
2. **Corrective Action for Conduct:** For **minor** policy / procedure and conduct violations, a first offense may result in a verbal counseling; a next occurrence may be followed a written counseling, a third offense could result in a suspension or second written counseling, while the fourth occurrence could result in termination. More serious policy / procedure and conduct violations may result in written counseling, suspension or termination for a first offense.
3. **Corrective Action for Performance:** If the issue involves poor performance and routine informal coaching has not been successful, it may be determined that additional training is needed. In this instance the supervisor will use a **Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)** to address performance.
4. **Corrective Action for Attendance:** If the issue involves attendance violations, progressive discipline will not be combined with corrective actions associated with conduct. Corrective actions associated with attendance will move through a separate progressive disciplinary process. Depending on the area in the company, attendance may be managed on a point

system. Otherwise, a first offense may result in a verbal counseling; a next occurrence may be followed by a written counseling and a third offense could result in a suspension or second written counseling, while the fourth occurrence could result in termination. The more serious attendance violation involving job abandonment will result in termination for three consecutive shifts missed due to the absent employee failing to make any contact with the supervisor pertaining to the missed days.

5. Meridian reserves the right to discipline, suspend, or terminate employees without resorting to prior disciplinary measures where the action creates a detrimental environment to our clients, staff, or the Center's mission.

6. Senior Management members must concur with any disciplinary action to be taken. Human Resources must approve any suspension or termination prior to its implementation.

**F. Corrective Action Forms:** All corrective action forms are available and can be downloaded from the HRIS system (DATIS).

Supervisors should administer corrective actions to the employee within 30 days of being aware of a conduct infraction or performance issues. Corrective action submitted outside the 30-day period and/or failure to document PIP performance progress in a timely manner, may result in denial of the corrective action by Human Resources.

## **II. Types of progressive discipline or corrective action**

A. **Verbal Coaching:** Verbal coaching is a written document of a conversation to alert an employee of minor issues or conduct infractions. It may be the first step in the progressive disciplinary process.

B. **Verbal Warning:** Verbal Warning is used to advise the employee of a policy / procedure violation or conduct problem, the need to correct it and an agreed upon solution plan and is documented on a "Verbal Coaching Record" Form. The original document should be uploaded to the employee's DATIS file in the Corrective Actions section. Informal coaching should be used for minor performance or conduct issues. Written documentation is required, and should be uploaded to DATIS as outlined above.

C. **Written Counseling:** The written format should cover the misconduct or unsatisfactory performance at issue, the corrective measures to be taken by the employee moving forward, and the consequences for failure to correct the problem for which the employee is being counseled.

- i. The written counseling needs to be documented and uploaded to Datis, in the Corrective Actions section.
- ii. Supervisors must use the "Corrective Action" Form available from DATIS.
- iii. Both the supervisor and the employee must sign the forms to document that the counseling took place. If the employee refuses to sign the copy, a note to that effect should be made on the form and a witness' signature should be obtained. The witness must be a supervisor or above.

**D. Performance Improvement Plan (PIP):** The written format for addressing performance issues clarifies the target performance for both the supervisor and employee, notifies the employee of what additional training will be provided, sets a target date for improvement and re-evaluation and advises the employee of the consequences for lack of improvement.

1. The PIP needs to be submitted to Human Resources for review and approval prior to discussing with the employee. Upon receiving approval form Human Resources, the PIP should be discussed with the employee and then uploaded in DATIS, in the Corrective Actions field.
2. Supervisors must utilize the Performance Improvement Plan form housed in DATIS to document the performance issues.
3. Both the supervisor and the employee sign the form to document that the counseling took place. If the employee refuses to sign the copy, a note to that effect should be made on the copy and a witness' signature should be obtained. This witness must be a supervisor or above.

**E. Suspension:** A disciplinary suspension without pay may be an appropriate disciplinary action under certain circumstances. This action is generally a final action step prior to termination for misconduct. Human Resources must approve any disciplinary suspension of an employee. (Exception is a suspension in response to a serious infraction of policy / procedure that will likely result in termination where time is needed to confer with Human Resources).

1. Suspension may or may not be preceded by a verbal or written counseling for serious infractions of policy or procedures. (Exception is a suspension in response to a serious infraction of policy / procedure that will likely result in termination where time is needed to confer with Human Resources.)
2. A written notice of suspension shall be given to the employee who shall sign an acknowledgement. The notice and acknowledgement shall be uploaded to DATIS in the Corrective Actions section.
3. In order to comply with Fair Labor Standards Act requirements, suspensions for exempt employees must be in complete work week segments (Friday through Thursday) and the employee must not perform **any** work while suspended. Suspensions of periods of less than one week are limited to acts of gross misconduct (safety violations, sexual harassment, violence against another employee, etc.) and must be approved by Human Resources. Exempt employees must be paid a full day's pay for any partial days worked.

**F. Termination:** The failure of an employee to respond positively to progressive disciplinary/corrective action may lead to termination. The supervisor will discuss the problem/violation with Human Resources. If the problem is deemed to warrant termination of employment, a letter of termination will be drafted and the employee and supervisor will have a termination meeting. Human Resources may also attend.

1. If an employee's action is sufficiently egregious, immediate termination of employment may result.
2. The following list contains situations that could result in immediate termination from Meridian, but is not meant to be all-inclusive:
  - a. Theft or attempted theft from Meridian, another employee, a client, or other individual doing business with Meridian;
  - b. Falsification of time records, medical forms, employment applications, billing records, or other documents;
  - c. Fraudulent statements or actions involving Meridian's records or business activities;
  - d. Destruction or abuse of Meridian's property;
  - e. Use, possession, manufacture, distribution, dispensation, sale, purchase of illegal drugs at any time at any place,
  - f. Use of illegal drugs or alcohol and misuse of prescription drugs while on duty,
  - g. Refusal to follow work orders;
  - h. Sleeping on the job;
  - i. Physical and/or verbal violence, threats, intimidation, or harassment of another employee, client, or other person doing business with Meridian including but not limited to conduct that amounts to racial or sexual harassment;
  - j. Violations of federal, state, or local law when such violation occurs on the job, or relates to work performance, or adversely affects Meridian in any way;
  - k. Possession of a weapon in any Meridian building or in a Center vehicle;
  - l. Violations of non-competition or confidentiality agreements, unauthorized disclosure of MBH or client confidential or proprietary information;
  - m. Violation of MBH policies, procedure, code of conduct or work rules
  - n. Any action whether or not committed during working hours and whether or not involving Meridian or its clients, vendors or employees that could potentially result in damage to the reputation of MBH, its clients, or employees;
  - o. Any conduct that constitutes a violation of any standard applicable to Meridian involving patient care; conspiracy to commit or attempting to commit, with any other person, any of the acts set out in the above paragraphs.

G. While it is impossible to list every type of behavior that may be deemed a serious offense, the Employee Code of Conduct includes examples of problems that may result in suspension or termination of employment. However, the problems listed are not all necessarily serious offenses, but may be examples of unsatisfactory conduct that will trigger progressive discipline.

H. As with all other Meridian policies and procedures, nothing herein is intended or should be construed to create a contract between Meridian and its employees.

### III. Employee Responsibility

It is each employee's responsibility to be informed about Meridian's code of conduct. Rules of conduct are available through New Employee Orientation, Policies of Meridian's Board of Directors and Center-wide Procedures (Chapter VIII). The online procedures will be the official procedure if there is a difference with any written materials. Each employee can and should consult with his/her supervisor on difficult or questionable decisions. Each and every employee should feel free to contact Human Resources directly to discuss any situation as to which there could be differences of opinion or legitimate exceptions to the guidelines.

#### 4.10.0 Employment Termination. *(Extracted from : Procedure VIII-L)*

Meridian Healthcare. (Meridian or MBH) terminates employment because of an employee's resignation, discharge, retirement or the organization's permanent reduction in work force. Discharge can occur at any time, for any reason permitted by law. Employees are free to terminate employment at any time and for any reason.

#### **PROCEDURE:**

Supervisors must immediately notify Human Resources upon learning of an employee's termination. The supervisor will generate the termination in DATIS and upload any supporting documentation, including resignation letter, if provided. Human Resources will finalize all terminations in the DATIS system. The supervisor will generate a requisition to fill the vacancy through Datis. Upon separation, if the employee has made contributions to the retirement plan, they should contact Empower Retirement, the retirement plan provider, at (800) 338-4015 to indicate their preference for either rolling over or closing the account.

I. The following information is required for the employment termination actions:

#### **A. Resignation**

1. Non-exempt staff are requested to provide their immediate supervisor and Human Resources with at least two weeks written notice of their intent to resign. Exempt staff are requested to provide 4 weeks written notice. A written resignation must be submitted to Human Resources and a copy provided to the supervisor. Failure to provide and **work** the appropriate notice will result in loss of some separation benefits (i.e. PTO payout, eligibility for re-hire).
2. The employee is responsible for ensuring that all company property issued during their employment period is returned. The employee should return equipment to IT themselves and sign acknowledging the return of the equipment. If the employee coordinates with their supervisor for the return of Meridian's property, the employee is responsible if the equipment is not received by IT. All property must be returned on or before the last day of employment. If such property is not returned, the employee may be responsible for reimbursement for said property. The replacement or repair cost (if damaged) of the property will be deducted from the employee's final paycheck, as allowable by law.

3. Supervisor will indicate in the DATIS system whether employee is ineligible for rehire. If employee is deemed ineligible for rehire, supervisor shall provide explanation in DATIS system. Eligibility for rehire status will be final approved by Human Resources.

#### **B. Discharge**

1. Supervisor must obtain approval from Human Resources to terminate based upon the Progressive Discipline (Procedure VIII-DD).
2. If termination is approved, Human Resources will draft and deliver a brief termination letter, indicating to the employee why employment is terminated. The supervisor will provide any documentation supporting the termination. Such documentation will state the policy or procedure the employee violated, dates of verbal or written counseling, the applicable dates of any Performance Improvement Plan, and the deadline for performance improvement. If a formal investigation was conducted, supervisor will include the findings of such investigation. Human Resources will review prior to delivery to employee.
3. Supervisor will collect Center property from employee.
4. Employee will be escorted by the supervisor or designee to collect personal belongings and escorted from the facility.
5. Discharged employees are considered ineligible for rehire. Any exceptions to this must be requested in writing to Human Resources and approved by the Senior Vice President.

#### **C. Workforce Reduction (Reduction in Force – Position Elimination)**

1. Prior to terminating an employee as a RIF, Meridian will allow the employee the opportunity to seek another position in which the impacted employee meets the minimum qualifications.
2. Meridian shall implement the procedures set forth in Procedure VIII-M, Workforce Reduction.
3. On or before employee's final day of employment, supervisor will collect all Meridian property.
4. Human Resources will provide each employee with a letter of separation. Supervisor will recommend if employee is eligible for rehire. If employee is deemed ineligible for rehire, supervisor shall provide explanation in DATIS.
5. Every attempt will be made to place qualified staff in current Center vacancies.

#### **D. Retirement**

1. Non-exempt staff are requested to provide Human Resources and their immediate supervisor with at least two weeks written notice of their intent to retire. Exempt staff are requested to provide 4 weeks written notice. Failure to provide appropriate notice of intent to retire may result in loss of some separation benefits (i.e. PTO payout, eligibility for re-hire).
2. Employee will coordinate with their supervisor for the return of Meridian's property. All property will be returned on or before the last day of employment. If such property is not returned, employee may be responsible for reimbursement for the value of said

property. The cost of the property will be deducted from the employee's final paycheck, as allowable by law.

3. Supervisor will recommend if employee is eligible for rehire. If employee is deemed ineligible for rehire, supervisor shall provide explanation in DATIS. Eligibility for rehire status will be final approved by Human Resources.

#### **E. Job Abandonment**

1. An employee that misses three consecutive scheduled days/shifts without requesting approved leave or proactively notifying their supervisor is assumed to have abandoned their position. This is considered a voluntary resignation without notice.

2. PRN employees – after three consecutive communication attempts by staffing department and failure by the PRN employee to respond to those communications, the PRN employee will be voluntarily termed for job abandonment - failure to meet requirements of PRN agreement.

3. In the event of job abandonment, the employee's immediate supervisor must notify Human Resources at the time of the third missed day/shift. Human Resources will start immediate processes to ensure all access rights are terminated. The supervisor will process the termination in DATIS and upload any supporting documentation. The supervisor will generate a vacancy approval to fill through DATIS.

4. The immediate supervisor will be responsible for retrieving any Center property, however, the cost of the equipment may be deducted from the employee's last check as allowable by law.

5. An employee that abandons their position is ineligible for rehire.

6. In rare circumstances, an employee may not be able to report to work or to notify management or Human Resources. If an employee feels he/she falls into this category, the employee must provide documented evidence from a reliable source of the absence within 7 business days from receiving the notice of job abandonment letter from HR and reason for not contacting management or having a representative contact management on their behalf. The CHRO and SVP will take under advisement the new information and will make a final determination on the employee's status.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

It is the policy of Meridian to ensure that all staff are selected, prepared and deemed competent for their responsibilities through pre-employment interviews, orientation, in-service training, continuing and mandatory education programs, and through initial and annual competency verification.

#### **5.1.0 Employee Competence.**

Meridian strives to hire the most qualified staff available and provide opportunities for the professional growth and development of all staff.

- a. Staff shall accurately represent their own qualifications/affiliations or those of their colleagues.
  
- b. Staff shall provide services using techniques, including testing/assessment techniques, which are generally accepted in terms of effectiveness and procedures. Controversial issues shall be discussed prior to use with one's supervisor and shall meet with supervisory approval.
  
- c. Staff shall be responsible for recognizing the limitations of their competence and will only provide services and use procedures with which they are familiar and are qualified by training and experience.
  
- d. Staff shall take the initiative to seek supervisory advice for programmatic issues related to service delivery.
  
- e. Staff shall maintain knowledge of current scientific and professional information related to their area of expertise. Staff will comply with their individualized training plan determined by their supervisor and Human Resources when hired.
  
- f. Staff is expected to recognize the need for continuing education and shall take the initiative to obtain training, experience or counsel to assure competency in their field. Staff will be encouraged to participate in conferences and professional meetings that directly relate to professional competence and program needs.
  
- g. Staff is expected to recognize that personal problems and conflicts may interfere with professional competence. They shall refrain from undertaking activities in which a personal problem may lead to inadequate professional service or harm to persons served. Such staff are expected to seek competent professional assistance. Meridian makes an Employee Assistance Program available for all staff.

- h. Staff is expected to meet all annual training requirements that have been outlined in the Training Plan as well as those identified in supervision.
- i. Staff is responsible for obtaining access to the Meridian e-Learning (MeL) internet site to complete required online courses.
- j. Staff shall offer competent service provision including complete, accurate and timely documentation. This is especially important with regard to documentation in the service records and in Unusual/Adverse Incidents.
- k. Personal values and judgments are not appropriate in a service record or in Incident Reports. It is important to describe specific aspects of problematic behaviors or events without recording personal value judgments. Service records shall not contain references to socially embarrassing behavior or unnecessary reference to anti-social behavior.
- l. Staff shall not falsify any type of Meridian record/documentation. Falsification of any documents may result in immediate termination.

### **5.2.0 Job Classification.**

Employees are assigned to job classes based on their duties and responsibilities. Each class of position has a position description, which outlines the allocation factors and general duties. Each position within Meridian has a written job description that outlines the position's essential duties and responsibilities and is the basis for performance expectations. Job descriptions are reviewed at least annually by the supervisor and updated as necessary to ensure essential duties and responsibilities are accurately described. Employees are required to sign the job description at least annually.

### **5.3.0 Registration, Licensure and Certification.**

Certain job classes or work assignments require the maintenance of an active license, registration, or certification. Each employee is responsible for maintaining the required license (including driver's license), registration, or certification and for notifying the supervisor of any change of status. Failure to maintain the required license, registration, or certification, or to notify the supervisor of a change of status, may result in either removal from the job class or position or in dismissal.

**5.4.0 Performance Appraisals. (Procedure VIII-J)** Performance is monitored through supervision on a regular basis. Formal performance reviews will occur approximately 90 days subsequent to hire and on an annual basis. Nothing in this policy precludes the more frequent performance of such evaluations if deemed appropriate. A copy of all performance reviews will be stored in DATIS and be part of the employee's Human Resources file. HR's Staff Training/Development is responsible for tracking and reporting pending performance appraisals.

Supervision serves to verify and support the development of required competencies. This verification/assistance process occurs intensively during the employee's first three (3) months of employment. The review of competencies and the evaluation of performance occur at least annually. Competencies are verified via review of record audit data, supervisor observation, and Risk Management data. Performance is appraised on the basis of data about such things as productivity, revenue, attendance for meetings, timely completion of tasks, accuracy etc. Procedure VIII-J applies to all staff, including PRN. 5.4.1 Orientation. Beginning on your first day of work, you will enter an orientation period. This orientation period includes a **3-day New Employee Orientation course**. This course transitions you into a Meridian employee.

**Your supervisor will meet with you to sign your Job Description within 30 days of hire and have an introductory/competency review, due 90 days from hire. Your yearly Annual Evaluations will be completed at the start of every fiscal year. Your supervisor will help you to complete these requirements.**

1. **Job Description:** This document makes the general duties outlined in the Position Description specific to a particular position within a department, for a particular employee. Job Descriptions shall, explicitly and effectively, outline the criteria on which the employee will be evaluated for their Introductory (90-Day) and Annual Reviews. Once Job Descriptions are established for each position, the needed competencies an individual must possess to perform those duties can be readily identified.
  - a. *Human Resources, Staff Training and Development, will ensure that accurate and updated Job Description templates are available and centrally located in the "Managers Toolbox"*
  - b. *Any required changes to a Job Description must be presented to Human Resources, Staff Training and Development for approval. Upon approval, Human Resources, Staff Training and Development, will update the Job Description template to be accessed in the "Managers Toolbox"*
  - c. *1st level Supervisors will obtain Job Description templates from the "Managers Toolbox" and are responsible for completing a Job Description, with all required signatures (employee, 1st level supervisor and 2nd level supervisor), for each employee in their department.*
  - d. *Job Descriptions are to be completed a) within 30 days of an employee's initial hire date b) within 30 days of an employee changing job titles c) annually, within 30 days of the new fiscal year.*

*e. Completed Job Descriptions are to be uploaded to the employee's "Credentials" page in the Human Resources Information System (HRIS).*

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**2 Introductory Evaluation and Competency Checklist:** Due within 90 days of hire, this performance management item is completed in DATIS and will evaluate the performance level of the new employee on key job duties at the end of the orientation period. Employee reviews are based on a 5–point rating scale.

1. The employee must at least meet expectations in all essential areas to be deemed proficient. Failure to meet these expectations may result in a requirement for continued supervision or additional training, or disciplinary action, up to and including termination.
  - a. The review is completed in the HRIS by the manager, reviewed by the second level supervisor and acknowledged by the employee.
2. The Competency Checklist and the Introductory Evaluation together establish that the employee has demonstrated the requisite competencies to perform the specified duties, and has performed those duties consistently to Meridian's standards.

**3 Annual Performance Appraisal:** Each employee's performance is evaluated at least annually at the close of the Center's fiscal year; or in response to a required, performance related corrective action plan. A 90-day evaluation completed between March 1 and June 30 will count as the annual evaluation. Employee assessments are based on a 5–point rating scale.

1. The Performance review is based directly on the Job Description. Staff performance on each duty is assessed based on the related standard set at the beginning of the fiscal year or in subsequent modifications or corrective action requirements.
  - a. In order to receive a rating of "achieved goals" (meets expectations) the performance must be at the specified level.
  - b. Performance is assessed in two areas:
    - i) Quantitative areas include amount of work, attendance at meetings, generating revenue or savings
    - ii) Qualitative areas relate to competence and document that the employee's work is of such quality as to demonstrate the employee's continued competence, as evident in the peer review data and from any other relevant sources.
  - c. Expectations for quantity of work can be adjusted based on
    - i) FMLA or other leave approved by the Center
    - ii) Length of employment less than a full year
    - iii) System issues as identified by the supervisor and explained in the appraisal
  - d. Some items may be scored only as meet/fails to meet for example, compliance with payroll, leave requests, etc. are met or not met and do not qualify for a score of "exceeds."
2. Each July the supervisor needs to gather relevant data for the previous fiscal year from QI/Risk Management, Human Resources, Peer Review Audits, Fiscal and SmartCare or other relevant data bases and review performance and competency with the employee. Each item is rated with comments outlining the basis for the rating.
  - a. Areas for improvement or further development are discussed and agreed upon and documented on the form.
- b. The employee, supervisor, and second level supervisor all sign the on line evaluation in the HRIS,

- c. The employee receives a copy of the completed signed evaluation in the HRIS. If an
3. employee fails to achieve goals in any area, the manager will develop a plan for improvement (PIP) and submit it to HR for approval. Repeated inability to perform, or inability to perform in key areas will be addressed in accordance with Human Resources policy, but may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **LEAVE & BENEFITS**

#### **6.1.0 Health, Life, and Supplemental Insurance.**

Employees are offered a variety of insurance plans. Meridian pays part of the sponsored health plans and pays the full premium for basic life insurance and long-term disability insurance. Other insurance plans, available through voluntary payroll deduction, are group plans with no Meridian participation in premium cost.

Employee benefits are available to all full time employees and their dependents and part time employees providing they work at least 30 hours per week. Eligibility starts the first of the month following 60 days of employment. Employees have the right to enroll in any sponsored insurance plan without evidence of insurability during the first 30 days of employment when eligibility requirements are met. After 30 days of employment, employees may only enroll or make changes to existing policies during specified open enrollment periods. Employees can only make changes to their insurance options if they experience a qualifying event such as marriage, divorce, the birth or adoption of a child, or if they enroll in or lose coverage in another plan. These changes can only be made during the annual open enrollment period. PRN employees and part-time regular employees working fewer than 30 hours per week are not eligible to participate in health, life, long-term disability and supplemental insurance plans.

Insurance plan payroll deductions are pre-tax, with the exception of supplemental life and Aflac's short-term disability. Employees have the option to decline any insurance plan within 30 days of meeting eligibility requirements or during the open enrollment period. For more details, you can inquire at the Human Resources Office.

#### **6.2.0 Retirement.**

Employees have the option to allocate a portion of their earnings towards either a deferred compensation or Roth account. All employees are eligible to join the retirement plan from their first day of employment and become fully vested from that date. For financial planning guidance regarding these investment options, you can contact Empower Retirement at (800) 338-4015. You may seek independent advice from SageView Advisory Group by reaching out to Maressa Etzig at 800-814-8742, extension 290.

Employer contributions begin after one year of employment, and they follow this match schedule:

- Less than 1 year of service: 0%
- 1 year: Up to 1% of salary
- 2 years: Up to 2% of salary

- 3 years: Up to 3% of salary
- 4 years: Up to 5% of salary
- 5 years: Up to 6% of salary
- 6 years: Up to 6% of salary
- 7+ years: Up to 8% of salary

The vesting schedule of the employer match is as follows:

- Less than 2 years of service: 0%
- 2 years: 25%
- 3 years: 50%
- 4 years: 75%
- 5 years: 100%

### **6.3.0 Unemployment Compensation.**

Under Florida law, an employee who is laid off or terminated through no fault of his or her own may be entitled to receive unemployment compensation benefits. The Agency for Workforce Innovation assists individuals who have been laid off or terminated to ascertain their rights to benefits. Forms, publications, and general information are available through the state web site [www.myflorida.com](http://www.myflorida.com).

#### **6.4.0 Workers' Compensation.**

Employees are covered by workers' compensation insurance, providing medical care, lost wages, and compensation for disabilities resulting from on-the-job injuries. Employees are required to report on duty accidents to their supervisor immediately and obtain approval for medical care and/or compensation through the Meridian-contracted provider to be eligible for benefits. Compensation is dependent upon the nature of the injury. PRN employees are normally only covered for medical care.

**You must seek treatment only from an authorized medical provider in all cases except for emergency treatment.**

In accordance with Meridian's Drug-Free Workplace Policy, you will be required to submit for a post-accident drug screening no later than 12 hours after the accident. Be prepared to show a picture ID at the Drug Screening Lab.

After every medical appointment, you must provide your supervisor and the Human Resources Department with medical documentation of your work status. Injury-related absences from work may only be initiated by your authorized medical care provider.

Contact your Human Resources or your supervisor in order to keep him/her informed about your medical progress, in-going treatment, and prognosis for recovery. You must attend all of your scheduled medical appointments.

If the injury results in the employee being placed on no work status for more than 3 consecutive days with the expectation of continued treatment for a serious health condition as defined by FMLA Act, the employee will be placed on FMLA leave. FMLA leave is unpaid leave however the employee can use any accrued PTO concurrently with FMLA.

When your medical provider releases you back to work, regardless of the limitations/restrictions you may have, you must be willing and available to return to work. Depending on the employee's position, light duty may not be an option.

Questions regarding workers' compensation should be directed to the Human Resources Department.

#### **6.5.0 Professional Liability Insurance.**

Meridian Healthcare provides Professional Liability coverage to each employee. The limit of insurance is \$1,000,000 for each employee/\$3,000,000 aggregate. This insurance does not apply to dishonest, fraudulent, criminal or malicious act. "Damages" arising out of any intentional dishonest, fraudulent, criminal, malicious act, error or omission, committed by any

insured including the willful or reckless violation of any statute will not be covered.

## **6.6.0 Employee Assistance Program (EAP).**

Meridian offers an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) designed to provide professional and confidential counseling support to all employees, as well as their spouses and children, who may be dealing with personal or emotional challenges that could impact their job performance. This service has been contracted with CompSych, and it includes three in-person counseling sessions per incident at no cost to you. Please call (800) 311-4327 at any time to obtain a referral to a qualified local provider. For additional details and information, please reach out to the Human Resources department.

## **6.7.0 Leave**

Approval must be obtained from the immediate supervisor prior to taking leave with or without pay. If an emergency occurs, it is the employee's responsibility to contact the supervisor and request leave as soon as reasonably possible.

### **6.7.1 Personal Time Off (PTO). (*Procedure VIII-P*)**

#### **Purpose:**

Meridian Healthcare (Meridian, Center or Agency) values life work balance and self-care. Therefore, it is Meridian's practice to offer paid time off (PTO) for all regular full-time and part-time employees in good standing, for the purposes of vacation, illness or injury, or personal business.

This procedure provides the Center-wide guidelines and processes related to PTO and Holiday Pay, including accrual and use.

#### **Procedure:**

Accrual of PTO will begin immediately upon appointment to a regular position. Employees are not eligible to utilize their PTO until the time accrued appears in the Human Resources (HR) System (DATIS). This eligibility will occur automatically upon hire with the initial payroll cycle.

#### **1. Applicability:**

- a. PRN, consultants, and temporary or contract employees are not eligible for PTO.
- b. Only PTO hours taken off can be claimed with the exception of the PTO buy-back policy listed below. Employees will not be paid PTO hours for regularly scheduled days off. Employees will not be paid PTO hours in addition to actual time worked for the same hours.
- c. Exempt employees must request PTO for any absences during the normally scheduled workday that interferes with the performance of their duties.
- d. Comp time for non-exempt employees is never allowed, by Federal and State law.

## 2. Approval

- a. Each employee must complete a Leave Request in the Datis System as far in advance as possible, and within the timelines specified in Section 5 below. Once the employee submits the Leave Request, the Datis system automatically forwards the request to the employee's supervisor for approval.
- b. Submission of a request for PTO by no means guarantees that it will be approved. The supervisor will take into consideration whether there is adequate coverage for the department during the proposed leave time and/or whether there exists a legitimate business reason to deny the request. Supervisors are encouraged to allow use of PTO when appropriately requested; however, if a legitimate business reason exists, PTO use may be denied. Furthermore, the need to maintain adequate staffing will take precedence over all other scheduling considerations.
- c. Any employee denied the use of PTO time by their supervisor, who subsequently calls off on the day(s) requested will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.
- d. Meridian may, at its discretion, require staff to use accrued PTO if a clinic or program is experiencing a down cycle or operations are temporarily closed. Conversely, if an employee works during a period in which PTO pay has previously been approved, the hours worked will substitute for PTO hours approved on a one-to-one basis.

## 3. Accrual Provisions

- a. Regular full and part-time employees will earn PTO based on their established FTE designation. The accrual rate will be based on length of current service calculated on most recent hire date.
- b. Accrual Rates – Non-Exempt Employees

<b>Length of Regular Employment</b>	<b>Hours earned per pay period for 1.0 FTEs</b>	<b>Hours earned per year for 1.0 FTEs</b>
Less than 1 year	4.62	120
1 year to 3 years	6.00	156
3 years to 5 years	7.00	182
Over 5 years	9.00	234

- c. **Accrual Rates - Exempt Employees.** Because exempt employees may work more than 40 hours per week to meet their performance objectives, they will accrue PTO at a higher rate than non- exempt employees during their first five years of employment. However, exempt employees must use PTO for any absence that interferes with the performance of their duties.

<b>Length of Regular Employment</b>	<b>Hours earned per pay period for 1.0 FTEs</b>	<b>Hours earned per year for 1.0 FTEs</b>
Less than 1 year	6.00	156
1 year to 3 years	7.00	182
3 years to 5 years	8.00	208
Over 5 years	9.00	234

- d. Should an employee be on leave without pay during any pay period, PTO will be accrued only based on the actual hours worked during that period. Hours worked in excess of FTE designation will not result in an increase of leave accrual.
- e. Carryover of PTO is limited to 480 hours of accrued but unused PTO. This will be a rolling cap, and employees will not be able to accrue more than 480 hours at any time. Any exceptions to the carryover policy must be approved by the President (CEO).

**4. Recognized Holidays**

(See Procedure VIII-P-1 for more information)

- a. Meridian recognizes 11 holidays during the year. Employees will automatically be given 8 hours of Holiday Pay for each of those 11 holidays (these hours will no longer be deducted from staff's PTO balance beginning June 27, 2025).
- b. Meridian offices and outpatient clinics will be closed on the following holidays:
- New Year's Day (January 1)
  - Martin Luther King Jr Day (Third Monday in January)
  - Memorial Day (Last Monday in May)
    - Juneteenth (June 19)
  - Independence Day (July 4)
  - Labor Day (First Monday in September)
  - Veterans Day (November 11)
  - Thanksgiving (Fourth Thursday in November)
  - Day after Thanksgiving (Fourth Friday in November)

- Christmas Eve (December 24)
  - Christmas (December 25)
- c. **Holiday Observance Exceptions:** When Christmas Eve falls on either a Saturday or Sunday, which is not a regularly scheduled workday for the employee, there will be no application of 8 hours of Holiday Pay and no additional day off during the week will be granted (e.g., Friday or Monday surround the holiday). If an employee works on Christmas Eve when it falls on a Saturday or Sunday, employee will receive double-time differential pay.
5. **Notice Regarding Requests for PTO**  
(Exceptions to timelines must be approved by appropriate Senior Management)
- a. Non-clinical staff must request PTO 30 days in advance, excluding emergencies.
  - b. Clinical staff must request PTO 60 days in advance, excluding emergencies.
  - c. Medical staff must request PTO 90 days in advance, excluding emergencies.
  - d. Planned PTO use must be approved for use 30 days in advance, or as early as possible. Once approved, planned PTO may not be used against the employee for any disciplinary actions.
  - e. If requested and approved in advance, Supervisors will note "Planned PTO" in the grey box in DATIS.
6. **Annual Leave & Short-Term Disability Leave Balances Prior to January 1, 1997**
- a. Unplanned PTO may be used and may require documentation from a doctor to support the absence.
  - b. Excessive unplanned PTO usage is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.
  - c. Supervisors reserve the right to decline the use of PTO based on coverage or business purposes.
  - d. If PTO use was unplanned and/or requested at the last minute in circumstances such as illness or personal business, Supervisors will note "Unplanned PTO" in the grey box in DATIS.
7. **Treatment of PTO Time**
- a. Employees hired prior to January 1st, 1997, who have annual leave or short-term disability leave balances, will have their accrued leave retained in these separate accounts.
  - b. Annual Leave balances can be accessed for time off following the same process as PTO requests.
  - c. Short-term Disability Leave can be utilized when an employee is on approved leave under the Family Medical Leave Act or for the employee's personal illness that may or may not qualify under the Family Medical Leave Act. Employees with Short-term Disability Leave may donate their leave to another employee if they choose to do so. Employees must obtain prior approval from Human Resources to utilize hours in their Short-term Disability accounts

**8. Treatment of PTO Time**

- a. PTO will be paid at the employee's base hourly rate of pay.
- b. For the purpose of computing overtime, while PTO is paid time, PTO hours will **NOT** be counted as hours worked toward overtime.
- c. Employees will only be entitled to use their existing and accrued PTO. Leave must have been accrued and available for use prior to the pay period PTO is used. Under no circumstance will an employee be permitted to take PTO when it has not accrued.

**9. Donating PTO Time**

- a. Employees may donate up to 8 hours per month of their own PTO to a colleague who is on leave and has a valid FMLA Certification on file with Human Resources.
- b. To be eligible to donate, the giving employee must maintain a minimum PTO balance of 80 hours after the donation has been processed.
- c. To process the donation of PTO hours, the giving employee must send an email or submit a "PTO Donation Form" to Payroll indicating their desire to donate the PTO hours, noting to whom the hours are being donated, and confirming the hours remaining in the donating employees PTO accrual bank.

**10. Leave Without Pay (LWOP) & Unplanned PTO**

- a. If prior approved by the first and second level supervisors, employees who need additional time off may request Leave Without Pay (LWOP). Refer to Procedure VIII-KK for information on approved Leaves of Absence.
- b. LWOP will NOT be granted until all PTO, Annual Leave, and Short-term Disability (only for qualified illnesses) have been exhausted.
- c. It is the responsibility of each direct supervisor to enter LWOP on each time person's timesheet and to confirm that all PTO, Annual Leave, and Short-term Disability have been utilized first.
- d. It is acknowledged that unplanned PTO usage and/or LWOP utilization places a burden on the Agency, as this work time is not factored into the business needs of the Agency. Use of unplanned PTO and/or LWOP, which is not part of FMLA or other approved leave of absence, may be used and may require documentation from a doctor.
- e. Excessive unplanned PTO usage and/or LWOP utilization will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. Supervisors reserve the right to decline the use of PTO based on coverage and business purposes. Excessive use of unplanned PTO and/or LWOP will be subject to the Agency's progressive disciplinary procedures in the following manner.
  - First offense may result in First Written Warning.
  - If an employee is out sick on multiple concurrent days and provides written medical documentation for the first utilization of LWOP, an exemption will be granted. This medical note must be attached to the timesheet at the time of submission by the employee and approved by the supervisor.
  - The supervisor must verify that the required medical documentation is uploaded for each individual day. The supervisor will also ensure the written medical documentation specifically supports each day listed and confirm it is being used

- for the first utilization of LWOP.
  - Second offense within a rolling 12 months may result in a Final Written Warning.
  - Third offense within a rolling 12 months may result in immediate termination of employment.
- f. Any utilization of LWOP must be entered on the timesheet with a Pay Code of "Leave Without Pay".

## **11. PTO Buy-Back**

- a. After one year of employment, an employee may sell PTO hours back to Meridian if a Center-wide PTO buy-back event is authorized by the CEO/President and the Board of Directors. The CEO will announce details in a town hall meeting when authorized.
- b. The maximum number of PTO hours sold may not exceed 40 hours for a given buy-back event.
- c. The maximum number of PTO hours sold may not exceed 80 hours in any given calendar year.
- d. An employee must retain a minimum balance of 80 hours to be eligible for the buyback. Hours below 80 hours are not eligible for PTO Buy-Back.

## **12. Recordkeeping Requirements**

- a. Employees will enter a leave request in the Datis system. The Datis system will automatically enter the PTO time into the employee's timecard upon supervisor approval of the request.
- b. Employees are responsible for ensuring their PTO accrual is accurate for each pay period.
- c. Failure to properly document PTO use could result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.
- d. Managers who alter timesheets, review and approve timesheets with inaccurate entries or omission of non-worked time will be subject to disciplinary action.

## **13. Pay Upon Termination**

- a. Upon voluntary termination, and after one year (365 days) of continuous regular employment in a full-time or part-time position, an employee shall be entitled to receive payment for accrued PTO, up to a maximum of 80 hours, prorated based on FTE status at time of termination. Periods of previous employment or assignments to PRN positions are not taken into account for the one-year requirement.
- b. Employees with less than one year (365 days) of continuous regular employment shall not receive payment for any accrued PTO.
- c. Non-exempt staff are required to provide, and work, a two-week notice. Exempt employees must provide and work a four-week notice (See procedure VIII-M for more details).

- d. Employees must be in good standing at the time of separation; they must serve out the entire resignation notice required for their position and leave any pending clinical documentation, or other assigned duties, completed by their last day to receive payment for eligible accrued PTO payout.
- e. Employees who are discharged for any reason, including but not limited to policy violation, misconduct, or performance issues will forfeit any eligibility for payment of accrued PTO. Employees who are given the option to resign in lieu of termination are ineligible for payment of accrued PTO unless authorized by the President/CEO.
- f. Employees may not use PTO after submitting a notice of intent to resign. Exceptions to this policy will be granted only under extenuating circumstances and must be approved by the Senior Vice President of the department. Pay out for employees with balances in their Annual Leave and Short-term Disability Accounts will be paid out as follows:
  - Annual Leave - Employees will receive 100% of the balance in their account.
  - Short-term Disability Leave - Employees will receive 25% of the balance in their account up to a maximum of 60 hours.

#### 14. **CEO Discretion**

The CEO may make exceptions to the policy above, with concurrence of the Executive Management Team.

## 6.7.2 Family and Medical Leave (Procedure VIII-U)

### a. Basic Leave Entitlement

FMLA requires covered employers to provide up to 12 workweeks of unpaid, job-protected leave to eligible employees for the following reasons:

- i. For incapacity due to pregnancy, prenatal medical care or child birth;
- ii. To care for the employee's child after birth, or placement for adoption or foster care;
- iii. To care for the employee's spouse, son or daughter, or parent, who has a serious health condition; or
- iv. For a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the employee's job.
- v. Meridian has a secondary employment notification requirement, employees who work other jobs while on FMLA leave are required to report the secondary employment as outlined in the secondary employment policy.

## b. Military Family Leave Entitlements

Eligible employees with a spouse, son, daughter, or parent on active duty or call to active duty status in the National Guard or Reserves in support of a contingency operation may use their 12-week leave entitlement to address certain qualifying exigencies. Qualifying exigencies may include attending certain military events, arranging for alternative childcare, addressing certain financial and legal arrangements, attending certain counseling sessions, and attending post-deployment reintegration briefings.

FMLA also includes a special leave entitlement that permits eligible employees to take up to 26 weeks of leave to care for a covered service member during a single 12-month period. A covered service member is a current member of the Armed Forces, including a member of the National Guard or Reserves, who has a serious injury or illness incurred in the line of duty on active duty that may render the service member medically unfit to perform his or her duties for which the service member is undergoing medical treatment, recuperation, or therapy; or is in outpatient status; or is on the temporary disability retired list.

## c. Benefits and Protections

During FMLA leave, the employer must maintain the employee's health coverage under any "group health plan" on the same terms as if the employee had continued to work. Upon return from FMLA leave, most employees must be restored to their original or equivalent positions with equivalent pay, benefits, and other employment terms. Use of FMLA leave cannot result in the loss of any employment benefit that accrued prior to the start of an employee's leave.

## d. Eligibility Requirements

Employees are eligible if they have worked for a covered employer for at least one year, for 1,250 hours over the previous 12 months, and if at least 50 employees are employed by the employer within 75 miles.

## e. Definition of Serious Health Condition

A serious health condition is an illness, injury, impairment, or physical or mental condition that involves either an overnight stay in a medical care facility, or continuing treatment by a health care provider for a condition that either prevents the employee from performing the functions of the employee's job, or prevents the qualified family member from participating in school or other daily activities.

Subject to certain conditions, the continuing treatment requirement may be met by a period of incapacity of more than 3 consecutive calendar days combined with at least two visits to a health care provider or one visit and a regimen of continuing treatment, or incapacity due to pregnancy, or incapacity due to a chronic condition. Other conditions may meet the definition of continuing treatment.

An employee does not need to use this leave entitlement in one block. Leave can be taken intermittently or on a reduced leave schedule when medically necessary. Employees must make reasonable efforts to schedule leave for planned medical treatment so as not to unduly disrupt the employer's operations. Leave due to qualifying exigencies may also be taken on an intermittent basis.

f. Substitution of Paid Leave for Unpaid Leave

Employees may choose or employers may require use of accrued paid leave while taking FMLA leave. In order to use paid leave for FMLA leave, employees must comply with the employer's normal paid leave policies.

g. Employee Responsibilities

Employees must provide 30-day advance notice of the need to take FMLA leave when the need is foreseeable. When 30-day notice is not possible, the employee must provide notice as soon as practicable and generally must comply with an employer's normal call-in procedures.

Employees must provide sufficient information for the employer to determine if the leave may qualify for FMLA protection and the anticipated timing and duration of the leave. Sufficient information may include that the employee is unable to perform job functions; the family member is unable to perform daily activities, the need for hospitalization or continuing treatment by a health care provider, or circumstances supporting the need for military family leave. Employees also must inform the employer if the requested leave is for a reason for which FMLA leave was previously taken or certified. Employees also may be required to provide a certification and periodic recertification supporting the need for leave.

## h. Employer Responsibilities

Covered employers must inform employees requesting leave whether they are eligible under FMLA. If they are, the notice must specify any additional information required as well as the employees' rights and responsibilities. If they are not eligible, the employer must provide a reason for the ineligibility.

Covered employers must inform employees if leave will be designated as FMLA-protected and the amount of leave counted against the employee's leave entitlement. If the employer determines that the leave is not FMLA-protected, the employer must notify the employee.

## i. Unlawful Acts by Employers

FMLA makes it unlawful for any employer to:

- o Interfere with, restrain, or deny the exercise of any right provided under FMLA;
- o Discharge or discriminate against any person for opposing any practice made unlawful by FMLA or for involvement in any proceeding under or relating to FMLA.

## Enforcement

An employee may file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Labor or may bring a private lawsuit against an employer.

FMLA does not affect any Federal or State law prohibiting discrimination, or supersede any State or local law or collective bargaining agreement which provides greater family or medical leave rights.

### 6.7.3 Administrative Leave (*Procedure VIII-V*)

It is Meridian's policy to compensate all regular status employees for time spent in certain situations where they are absent from their normal work location and /or duties. These include, but are not limited to jury duty, examination for military service, certain volunteer activities, death in the immediate family, Center emergencies, formal investigations, elections, some examinations, some meetings and conferences, short term military training and active duty, and some educational leave.

This policy applies to all Regular Part Time or Full Time employees. PRN employees are not eligible for paid administrative leave. Administrative leave counts as hours of pay, but does not count as hours of work for overtime purposes. Approval of administrative leave is limited to an amount necessary to bring the employee to full pay, 40 hours of work in the workweek. In no case can the approval of administrative leave be based on the number of hours regularly worked during

the workweek. Part-time employees shall be granted a pro-rated number of hours for each type of administrative leave to bring the employee to full pay based on their FTE designation. Refer to Center-wide Procedure VIII-V for a description of the qualifying activities.

a. Qualifying Activities:

- i. Court
- ii. Examination for Military Service
- iii. Death in Family
- iv. Emergency Situation
- v. Volunteers for Civil Disorder or Disaster
- vi. Formal Investigation
- vii. Elections
- viii. Examinations and Interviews
- ix. Meetings and Conferences
- x. Short-term Military Training
- xi. Education

b. Administrative leave must have prior approval. Employee will submit a Leave Request using DATIS to their immediate supervisor. The request will include the reason (justification) for the time off and whether the request is for administrative leave.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **ETHICS & STANDARDS OF CONDUCT**

#### *Employee Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards of Practice (Procedure VIII-Y)*

#### **PURPOSE:**

It is every employee's responsibility to ensure that Meridian Healthcare. (Meridian or MBH) conducts business in a legal and ethical manner, consistent with federal and state statutes and regulations, as well as the ethical standards of the professions represented by Meridian staff. Each employee is responsible for his/her own conduct and for reporting violations that jeopardize the integrity or reputation of the organization.

It is the expectation that all employees with Meridian conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with the ethical standards outlined in Florida Statutes and with Meridian policies, procedures and standards governing rights of persons we serve. Employees are to uphold these standards not only in performing their job duties, but also in situations outside Meridian which may affect Meridian or the employee's job performance. Licensed staff will abide by the ethical standards published for each professional specialty. Staff shall maintain integrity with respect to their duties as they come in contact with the persons we serve, other service providers, and the public. Staff shall faithfully discharge their duties recognizing that the interest of the persons we serve and of the public is of primary concern.

#### **PROCEDURE:**

##### **Applicability**

This procedure applies to all staff, including contractors, agents, consultants, students, and volunteers. Complaints against any staff regarding violations of this code shall be handled in accordance with Meridian's policies and procedures for complaints from persons we serve.

#### **I. REPORTING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST, WRONGDOINGS, OR AREAS OF CONCERN**

A. Each employee has a duty to report any actual or perceived conflicts of interest and/or wrongdoings to management, Human Resources, and Risk Management through completion of the **Incident Reporting Form** (MBH Form #18 -- Procedure IV-A, Attachment A). Staff must follow the directions on the form for the completion process. (See Procedure IV-A & QIMP -- Corporate Compliance Plan). Employees aware of wrongdoing who fail to report may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

B. Employees also have the right to directly report any suspected wrongdoings and may do so by filing a complaint with any of the organizations responsible for compliance oversight, including the following agencies/departments: The Office of the Inspector General (OIG), the Florida Commission on Human Rights, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), or by contacting the Whistleblower Hotline Number at 1.800.513.5353.

C. For guidance regarding what constitutes an act appropriate for reporting, see Procedure IV-A, incident and sentinel event defined and QIMP -- Corporate Compliance Plan.

1. An employee faced with ethical dilemmas or an area of concern is to seek guidance from his/her supervisor to clarify choices and to choose appropriate corrective action. Employees and supervisors are encouraged to contact Human Resources and Risk Management for assistance.

2. The Corporate Compliance Officer (**who is also the Chief Human Resources Officer**) is available to any employee seeking consultation or wishing to make an anonymous complaint. The Corporate **Compliance Hotline** is also available at **(352) 374-5600, Ext 8222**.

## II. INVESTIGATING REPORTS

A. Risk Management will immediately conduct an investigation of client related situations including, but not limited to, employee interviews, site visitations, and review of relevant documentation or electronic surveillance. Risk Management will notify Human Resources of any human resources issues related to the situation. Human Resources will conduct investigations regarding employee related situations that may require expertise in employment law.

1. Any and all issues regarding regulatory compliance will also be reported to the Corporate Compliance Officer, who may at his/her sole discretion bring the matter to the Board of Directors.

2. Staff will make themselves available to answer HR/Risk Management's questions or provide sworn written affidavits and will offer honest answers. Misrepresentations, evasiveness, omissions and obstruction will only hinder the investigation and may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

3. HR/Risk Management will set deadlines, based upon the type of incident, for information to be provided to them and for completion of the investigation.

4. All involved parties will be notified by HR/Risk Management, within the pre-established time frames, of the investigation findings and needed corrective action.

5. HR/Risk Management will arrange any necessary follow-up with involved parties.
6. Any violations of the Ethical Code of Conduct that are determined to be true and legitimate will lead to disciplinary action up to and including termination.
7. The Human Resources Department will make the final determination on disciplinary action or termination related to compliance issues, subject to Meridian's policies and procedures.

### 7.1.0 ETHICS

**A. GOVERNING ETHICAL PRINCIPLES:** There are 5 general principles that guide ethical conduct of professionals, including students, and supervisors in their relationships with persons they serve:

i. **Autonomy** - Under this principle, staff respect the freedom of persons we serve to choose their own services and providers, make their own choices, and control their own lives within their capacity to do so. We have an ethical obligation to decrease dependency and foster independent decision-making by persons we serve. We refrain from imposing goals, avoid being judgmental, and are accepting of different values

ii. **Non-maleficance** "do no harm" - We must take care that our actions do not risk hurting persons we serve. We have a responsibility to avoid engaging in practices that cause harm or have the potential to result in harm.

iii. **Beneficence** (*promoting wellness*) - This principle mandates that staff actively promote the growth and welfare of those they serve.

iv. **Justice** (*commitment to fairness*) - Justice includes consideration of such factors as quality services, allocation of time and resources, establishment of fees, and access to services for all persons we serve. This principle also refers to the fair treatment of an individual when his or her interests need to be considered in the context of the rights and interests of others.

v. **Fidelity** - Fidelity means that staff make honest promises and honor commitments to persons we serve and anyone else they interface with in the course of their positions. This principle involves creating a trusting and therapeutic climate in which people can search for their own solutions, and taking care not to deceive or exploit persons we serve.

## 7.2.0 STANDARDS FOR ALL STAFF

### Standards of Conduct

See Center Wide Procedure VIII-DD (Progressive Discipline) for additional information. Programs within Meridian perform a vast array of functions and deliver a wide variety of services. Some employees perform routine tasks in a safe office environment, while others engage in unpredictable situations under sometimes demanding circumstances. Breach of a particular standard in one context might be less serious, while in another it might result in the loss of life, property, or adversely affect the progress of a client's treatment. Accordingly, supervisors have been delegated primary authority and responsibility for managing the conduct of their employees. If it is deemed necessary to discipline an employee for violation of a conduct standard, Meridian may impose any discipline up to and including termination, taking into account the agency's unique mission and the individual facts and circumstances.

Standards of Conduct, which all employees must meet, are established herein, and any employee who fails to meet these Standards of Conduct is subject to corrective action. Other than for termination, corrective action is to be constructive and shall be for the purpose of motivating the employee to meet Meridian's established Standards of Conduct. All disciplinary actions shall be applied in a nondiscriminatory manner. *Employees may be terminated at will, with or without notice or cause.* The examples under the categories listed below are the types of things that can lead to discipline, up to and including termination. This list is not exhaustive:

#### 1. **Poor performance**

Employees shall strive to perform at the highest level of efficiency and effectiveness; they shall do more than "just get by". Employees are expected to be effective, for example : to organize their work ; to stay focused on job related activities during work hours; to provide the level of effort necessary to get the job done; to demonstrate willingness and ability to make decisions and exercise sound judgment ; to produce work that consistently meets or exceeds expectations ; to accept responsibility for their actions and decisions; to adapt to changes in work assignments, procedures, and technology; and to be committed to improving individual performance.

#### 2. **Poor attendance or time management**

Employees are expected to be reliable and dependable, for example: to show up for work, ready to work, on a reliable basis; to observe established work hours and scheduled appointments; to complete work on time; and to obtain permission before being off work and to schedule leave in a manner that minimizes work disruption.

3. **Negligence**  
Employees shall exercise due care and reasonable diligence in the performance of job duties.
4. **Inefficiency or inability to perform assigned duty**  
Employees shall, at a minimum, be able to perform duties in a competent and adequate manner. Employees must be able to perform essential duties of a position with or without reasonable accommodations.
5. **Uncooperative Behavior-Refusal to comply with Managerial Directives**  
Employees shall follow lawful orders and carry out the directives of persons with duly delegated authority. If an employee is unsure of a directive they are responsible for gaining clarity from their supervisor or their second level supervisor. Failing to “understand” a directive will not be considered an excuse for failing to follow directions. Employees shall resolve any differences with management in a constructive manner.
6. **Violation of the provisions of law**  
Employees shall abide by all state and federal law including both criminal laws, such as drug laws, and civil law, such as laws prohibiting sexual harassment and employment discrimination.  
*In regards to the use of illegal drugs, Meridian will not tolerate the use of illegal drugs by employees. Any positive test or admissions of illegal drug use will be dealt with according to the provisions of the Drug Free Workplace - Procedure VIII-Z.*
7. **Immediate Notification of Arrest/Conviction of any crime including a plea of nolo contendere or a plea of guilty with adjudication withheld.**  
Any employee who is arrested or receives notice of possible criminal prosecution from any law enforcement agency whether in Florida or another state including any violation mandating a court appearance, must report the expected prosecution to Human Resources and their immediate supervisor as per the provisions of this policy. Any employee who is convicted of any crime, including a plea of nolo contendere or a plea of guilty with adjudication withheld, must similarly provide immediate notification of such events to Human Resources and their immediate supervisor. This policy requiring notification does not distinguish between misdemeanors or felonies. The only exceptions to this obligation of immediate reporting shall be minor traffic offenses which are defined to include traffic citation such as speeding, running a red light or stop sign, or similar offenses for which a person is not arrested or placed in detention. If, however, any traffic citation involves forfeiture of a driver’s license or incarceration, allegations of alcohol or drug-related impairment, such offenses fall under this policy

and require immediate reporting to Human Resources and the employee's immediate supervisor. The notification of the supervisor / employer must be given immediately if during work hours or within 24 hours if outside of working hours.

Meridian makes all employment decisions consistent with EEO principles. The mere fact of an arrest or a crime being charged by a law enforcement agency does not necessarily create an impediment to continuing employment. Meridian bases decisions of continuing employment on the seriousness of the pending charges, their job relevance; whether the crime charged is contained in Chapter 435 of the Florida Statutes.

All regular full time, part time employees and PRN staff charged with disqualifying arrests or convictions may be placed on unpaid leave for a maximum of 30 calendar days to clear the charges or bring evidence the charges have been reduced to a non-disqualifying event. Regular, full time and part time employees may use any accrued PTO available to them during the 30-day period. All decisions whether an employee may be placed on an unpaid leave will be the sole discretion of Meridian.

Employees terminated under this guideline may reapply once the issue has been resolved so long as they can successfully obtain a Level 2 background screen. There is no guarantee of rehire and successful rescreening in accordance with the law will be required. Meridian may determine that an employee has acted in a manner not conducive to its mission, even if the law violation has not resulted in arrest or conviction. Meridian reserves the right to evaluate an applicant's or employee's overall background and can choose not to hire or choose to terminate even when the individual has received an exemption letter from DCF regarding employment.

**8. Violation of Meridian rules**

Employees shall abide by all applicable policies and procedures.

**9. Conduct unbecoming an employee**

- a. Employees shall conduct themselves, on and off the job, in a manner that will not discredit or bring embarrassment to Meridian.
- b. Employees shall be courteous, considerate, respectful, and prompt in dealing with and serving clients, co-workers, and members of the community.
- c. Employees shall maintain high standards of honesty, integrity, and impartiality. Employees shall place the best interest of Meridian ahead of personal interests
- d. All statements both oral and written shall be true and accurate to the best knowledge of the employee. Employee shall not use, or attempt to use, their official position for personal gain or confidential information for personal advantage.

e. Employees shall protect Meridian property from loss or abuse, and they shall use Meridian property, equipment and personnel only in a manner beneficial to the agency.

10. **Misconduct**

Employees shall refrain from conduct which, though not illegal, is generally inappropriate for a Meridian employee in the employee's particular position. (See Procedure VIII – DD for a list.)

11. **Bullying Behavior** – Meridian will not in any instance tolerate bullying behavior towards our staff, clients, and/or business/community partners. Bullying behavior includes threatening, humiliating and/or intimidating behaviors whether verbal or physically.

- a. Verbal bullying – use of slandering, ridiculing, abusive, hurtful, insulting, or offensive remarks towards an individual
- b. Physical bullying – pushing, shoving, kicking, poking, tripping, assault or threat of physical assault
- c. Gesture bullying – nonverbal gestures that can convey threatening messages.

12. **Gifts and Persons Served**

- a. Staff is prohibited from providing clients with money, personal favors, gifts or services (including transportation) outside of the scope of their position.
- b. Staff is prohibited from seeking, soliciting, or accepting gifts from clients.

13. **Non-Employees or Unauthorized Personnel**

Employees must consider issues of safety, confidentiality, disruption of operations, and the legal liability posed by the presence of non-employees including children in the workplace. To maintain the safety and privacy of Meridian employees, clients, guests, and visitors:

- a. Staff will not allow or bring any unauthorized individuals (including children) in staff only areas including but not limited to food preparation areas and residential or inpatient units.
- b. Staff will not allow or transport unauthorized individuals in center vehicles.
- c. Under no circumstances shall staff transport clients in their personal vehicles or loan their personal vehicles to clients.

14. **Sleeping on the Job** All Meridian positions are awake positions. All staff must be alert, awake and report to work ready and able to perform their duties. Employees are strictly prohibited from sleeping during working hours. Employees will be disciplined for sleeping on the job for all cases unless they have a reported condition that is considered a disability that is protected by state and/or federal laws.

- a. Any staff taking prescription medication that contains a warning that the medication may cause drowsiness must report that they are taking such medication to their supervisor in advance of their scheduled time so that the supervisor or staffing department has adequate time to determine if the employee should report to work.
- b. Failure to report the observance of another staff sleeping on duty shall be cause for disciplinary action, up to and including termination from employment.

15. **15.Habitual illegal drug use**

Meridian shall not tolerate violations of Meridian's Drug-Free Workplace (Procedure VIII-Z) or other misuse of mood or mind-altering substances, including alcohol and prescription medications.

16. **Falsification of any written or electronic documentation**

Meridian shall not tolerate falsification of any documentation, including billing/ service records, timesheets or incident reports.

a. **Falsification of Client Observation Checks**

To account for the safety, security, and presence of clients, Meridian requires that inpatient and residential clients be checked and observed on a required established schedule. Meridian shall not tolerate falsification of client monitoring flow sheets or falsification of client observations/checks. Under no circumstances, shall a staff record or document a check or observation that had not actually occurred. It is essential that related records be accurately completed.

17. **Theft**

Meridian shall not tolerate the misuse or theft of company funds, money, equipment, vehicles or property. Theft includes the unauthorized use of Company services, facilities as well as using any company property for personal use.

18. **Unauthorized Overtime**

Employees who fail to obtain approval prior to working hours that extend beyond their normal workweek or hours that result in overtime will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.

19. **Failure to comply with Meridian's Corporate Compliance Program** All employees and agents of Meridian shall comply with all aspects of Meridian's Corporate Compliance Program, including the requirement to report any suspected or known violations of Program and the Code of Conduct.

20. **Service Quality**

In their commitment to helping others, staff shall value objectivity and integrity. Staff shall accept responsibility for the consequences of their work and make every effort to insure that services are of the highest professional quality, effectiveness, and efficiency. Staff members are personally responsible for the quality of their services. Quality service and professionalism of staff includes the following:

a. Assuring the continuity of care for persons we serve is an integral part of service quality. This applies to transfer of care and aftercare planning. (For example, each counselor is responsible for follow-up of referrals to other agencies or other individuals.)

Exhibiting exemplary conduct.

b. Employees will not engage in any behavior toward a person we serve that may be considered as abusive or neglectful, and will immediately report any observance of such behavior to their supervisor. Any reports of alleged abuse or neglect will result in the completion of an Incident Report and will be investigated. Examples of negligent behavior or abuse -

- o Abuse - Actions by a staff member who is providing care and/or supervision to a client which may result in physical harm, pain or mental suffering to the client.
- o Physical or Sexual Abuse: the use or attempt to use unnecessary force on the client, unreasonable physical constraint or prolonged or continual deprivation of food or water. It also means the use of isolation, physical or chemical restraint, or psychotropic medication without medical authorization for punishment.
- o Mental Suffering: fear, agitation, confusion, severe depression or other forms of emotional distress that is brought about by taunting, threats, harassment or other forms of intimidating behavior.
- o Neglect: the negligent failure of a person(s) having care or custody of a client to exercise a reasonable degree of care including, but not limited to, a failure

- o to assist in personal hygiene and the provision of food, clothing, and shelter, or failure to provide medical care or protect the client from health and safety hazards. Working together with other staff in a climate of mutual trust, respect, dignity, edification, and impartiality. Knowing Meridian's programs, policies, rules and procedures.
- o Reporting all wrong doings either directly observed or substantiated by
- o reasonable data.

**21. Business Ethics and Public Relations**

Meridian Behavioral Healthcare and its employees will operate in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations in order to maintain the integrity of our organization. We have a duty to report any perceived violation of applicable laws, regulations and professional standards to management, Human Resources, the Compliance Officer, or the Compliance Hotline **(352-374-5600, Ext 8222)**.

In dealing with other agencies and soliciting or pursuing contracts, Meridian Behavioral Healthcare, Inc. ensures that its business practices are fair and ethical at all times. Meridian's staff will adhere to all legal, professional, and ethical standards in educating the community, advocating for public policy or funding, ensuring that it supports policy, funding, and public education efforts that further the interests of those we serve and the community as a whole.

Staff will not make any contributions of Meridian Behavioral Healthcare funds, property, or services to any political party or candidate.

The marketing of any services that Meridian offers to the public or other healthcare entities (i.e. managed care organization, governmental agencies, and other healthcare providers) will be done in an ethical, honest manner that is consistent with the code of ethics. Communication, either written or verbal, must be accurate, honest and make every effort to accurately reflect the quality and type of care that we provide.

Meridian Healthcare. will receive permission via consent from persons we serve and employees prior to using their pictures, quotes or any personal information that would violate their confidentiality.

22. **Billing and Cost Reports** It is the intent of Meridian Healthcare. to prohibit the submission of any claim for payment or reimbursement to any third party that is false, fraudulent, knowingly inaccurate, or fictitious. **Violations or suspected violations of this portion of the Code of Conduct procedure are extremely serious and must be reported immediately to a member of management, the Risk Manager or to the Corporate Compliance Officer.**

a. Staff will only submit for payment or reimbursement claims for services actually rendered that are appropriately documented in treatment and/or service records using billing codes that accurately describe the services provided.

b. Staff will only submit for billing services that are reimbursable under non-treatment contracts.

c. Staff will only provide those services which are individualized, specific, and consistent with symptoms or confirmed diagnosis of the illness and can reasonably be expected to improve the individual's condition or prevent further regression, and not in excess of the needs of persons we serve.

d. Staff will take immediate steps to alert appropriate management personnel if inaccuracies are discovered in our cost reports or in claims submitted for payment or reimbursement.

e. Staff who misrepresent services or submit false claims for services will be subject to immediate termination and may be subject to criminal charges.

23. **Conflict of Interest**

Staff will avoid all situations that may create an actual conflict or the appearance of conflict, of loyalty or interest unless approved in advance by appropriate management.

a. Meridian Behavioral Healthcare and its employees will take all reasonable steps to avoid conflicts, or appearance of conflicts, between the private interests and the official responsibilities and performance of our duties. Staff has a duty to report any actual or perceived conflicts of interest to management, human resources, the Compliance Officer, or the Compliance Hotline.

b. Staff members faced with perceived ethical dilemmas are to seek guidance from their supervisors to clarify choices in any ethical dilemma.

24. **Protection of Assets**

Meridian Behavioral Healthcare and its employees are committed to protecting the organization's assets, and the assets of others entrusted to us, including physical property and proprietary information, against loss, theft, or misuse. Staff has a duty to report any actual or perceived loss, theft, or misuse of Meridian Behavioral Healthcare

property or the assets of others to management, Human Resources, the Compliance Officer, or the Compliance Hotline.

- c. Staff will be held accountable for the proper expenditure of Meridian Behavioral Healthcare funds and for the proper use of the organization's property.
- d. Staff will obtain approval from the appropriate authority, prior to the commitment or expenditure of any Meridian Behavioral Healthcare funds.
- e. Staff will follow generally accepted accounting principles, established finance procedures, and internal control procedures in handling and recording all funds and property.
- f. The property and equipment of Meridian Healthcare. is to be used for business use only. Any personal use of equipment must be prior-authorized by the employee's supervisor. Costs incurred by Meridian for the personal use of agency property (i.e.: computers, tablets, cellular telephones, personal long distance calls, printers, fax machines) will be reimbursed by the employee.
- g. Staff has a duty to safeguard the property of persons we serve, employees, and visitors.
- h. Staff will dispose of surplus, obsolete or condemned property in accordance with Meridian Behavioral Healthcare's policies and procedures. Unauthorized disposal of property is a misuse of assets.
- i. Staff has a clear obligation to use their paid time productively. Misuse or misrepresentation of time worked is an abuse of Meridian's assets and could result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

25. **Human Resources**

Meridian Behavioral Healthcare is committed to protecting and supporting all employees as well as helping them to achieve their fullest potential in a fair and equitable manner. Staff has a duty to report any actual or perceived mistreatment, discrimination, safety issues, hostile activity, legal violations, or other non-compliance issues occurring in the workplace to management, Human Resources, the Compliance Officer, or the Compliance Hotline. (352-374-5600, 8222)

- a. Meridian Behavioral Healthcare will not tolerate any form of physical, verbal, psychological, sexual abuse. Sexual abuse includes unsolicited or unwelcome sexual advances, requests, or demands for sexual favors, or any verbal, physical, or visual conduct of sexual nature, or any act that might create a hostile or uncomfortable environment.
- b. Staff will demonstrate respect for the persons we serve and co-workers by notifying a supervisor in advance if we are unable to report for work as scheduled.
- c. Staff will ensure that everyone is afforded equal employment and advancement opportunities regardless of gender, age, disability, race, color, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, or national origin.

- d. Staff will ensure that everyone is afforded equal pay for equal work regardless of gender, age, disability, race, color, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, or national origin. Staff will treat each other with respect, dignity and professional
- e. consideration at all times, regardless of gender, age, disability, race, color, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, national origin, job position, or employment status.

26. **Safety**

Meridian is committed to providing a safe environment for employees as well as the persons we serve. Staff has a duty to report any actual or perceived safety issues occurring in the workplace to management, human resources, the Risk Manager, the Compliance Officer, or the Compliance Hotline (352-374-5600, 8222)

- a. Staff will comply with all work and safety rules, regulations, policies, and procedures.
- b. Staff will take all reasonable precautions to ensure our safety as well as the safety of persons served, visitors, and other personnel.
- c. Staff will maintain and regularly communicate our emergency plans and procedures to employees and persons served to maximize safety. We practice safety awareness by thinking defensively, anticipating potential hazards, and reporting unsafe conditions immediately.
- d. Staff will maintain an atmosphere, which is free from workplace violence. Staff shall not engage in verbal or physical confrontation with a potentially violent person. Staff must immediately report any threats made against employees or persons served or face disciplinary action up to and including termination. Any verbal or physical threats of violence made by a staff member, (even made jokingly) may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.
- e. Staff will refrain from providing personal contact information on any employees or clients unless approved by management or in compliance with Meridian policies and procedures.
- f. Staff will promote a work environment that discourages smoking. Smoking is not permitted on any Meridian campus at any time. Non-exempt employees may not leave campus, except during a designated 30 minute or greater lunch break, and when they are clocked out.
- g. Staff will promote an environment that is drug and alcohol free. The illegal possession, distribution, use, sale or abuse of controlled chemical substances or alcohol while on company business or on company premises is strictly prohibited and may result in disciplinary action. Please see the Drug-free Workplace procedure (Chapter VIII-Z).

27. **Organization Communication** Meridian Behavioral Healthcare will foster an environment that encourages open communication. Staff has a duty to report any actual or perceived communication problem to management, Human Resources, the Compliance Officer, or the Compliance Hotline. a. Staff is responsible for sharing ideas, resolving problems or concerns and treating

all opinions with respect and consideration and in a professional manner.

- b. Staff will raise legitimate questions or concerns in an appropriate and efficient manner. Supervisors and management shall respond timely and in a professional manner, to questions and concerns brought to their attention by staff.
- c. Staff use of Internet access and internal/external e-mail will be monitored by the management of Meridian Healthcare., and therefore staff has no expectation of privacy in regard to Company email. Staff who engage in illicit internet activities will be subject to immediate dismissal. Use of e-mail is limited to the function of job performance.

28. **Communication with Persons We Serve**

Staff will inform persons we serve, their family members, or legal guardians of all aspects of their care and treatment with appropriate informed consent. Informed consent includes full disclosure of potential risks, side effects, and the benefits of the proposed treatment, as well as treatment alternatives.

- a. Staff will respect the right of persons served to:
1. Receive information on Meridian Behavioral Healthcare's policies, procedures, and fees.
  2. To participate in decisions regarding their care and treatment, including the refusal of treatment to the extent permitted by law, and to be informed of the consequences of such action.
- b. Staff will promptly and courteously answer all questions from persons served, or refer them to the proper resource.

29. **Supervisor Responsibilities**

Those who **manage or supervise** others also have a responsibility to:

- a. Respect diverse opinions.
- b. Maintain an open door approach and listen to issues that are raised. Respond to issues or concerns in a professional, respectful and timely manner.
- c. Assist subordinates in understanding their rights and obligations under law, regulation and the Standards of Conduct.
- d. Identify, define, and communicate the duties and performance expectations of all direct reports.

- e. Provide accurate and timely feedback regarding performance through regularly scheduled supervision and periodic performance appraisals.

30. **Non-Retaliation Policy**

Meridian Behavioral Healthcare will not take any disciplinary action or other types of retaliation against any employee who, in good faith, reports a concern, issue, or problem to management, Human Resources, the Compliance Officer, or the Compliance Hotline.

- a. "Good faith" means that you should be telling the truth, as you know it.
- b. Any employee who believes that he or she has suffered retaliation from making a report should contact the Compliance Officer or call the Compliance Hotline at (352) 374-5600 Ext. 8222. Any staff member found in violation of Meridian's Non-Retaliation Policy will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.
- c. It is also our intent to protect employees from the intentional misuse of the Hotline. Intentionally making a false accusation is a serious violation of Meridian Behavioral Healthcare's policies and procedures and may lead to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

31. **Employee Competence**

Meridian strives to hire the most qualified staff available and provide opportunities for the professional growth and development of all staff.

- a. Staff shall accurately represent their own qualifications / affiliations or those of their colleagues.
- b. Staff shall provide services using techniques, including testing/assessment techniques, which are generally accepted in terms of effectiveness and procedures. Controversial issues shall be discussed prior to use with one's supervisor and shall meet with supervisory approval.
- c. Staff shall be responsible for recognizing the limitations of their competence and will only provide services and use procedures with which they are familiar and are qualified by training and experience.
- d. Staff shall take the initiative to seek supervisory advice for programmatic issues related to service delivery.
- e. Staff shall maintain knowledge of current scientific and professional information related to their area of expertise. Staff will comply with their individualized training plan determined by their supervisor and Human Resources when hired.
- f. Staff is expected to recognize the need for continuing education and shall take the initiative to obtain training, experience, or counsel to assure competency in their field. Staff will be encouraged to participate in conferences and professional

- meetings that directly relate to professional competence and program needs.
- g. Staff is expected to recognize that personal problems and conflicts may interfere with professional competence. They shall refrain from undertaking activities in which a personal problem may lead to inadequate professional service or harm to persons served. Such staff is expected to seek competent professional assistance. Meridian makes an Employee Assistance Program available for all staff.
  - h. Staff is expected to meet all annual training requirements that have been outlined in the Training Plan as well as those identified in supervision.
  - i. Staff is responsible for obtaining access to the Meridian Electronic-Learning system (MyLearningPointe) to complete required online courses.
  - j. Staff shall offer competent service provision including complete, accurate, and timely documentation. This is especially important with regard to documentation in the service records and in Unusual/Adverse Incidents.
  - k. Personal values and judgments are not appropriate in a service record or in Incident Reports. It is important to describe specific aspects of problematic behaviors or events without recording personal value judgments. Service records shall not contain references to socially embarrassing behavior or unnecessary reference to anti-social behavior.
  - l. Staff shall not falsify any type of Meridian record/documentation. Falsification of any documents may result in immediate termination.

### **7.3.0 CONDUCT - GENERAL**

#### **1. Community Standards**

Staff shall show regard for the standards of the community in which they work especially those which may affect their ability to deliver professional services. Staff shall recognize that violations of such standards on their part may involve their client/colleagues by damaging their professional credibility, injuring their own name and/or the reputation of Meridian, therefore substantially affecting their ability to provide services. Meridian recognizes the importance of due process and considers employees as innocent until proven otherwise.

#### **2. Conflict of Interest**

No staff shall solicit or accept free or discounted goods, services, prices, gifts, favors, accommodations, entertainment, discounted loans, or anything else of value when there is evident intent to influence decisions or performance standards of Meridian or its employees in performing their official duties. Any goods, services, prices, gifts, favors, accommodations, entertainment, discounted loans, or anything else of value of more than \$100 that meet the above requirement must be reported and approved by a second level supervisor prior to acceptance.

3. **Nepotism/Fraternization** Meridian employees shall not appoint, employ, promote, advance, or advocate for appointment, employment, promotion or advancement, a relative or person with whom they have a close personal relationship to a position in the same Department or area at Meridian over which the employee exercises any jurisdiction or control. Administration has the right to grant exceptions. (See Procedure VIII-G Nepotism).

4. **Grooming/Hygiene**

All staff shall observe good hygiene practices and dress appropriately for their job function. (See Procedure VIII-CC Personal Appearance and Dress)

5. **Personal Fundraising**

Employees are not permitted to conduct non-Meridian sanctioned fundraising while on company time or to solicit other employees while they are on company time. Further, employees are not permitted to post or distribute any flyers for fundraisers or any non-work related event program on Meridian property.

Employees may request permission to hold a fundraiser for a personal concern that has a tie to Meridian (e.g. a fellow employee's home is destroyed, an employee's child medical care, etc.) This request must be made in writing to the Chief Human Resource Officer (CHRO). The request will be reviewed by the Executive Management Team for approval. These requests will be approved on a limited basis.

6. **Witnessing of Documents by Staff**

Witnessing of documents can only be done by appropriate individuals in accordance with laws, regulations and industry standards. Authority is limited and vested pursuant to persons served to those designated by the Chief Executive Officer of the organization. If authority is granted to witness a document, the witness shall not remove, conceal, destroy, or share the information contained in the documents.

The witness is attesting only to having actually observed the individual sign the form. The witness' signature does not indicate that the staff member fully informed the individual of the risks and benefits of the plan or program, or that the individual understood the staff member.

The primary function of the witness is to verify that the individual actually signed the consent form, and he or she may be called to testify to that fact.

## **7. Private Practice (Licensed Staff)**

Meridian staff shall not conduct a private practice or other personal business during assigned working hours. Staff "on call" shall not allow private practice/personal business to interfere with on-call responsibilities. Staff shall not use Meridian material, equipment, or facilities for conducting private practice/personal business. Non-remunerative personal business may be conducted only during off duty hours or with prior written consent of the President, or designee, provided that the interest of Meridian and the quality of care are not adversely affected thereby. Those who have received prior approval to conduct personal business shall immediately reimburse Meridian for all costs incurred by such personal use of Meridian material, equipment, or facilities.

- a. Meridian counseling staff shall not accept any referral of a Meridian person served in their private practice (for the purpose of this section, a Meridian person served is anyone who has been admitted to a Meridian program or is eligible for on-going care at Meridian within the past six months).
- b. Meridian counseling staff shall not solicit, apply for, or accept private contracts with outside agencies or providers of which Meridian holds a current service contract and/or working agreement.
- c. Additionally, individuals and/or organizations that are employed by Meridian, and gain access to knowledge of potential contracts or requests for bids or proposals of services while in an employment/contractual agreement with Meridian Healthcare., shall not use that information for personal gain nor submit proposals or bids for said services.
- d. Staff must notify the Chief Executive Officer and Corporate Compliance Officer in writing of intent to do private practice, or any other secondary employment (including home based businesses) by completion of the Secondary Employment Notice form (VIII-Y Attachment A). Staff must notify Human Resources promptly of any changes to secondary employment.
- e. Any exception to this procedure requires written supervisory consult and approval from the President.

## **8. Secondary Employment**

Meridian staff shall not work at secondary employment during assigned working hours or accept any secondary employment which would be considered a conflict of interest.

- a. Staff "on call" shall not allow secondary employment to interfere with on-call responsibilities.
- b. Staff shall not use Meridian resources including material, equipment, or facilities for secondary employment.

- c. Staff must notify Human Resources of any secondary employment (including home based businesses) by completion of the Secondary Employment Notice form (VIII- Y Attachment A). Staff must notify Human Resources of any changes to secondary employment. Any exception to this procedure requires written supervisory consult
- d. and approval from the President.

#### **9. Solicitation/Referral**

Employees shall refrain from soliciting patients or persons we serve through the use of fraud, intimidation, or undue influence. Employees are advised that it is against Meridian policies and procedures to offer, pay, solicit, or receive a kickback, directly or indirectly, in cash or in kind for referring or soliciting patients.

#### **10. Meal Periods**

A meal may be allowed, but is not required under the FLSA (Fair Labor Standards Act). When a meal period is a part of the workday, the period must be at least 30 minutes. In some special situations, employees may be directed to work during their meal periods. In such instances, meal periods are considered time worked.

#### **11. Work Breaks**

A work break of up to 15 minutes may be allowed, but is not required under FLSA (Fair Labor Standards Act) during the first half of the work shift and again during the second half of the work shift. An employee cannot combine, accumulate, or use this time to cover late arrival or early departure from duty. Work breaks are considered time worked and employees and supervisors must ensure this privilege is not abused and does not interfere with established work schedules. Nonexempt employees are prohibited from going off site during work breaks and smoking is limited to official lunch breaks off site.

### **7.4.0 PROFESSIONAL / COLLEGIAL RELATIONSHIPS**

1. Staff shall act with due regard for the needs, special competencies and obligations of their colleagues and related professionals. Staff shall respect the prerogatives and obligations of the organizations with which other staff may be associated. Counseling staff shall maintain respect for the rights of privacy of their colleagues:
2. A person we serve who is discovered by one staff member to have a continuing therapeutic relationship with a colleague within Meridian shall not be offered or given services without the knowledge and consent of the colleague except in emergency situations or those indicated in the treatment plan.

3. Criticism of a colleague's services or procedures shall be addressed to the appropriate individual in the organization, following proper procedures.
4. Meridian is committed to providing a work environment that is free from sexual or personal harassment. Sexual or personal harassment is a form of employee misconduct, which undermines the integrity of employment relationships, and is strictly prohibited.
5. The making or publishing of vicious, malicious, or false statements concerning any employee of Meridian or of its operations is strictly prohibited.

#### **7.5.0 EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIPS WITH PERSONS SERVED**

- Every staff shall treat all persons served and the general public with courtesy, impartiality, fairness, and equality. No staff shall grant special consideration, treatment or advantage to any person served beyond that which is available to every other individual. Staff shall insure that no person or citizen shall be discriminated against on the basis of race, creed, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, veteran's status, medical condition, or handicap. All persons and citizens shall be treated with dignity and respect at all times.
- Staff is instructed that the use of courtesy titles must be uniform. If you address persons we serve by their first name, do so consistently. Also be aware not to call persons served, such things as "Honey", "Sweetie", or "Old Joe."
- Staff shall have an objective, personal concern for those we serve. They shall also maintain this personal concern within the bounds of their responsibilities and duties, so as to safeguard the welfare of the person we serve both during and after service delivery.
- Every effort shall be made to avoid the development of non-professional obligations in the therapeutic or consultation relationship.
- Counseling staff especially shall continually recognize their position of power and influence in the professional relationship and avoid any exploitation of the person we serve.
- Peer specialists are expected to adhere to the same professional relationship boundaries and ethics as all other Meridian employees. Peer Specialists will at all times respect the rights, dignity, privacy and confidentiality of clients they provide services to. Peer

Specialist relationship boundaries are established to promote trust, increase safety, demonstrate respect, develop rapport and provide structure to the helping relationship.

- Dual relationships with persons we serve during treatment and thereafter are prohibited. For the purpose of defining dual relationships:
  - A person we serve maintains this status in perpetuity (unending).
  - Relationships that are not acceptable include but are not limited to socialization outside of the work environment, business or financial relationships, and dating and sexual intimacies.

Dual relationships are prohibited for the duration of staff's employment at Meridian. Licensed staff will follow time frames required by law for refraining from dual relationships.

- The relationship between professional and the person served shall never include conduct on the part of the staff which would be abusive (verbal or physical), sexual, negligent, threatening, intimidating or damaging to the person in any way.
- When there is a conflict among colleagues, staff shall be concerned primarily with the welfare of the person we serve and only secondarily with the interest of their peer group.
- Staff shall terminate a clinical or consultation relationship when it is reasonably clear that the person served will not continue to benefit from it.
  - Care shall be taken to insure an appropriate setting for *provision* of services, especially clinical work, to protect both persons served and staff.
  - After discussion with his/her supervisor and prior to accepting responsibility for a person to be served we serve, a counselor having pre-existing social ties or relationships with an individual seeking services shall carefully evaluate his/her capability to effectively treat that person and, if appropriate, refer that person to another Meridian resource.
  - Staff are prohibited from sponsoring a person served for any recognized peer support group (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Emotions Anonymous, etc.) during the time they are active/open to any treatment programs or services and for a six-month period thereafter
    - This rule is applicable to all staff, including full-time staff, part-time staff, PRN staff, and Peer Specialists.

- If a pre-existing sponsor/sponsee relationship exists, staff shall notify their supervisor and arrangements should be made to end that relationship during services and for six months thereafter.
  
- All services shall be rendered on Meridian premises, except by staff specifically assigned to conduct "home visits" or "outreach" services, and only with prior permission of supervisor and supporting documents in the treatment plan.
  
- Staff is prohibited from providing clients with personal favors, gifts, or services (including transportation) outside of the scope of their position. If there is any question regarding a specific action, staff should consult with their supervisor, Human Resources, or the Compliance Officer.

## **7.6.0 FLORIDA ABUSE LINE REPORTING**

### **PURPOSE:**

**If in the course of a contact, Meridian Healthcare. (Meridian or MBH) staff receive any indication that a child, a disabled adult, or an elderly person might be being sexually or physically abused, neglected, or exploited you MUST IMMEDIATELY report it to the Department of Children and Families as outlined below. Your responsibility is to report what leads you to suspect abuse. You need not establish certainty and you are not to investigate the abuse.**

### **PROCEDURE:**

**DCF uses a state-of-the art computerized system that centralizes and standardizes reports called in from across the state to one, toll free hotline (1-800-96-ABUSE) to handle these complaints.**

**The Florida Protective Services System is coordinated statewide network for reporting and investigating abuse. An automated tracking system guides investigators in completing critical steps throughout their investigations. Help will arrive when needed.**

**Dial 1-800-96-ABUSE whenever you suspect abuse, neglect or exploitation involving children, adults with disabilities or the elderly. As a professional, you are mandated by law to report suspected abuse by calling the abuse hotline. Failure to call as required can lead to disciplinary action and possible criminal prosecution.**

**While DCF has made halting abuse, neglect and exploitation a top priority, it's everyone's job.**

**A. The duty to report suspected or known abuse supersedes the laws of confidentiality. Provide as much detailed information as you can.**

**B. Document the call in the record, noting the time/date of the call and the name of the DCF worker you spoke to and his/her ID number.**

**C. If the Abuse Registry declines to take your report of abuse, ask the name and ID number of the person taking your call at the Abuse Registry. Document the information in the clinical record with a statement that the report was declined. Immediately consult a supervisor, VP, COO or Risk Manager, and complete an Incident Report.**

**D. If you have indication that the individual is in immediate danger, request that s/he be taken into custody immediately and be held at DCF until picked up. In addition, if the victim of abuse is in need of immediate medical assistance, call 911.**

**E. Discuss the report with a supervisor.**

**F. If the allegation of abuse is against a staff member, the above procedures will be followed. The staff member that first learned of the abuse will complete an Incident Report, and immediately notify the Program Director/Vice President. The Program Director/Vice President will immediately notify the Senior Vice President of Human Resources.**

**1. If the abuse by staff was by report or directly observed, the staff member accused may be placed on Administrative Leave with pay, pending the DCF investigation. The determination regarding assignment of Administrative Leave will be jointly decided by the Program Vice President, the COO, the Chief Performance Officer, and the Senior Vice President of Human Resources. The decision will be based on the seriousness of the incident and the potential harm to clients and staff.**

**2. Once a staff member is placed on Administrative Leave, return to work will be dependent on the DCF clearance to do so. Procedure I-L Page 2 of 2**

**3. If abuse or neglect charges are determined to be "founded" by DCF, the employee will be immediately terminated from employment**

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **SAFE WORKPLACE POLICIES**

#### **8.1.0 Safety**

Meridian is committed to providing a safe environment for employees as well as the persons we serve. Staff has a duty to report any actual or perceived safety issues occurring in the workplace to management, human resources, the Risk Manager, the Compliance Officer, or the Compliance Hotline.

- a. Staff will comply with all work and safety rules, regulations and policies.
- b. Staff will take all reasonable precautions to ensure our safety as well as the safety of persons served, visitors and other personnel.
- c. Staff will maintain and regularly communicate our emergency plans and procedures to employees and persons served to maximize safety. We practice safety awareness by thinking defensively, anticipating potential hazards and reporting unsafe conditions immediately.
- d. Staff will maintain an atmosphere, which is free from workplace violence. Staff shall not engage in verbal or physical confrontation with a potentially violent person. Staff must immediately report any threats made against employees or persons served. Verbal or physical threats of violence made by a staff member will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.
- e. Staff will refrain from providing personal contact information on any employees or clients unless approved by management or in compliance with Meridian policies and procedures.
- f. Staff will promote a work environment that discourages smoking. Individuals working in or visiting Meridian's buildings or other space occupied by Meridian are entitled to an environment that is free of tobacco smoke. Smoking will only occur in designated areas during authorized personal breaks.
- g. Staff will promote an environment that is drug and alcohol free. The illegal possession, distribution, use, sale or abuse of controlled chemical substances or alcohol while on company business or on company premises is strictly prohibited.

**8.2.0 Domestic Violence.** (*Florida Statute 741.313*) Domestic Violence is a workplace issue that affects the safety, health, and productivity of all employees. Meridian provides training to heighten awareness of domestic violence, provides guidance for employees and managers to address the occurrence of domestic violence and its effects in the workplace, and helps victims of domestic violence to understand and access services, information, and protections available to them. Domestic violence is a criminal activity, and it is Meridian's policy that arrest and criminal prosecution are the most appropriate responses. No employee is exempt, whatever his or her occupation, from the consequences of actions that result in arrest or conviction for domestic violence, the issuance of a permanent injunction or repeat violence injunction. Employees who are or have been a victim of domestic violence or repeat violence have access to assistance through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). If an employee or family/household member of the employee is a victim of domestic or sexual violence, the employee may take leave time. An employee may take up to 3 working days of leave in any 12-month period. The employee may utilize PTO leave or leave without pay, if PTO unavailable. This section applies to an employee using this leave from work to:

- a. Seek an injunction for protection or legal assistance.
- b. Obtain medical care or mental health counseling or both.
- c. Make the home secure from the perpetrator or move to a safe location, etc.

Except in cases of imminent danger to the health or safety of the employee or family/household member, an employee seeking this leave must provide appropriate advance notice per the leave request policy.

**8.3.0 Workplace Violence Prevention.** Meridian is committed to preventing workplace violence and to maintaining a safe work environment. Meridian has adopted procedures to deal with intimidation, harassment, or other threats of (or actual) violence that may occur during business hours or on its premises. All employees and persons served should be treated with courtesy and respect at all times. Employees are expected to refrain from fighting, "horseplay", or other conduct that may be dangerous to others. Firearms, as defined by Florida Statutes, must remain locked in the employees' personal vehicle at all times. Other weapons, not identified by Florida Statute 790.06, and dangerous or hazardous devices or substances are prohibited on Meridian's premises.

Conduct that threatens, intimidates, or coerces another employee, a person served, or a member of the public at any time, including off-duty periods, will not be tolerated. All threats of (or actual) violence, both direct and indirect, should be reported as soon as possible to your immediate supervisor or any other member of management. All suspicious individuals or activities should also be reported as soon as possible to a supervisor. Do not place yourself in peril.

Meridian encourages employees to bring their disputes or differences with other employees to the attention of their supervisors or the Human Resources Director before the situation escalates into potential violence. Meridian is eager to assist in the resolution of employee disputes, and will not discipline employees raising such concerns.

Anyone determined to be responsible for threats of (or actual) violence or other conduct that is in violation of these guidelines will be subject to prompt disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment. Employees shall report all incidents to their immediate supervisors at once. If this is not possible for any reason, the employee should contact a higher-level supervisor or the Human Resources Director. Factual information on behaviors exhibited or verbal threats should be conveyed in addition to time, place, witnesses, and other relevant information.

**Situations of imminent danger are to be reported first and directly to law enforcement by calling 911.**

#### **8.4.0 Drug-Free Workplace. (Procedure VIII-Z)**

It is Meridian's policy to administer a Drug-Free Workplace Program in accordance with State and Federal laws in a commitment to safeguard the health of our employees and to provide a safe working environment for everyone. In addition, the purpose of this policy is to provide for confidentiality, fairness and accuracy of drug testing and testing results.

We recognize that employees' off-the-job involvement with drugs and alcohol can have an impact on the work place and on the ability to accomplish our goal of a drug free work place.

We view substance abuse (alcohol or other drugs) as a serious threat to an employee's physical well-being and client services. Therefore, Meridian's work environment must be free from drugs and alcohol and their effects at all times. Meridian reserves the right to take any necessary steps to the status of "drug-free workplace" whether the substance is used at a Meridian facility, on work hours, or on personal time.

#### 8.4.1 Drug Testing Requirements

The Center must and will conduct drug tests under the following circumstances:

a. Prospective Applicant.

b. Reasonable Suspicion: On an employee whose conduct creates a reasonable suspicion of improper use or possession of alcohol or drugs. Reasonable suspicion may be based on:

i. Nature of Incident/Cause for Suspicion.

ii. Behavioral Indicators Noted.

iii. Physical Signs.

iv. General Job Performance.

v. Information that an employee has caused, contributed to, or been involved in an accident while at work.

vi. Evidence that an individual has tampered with a drug test during his/her employment.

vii. Report of drug use provided by a reliable and credible source.

c. Random Testing without Notice: Meridian has established job classifications such as safety sensitive positions for Center drivers or employees that transport passengers/clients in Center vehicles.

d. Rehabilitation Condition: If the employee in the course of employment enters an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for drug-related problems, or an alcohol and drug rehabilitation program, the employee will be required to submit to follow-up testing. If follow-up testing is required, it will be conducted at least once a year for a two year period after completion of the program. Such tests will be conducted on a random basis. Advance notice of a follow-up testing date will not be given to the employee to be tested.

e. Refusal to Test: If an employee refuses to submit to a test for drugs and alcohol, he/she is terminated due to non-compliance with our Drug Free Workplace Policy and the employee is ineligible for consideration for rehire for (6) six months. There is no guarantee the employee will be rehired.

## **RECEIPT OF HANDBOOK**

I hereby acknowledge receipt of a complete copy of the Meridian Healthcare. Employee Handbook. I understand that it is my responsibility to review the handbook in detail and request any clarification needed from my supervisor or Human Resources Office. I also understand that this signed acknowledgment of receipt will become a permanent part of my personnel file.

## **RECEIPT OF ETHICS AND CODE OF CONDUCT**

I have received the policy on Employee Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards of Practice. The contents have been explained to me and I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the policy. I agree to adhere to all policies and procedures of the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards and understand that failure to comply may result in disciplinary action.

## **NOTICE OF PRIVACY POLICY AND MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION OF PROTECTED HEALTH INFORMATION**

The purpose of this policy is to assure the privacy and confidentiality of protected personal health information. Meridian employees and volunteers shall not permit the unauthorized disclosure of protected health information except as permitted or required by law. Meridian's Policy complies with 45 C.F.R. Parts 160, 162, and 164; federal regulations promulgated pursuant to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) and applicable Florida Statutes. As defined by the Act, *protected health information* is information which can be used to identify an individual and which relates to the past, present or future physical or mental health or condition of an individual, provision of health care to an individual, or the past, present or future payment for health care provided to an individual.

As defined by the Act, *disclosure* means the release, transfer, provision of access to, or divulging in any other manner of information outside the entity holding the information. Employees who disclose or permit the unlawful disclosure of protected health information will be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with Meridian's Standards of Conduct. Employees and volunteers who violate the privacy provisions of the Act may also be subjected to criminal penalties under Federal law.

I have read the Meridian's Policy Statement and understand my compliance with this policy is a condition of employment. I also understand that this signed receipt will become a part of my personnel file.

# **EMPLOYEE COPY**

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Print Name:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_