

A Word About Ethics APPEARANCES OF BIAS

When does a personal relationship create a conflict with my Government duties?

- Whenever you are assigned to a task focused on a particular person or organization in which you have a close business or personal relationship, it creates a conflict because members of the public may question your impartiality.

Do all close relationships create a possible conflict of interest or appearance of a conflict?

- No; ethics regulations cover only some personal and business relationships; you have such a “covered relationship” with:
 - anyone with whom you have (or are seeking) a business or financial relationship;
 - someone who employed you or was your client during the last year, or two years prior to your appointment if you are a political appointee;
 - a close relative;
 - a member of your household;
 - a current or prospective employer or client of your parents, dependent children, or spouse; and
 - an organization in which you are an active participant.

Are any other factors considered in determining whether a personal relationship creates a conflict?

- Yes; a conflict of interest involving a personal relationship is present only when your participation would likely be perceived by the public as affecting your impartiality.

How are conflicts based on personal relationships resolved?

- You must either:
 - not work on a matter in which an appearance of bias is likely because of a personal relationship or
 - obtain special authorization to work on the matter, which may be granted if the agency’s need for your participation outweighs concern about an appearance of loss of impartiality; you or your supervisor can seek such an authorization through the Ethics Law and Programs Division.

What if an appearance of bias is not from a “covered relationship?”

- You should discuss with your supervisor whether a matter should be reassigned if someone with whom you have a personal relationship, such as a friend, is involved. The decision on whether to reassign the matter would be based on management concerns, rather than ethics regulations.