



# Building Positive Relationships with Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers



Counselling and Member Services  
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ONTARIO ENGLISH  
**Catholic Teachers**  
ASSOCIATION



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### NOTE ON LANGUAGE:

Students in your classrooms have a variety of family structures. It is important to be sensitive to these structures. Some live with their birth parents, others with adoptive ones. Some live with close relatives, while others are in foster care or live with grandparents.

**Throughout this document we refer to parents, caregivers, guardians, and those who hold legal responsibility for your students as caregivers.** Be aware of the custody situations of each child in your classroom. Know which caregiver has legal responsibility for your students and what the communication arrangements should be with other caregivers who do not have this responsibility.

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

As trained, certified professionals, teachers deliver curriculum and work diligently to help each student grow into their potential. As Catholic teachers, we recognize that we have many partners in the province of Ontario. One of the most important of these partners are parents, caregivers, and guardians.

Caregivers place their trust in us to educate their children and help foster their growth and development in a culturally relevant and responsive manner. In turn, we hope that our students will receive support and reinforcement for their classroom learning at home.

A positive working relationship with the caring adults in your students' lives can significantly improve educational outcomes in your classroom. If relationships with caregivers are respectful with timely consideration of communication, these caring adults can be our best allies for achieving student success, fostering equity, and developing a genuine school community. They can offer vital insights into their child's interests and challenges. They can help ensure that work is turned in on time and to the best of students' abilities.

The overwhelming majority of relationships with caregivers are positive and productive. However, some teachers have experienced difficulty managing relationships with these important educational partners.

It is in everyone's best interest to develop and foster positive and professional working relations with caregivers. This begins with effective communication because most conflicts are a result of misunderstandings.

This resource is intended to provide a realistic and workable guide for teachers in promoting positive interactions with caregivers. It discusses how to proactively build relationships, examines possible sources of conflict, and gives some steps you might take if conflicts arise.

***Effective communication is necessary to building good relationships and the key to managing or resolving misunderstandings and conflict.***



**Effective communication is necessary to building good relationships and the key to managing or resolving misunderstandings and conflict.**

# CHAPTER 2

# ESTABLISHING COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS

It is wise to begin establishing positive relations with caregivers early in the school year. Start with developing various methods to communicate with them about classroom expectations and routines, behaviour management methods, course guidelines, marking schemes, and communication protocols.



## Elements of a good classroom communication protocol

### Each student sees themselves reflected in the curriculum and is valued

- Make cultural relevance and responsiveness an integral part of your lesson planning. Ensure that the texts you select, the videos you use, and other resources represent a variety of lived experiences and value the lives of all students, most especially equity-deserving students.
- For additional information on culturally relevant and responsive classroom management practices, see OECTA's professional development opportunities at [catholicteachers.ca](http://catholicteachers.ca)

### Invitations to caregivers for their input and information

- Let them know that you welcome information that might affect progress in the classroom. Record all such information.

### Regular communications with home

- Keep caregivers well apprised of what is happening in the classroom, providing timely information to avoid surprises.
- Let them know about school events, class projects, and reporting periods.
- Make them feel welcome, and let them know when and how they can reach you. Of course, these interactions should be limited to school time and location. Do not give out your personal telephone number, home address, or email address.
- If you are composing an email to caregivers after work hours, use the 'delay delivery' function within your board email so they receive it during the workday.

### Expectations, classroom management, and progressive discipline practices

- Make it clear how you will inform caregivers if something is wrong. For example, you can send a letter home on a regular basis, then telephone them individually about issues that are more personal and/or important.

### Classroom visiting procedures

- Caregivers may wish to visit your classroom. This should be in consultation with you and in line with the school and school board visitor policies. If you are unsure, consult with your principal on what these visits might entail and what to do if visitors are not following appropriate protocols.
- These procedures should be clearly explained to caregivers. Depending on the age of the students, it might be a good idea to establish a designated visiting day, when they can visit for an appropriate occasion or activity. Always explain to them your expectations of their behaviour during these visits. See the [Ontario Provincial Code of Conduct](#) for guidance.

### Constant communication and documentation

- Maintaining regular contact with caregivers prevents misunderstandings and can head off many potential conflicts before they arise. Following your own protocol can also help protect you from false allegations. Keep written documentation of all communication with them – written or verbal, in person or over the phone – so you have a record of what occurred and what was said.

## CREATING PARTNERSHIPS: HOME & SCHOOL

Teachers are role models who hold positions of trust, and we are expected to uphold values, beliefs, and knowledge deemed desirable by the school community. These expectations continue 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Caregivers are often in the school throughout the day, attending meetings, visiting classrooms, or volunteering. Be considerate and careful when making comments in the hall or staff room, especially at the end of a hectic day or when you need to discuss concerns with colleagues. The school might not be the most appropriate place to vent. Neither is a neighbourhood bar, nor a restaurant.

Remember that your goal in communicating with caregivers is to foster student success and well-being while promoting accessibility, inclusivity, diversity, and equity. To this end, you should endeavour to keep caregivers apprised of things they should know, do, or observe. Creating common expectations and being transparent about what is necessary to meet these expectations are key steps to developing constructive partnerships.

Your strategies will depend on your individual teaching style, school or board policies, and the roles and responsibilities set out by the Ontario College of Teachers, in Ministry of Education documents, and your collective agreement. [The Ministry of Education also lists considerations for program planning including:](#)

- Student well-being and mental health
- Instructional approaches
- Planning for students with special education needs
- Planning for English-language learners
- Healthy relationships
- Human rights, equity, and inclusive education
- The role of the school library
- The role of information and communications
- Education and career/life planning
- Experiential learning
- Pathways to specialist high skills major (SHSM)
- Health and safety
- Ethics



**Remember that education is a partnership, and caregivers are among our most important allies.**

To address some of the above considerations for program planning, work with caregivers to develop shared understandings of classroom expectations within a culturally relevant and responsive framework.

- Consider [human rights, equity, and inclusive education](#) as integral to your curriculum. This includes careful consideration of classroom resources to ensure that the materials utilized reflect the interests and lived experiences of students in your classroom. Consider diverse representation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit voices as well as equity-deserving identities including 2SLGBTQIA+, racialized students, those with disabilities and more.
- When considering class resources, consult with your board's program department. Note that past practice does not mean that a particular resource is currently appropriate, even if it remains on an 'approved' list. Take the time to review and reflect on the items you are using in consultation with your principal, board equity lead, and other colleagues as appropriate.

- Identify the skills and work habits students will be expected to exhibit and give ideas about how caregivers can encourage these at home.
- Share a sample unit, lesson plan, rubric, or other form of assessment to demonstrate what students will be learning, and what they will be expected to know and do.
- Co-create classroom norms and codes of conduct with students. Share these with caregivers and explicitly discuss how you will endeavour to make safety and well-being a priority.
- Get to know your students. Alert caregivers to sudden changes in behaviour, attitudes, etc.
- Invite a variety of appropriately vetted and approved guest speakers representing the various backgrounds of the students in your classroom.

A problem-solving approach can help avoid conflicts in the future. As a teacher, it is your duty to identify concerns with your students and look for workable solutions. The ideal strategy will be one that you develop with caregivers, but you might also need to seek out assistance, for example through the school board's student services department.

We maintain certain boundaries with our students, and we should also maintain professional distance from caregivers. Be careful about establishing relationships with these stakeholders which become friendships. You are the child's teacher above all. Conversely, you should never tolerate unwelcome comments about your appearance, unwelcome touching, visits to your home, frequent visits to your classroom for no apparent reason, or other behaviours that make you feel uncomfortable.

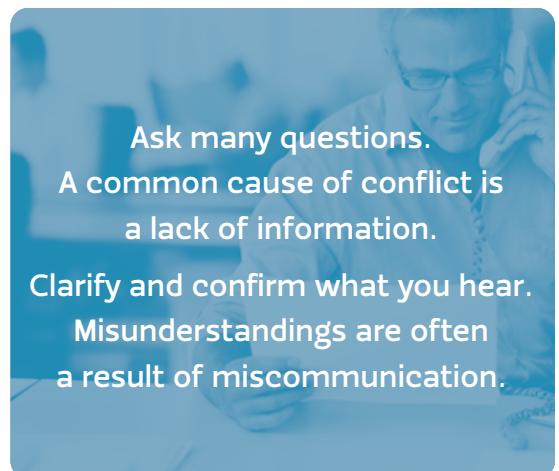
For more ideas and resources on building relationships with caregivers, see the Ontario Teachers' Federation's parent engagement website [www.parentengagement.ca](http://www.parentengagement.ca).

## TELEPHONE COMMUNICATIONS

Routine information can be communicated in writing; however, particularly sensitive information is usually best shared in person. Direct telephone conversation is also a good way to communicate with caregivers as it allows for more personal interaction, without the formality of an actual meeting.

**Below are some tips that will help you make phone calls pleasant and constructive.**

- To demonstrate consideration of schedules, email the caregiver to schedule a meeting during a time that is mutually agreeable. Share how long you think the conversation might take and the general subject of the conversation.
- Consider the timing of your call. Calls should ideally be made during your work hours. Be mindful that people do not like being disturbed during mealtimes or late at night.
- Be specific about the purpose of your call and stay focused on your objective.



- Avoid only calling with bad news. Some teachers make a habit of making at least one good news call to every caregiver each year/semester. This helps to encourage positive interactions overall. Tell the caregiver about your concerns, expectations, and/or plans. If there are behavioural concerns and you want support for a proposed course of action, state your request clearly and with compassion.
- If the caregiver seems short or reticent, keep in mind that you don't know what other issues they may be dealing with.
- Remember that telephones are not always private. This can stifle honest and open conversation.
- Do not call when you are angry.
- Understand that the topic is the child in their care. Be sensitive to their feelings and concerns. If the caregiver is angry or not available for a conversation when you call, schedule a discussion for a later time.
- When a caregiver calls you, return their call as quickly as possible.
- Protect your privacy. Use the school telephone whenever possible. If you have to use your own phone, use caller identification blockers.



*An important component of communication is the ability to listen and interpret the concerns. Only when a teacher truly understands the concerns of a caregiver, can the concerns be addressed.*

## IN PERSON MEETINGS

Face-to-face communication with caregivers is by far the most effective. However, because it is so time-consuming, it is generally reserved for reporting periods or for discussing important issues.

Teachers should keep in mind how stressful it is for many caregivers to meet their child's teacher. They may have very different school experiences, creating different expectations and perceptions of their child's education. It is important not to make any assumptions about why a caregiver might not be able to attend a meeting. Some might have work obligations that do not make meeting in person easy. Assume positive intent and use positive regard, avoiding judgement in your interactions. Your tone and demeanour during the meeting are important.

## Tips for Positive Caregiver-Teacher Interviews/Meetings

- Arrive on time. Punctuality is a sign of respect.
- If a language translation is needed, ask your administrator how to arrange for this using your board's resources. This includes verbal and sign language.
- If other accommodations are needed to ensure all can participate, make every reasonable attempt to address these. This can help ensure a positive experience for all.
- Be welcoming and polite.
- Address the caregiver by name and with respect.
- Demonstrate that you know and appreciate their child. Start with what the student does well, then transition to issues which require additional attention.
- Focus on the issue. Be prepared to share examples. Do not get sidetracked.
- Share all the information on hand, seek understanding, and ask for feedback.
- Do not do all the talking. Listen and invite suggestions.
- Do not compare students.
- Remember that the purpose of the meeting is to enhance learning and student well-being.



### *Consider your body language.*

*Is your body language sending a different message than your spoken words? Folded arms, avoiding eye contact, foot tapping, pen flicking, leaning back, or turning away can send the wrong message.*

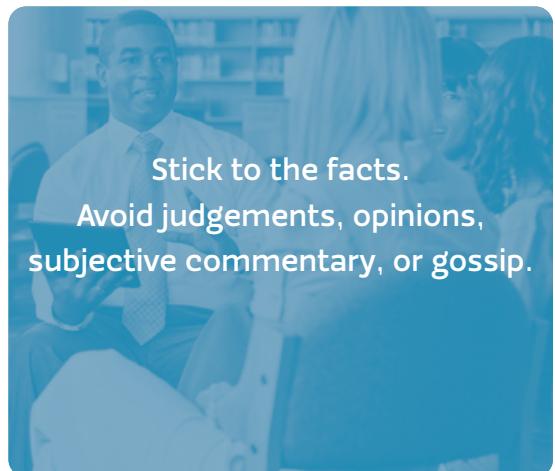
## EMAIL, TEXTING, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Teachers are increasingly using email, social media, and texting to communicate with caregivers. These forms of communication are common for many and are great for the quick dissemination of straightforward information.

OECTA advises teachers to be professional in all communications, including electronic ones.

In using electronic communication, consider the following:

- Electronic communication is not the best way to convey sensitive information. As stated above, you might use an email to arrange an appropriate time for a phone call or in-person meeting.
- Some households do not have a computer, smartphones, or reliable Internet access. Always offer an alternative to electronic communication.
- Remember that all electronic communication to a caregiver can be saved, printed, or forwarded to others. Exercise appropriate discretion.



**Stick to the facts.**

**Avoid judgements, opinions, subjective commentary, or gossip.**

- Electronic communications can be manipulated – ensure you keep a copy of your original message.
- Be aware of your professional liabilities and always maintain your professionalism when interacting with caregivers. There have been cases before the College of Teachers in which spelling mistakes, grammatical errors, use of slang, and informal tone have been used against teachers.
- Communication with caregivers should be limited to school time and location. As stated above, use the 'delay' feature on your email if you are composing communications outside of work hours.
- Do not give caregivers or students your personal email or social media accounts. Use only school or board accounts. Using personal accounts can cause many problems for teachers.

## DOCUMENT! DOCUMENT! DOCUMENT!

If you establish early contact with caregivers, and you keep each other abreast of ongoing issues and concerns, you will likely be able to work together to help students function in the school environment and achieve their goals in the classroom. However, as we will discuss in the next chapter, it is still possible for conflicts to arise.

For this reason, you should get into the habit of documenting every single communication with caregivers.

- Keep a file on communications that you send home with students, as well as all telephone calls, meetings, and evaluations.
- Write brief, objective notes during discussions with caregivers that include the date the incident/interaction/conversation occurred, what was said and by whom, the problems identified and their resolutions, who took responsibility for what, and any expected timelines. Stick to the facts and avoid writing opinions, hearsay, or subjective commentary.
- Remember that these notes constitute a formal record and should not be shared in a non-professional context.
- Sometimes complaints are raised months or years after an event. While memories fade, objective notes made at the time can be very helpful.
- Keep this written documentation in a secure location.

It is wise to keep your principal informed of your communication strategies. Ask if there are school or school board templates for formal contact with caregivers. This will help to avoid duplication or contradiction. If a situation arises that requires communication with students' families, it helps if your principal has been aware of your actions from the beginning.

# CHAPTER 3

# DEALING WITH CONFLICT

Despite your best efforts to reach out and build positive relationships, conflicts with caregivers occur from time to time in the normal course of every teacher's career. This can be upsetting, but it does not need to be counterproductive. Well-managed conflict can help to clarify issues and feelings. All teachers should enhance their conflict resolution skills to reduce stress and frustration when conflict does arise.

Many conflicts grow out of differences in expectations, experiences, or even personality types. Letting go of ideas of right versus wrong creates the space to take a step back, so we can understand what underlying factors might be contributing to the escalation of a conflict. When those factors are taken into account, both parties are better able to appreciate the other's perspective, helping to move toward a solution from a place of mutual understanding.

- Sometimes conflicts grow due to a lack of understanding about another person's/family's culture and/or lived experience. As a professional, listen attentively with the intention to understand why the conflict has occurred. This active listening can help demonstrate that you care about the concerns shared.
- Keep up to date and engage in professional learning about accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity so your responses are always caring and professional. This kind of professional learning is available through OECTA's professional development and AIDE resources. Both are available at [catholicteachers.ca](http://catholicteachers.ca).



# SOURCES OF CONFLICT

To handle a conflict with a caregiver successfully, learn to understand the sources of conflict. In general there are six main categories:

<p><b>Resources</b></p> <p>Conflicts often occur when resources are limited. A caregiver might not understand the allocation of scarce resources in their classroom. If the resources needed are not available, refer the caregiver to the school principal.</p>	<p><b>Values</b></p> <p>People might feel personally attacked if they think their values are being threatened. These conflicts can be the most difficult to resolve. Do your best to listen and attempt to understand the world views of the caregiver and be responsive. While you need to maintain professionalism, you have a responsibility to uphold the <a href="#">Ontario Human Rights Code</a> in your classroom and follow documents and policies from the Ministry of Education and your local school board. If you require support, contact your administrator and your local OECTA unit office.</p>
<p><b>Incongruent Role Expectations and Behavioural Norms</b></p> <p>Caregivers might have an expectation of a particular teaching style that is different from yours.</p>	<p><b>Intent vs. Impact</b></p> <p>In communication, consider what the impact of your words and tone might be. While you might not intend something to be considered offensive, be open and willing to take feedback if someone shares that it had that impact.</p>
<p><b>Perceived Divergent Goals</b></p> <p>Conflict might result when a teacher and a caregiver have completely different goals. For example, a teacher who stresses creativity and arts might come into conflict with a caregiver who values math and science above all. Communication responsive to curriculum expectations is key.</p>	<p><b>Social-Emotional Needs</b></p> <p>When factors such as self-esteem, feelings of belonging, or happiness are not addressed, people may behave differently than expected. A caregiver who thinks that a teacher is unprepared to engage with them to address issues, or who believes their child feels unwelcome or not valued at school, may express frustration and/or reach out to administration to have their concerns addressed.</p>

# RESOLVING CONFLICT

In conflict resolution, it is helpful to reflect on the issues and decide whether they are interests or positions. Interests are our needs that motivate us to act in certain ways to make certain decisions. For example, you need order in your classroom, so you create rules. A position is a stance that we adopt to meet those needs. Understanding professional boundaries and co-creating classroom norms that are consistently reinforced is important for students to have a positive experience in the classroom. This can translate into better home-school partnerships.

Positions can be changed. Successful conflict resolution focuses on understanding and addressing the interests of the parties rather than their positions. Focusing on interests allows the parties to discuss the real issues. So, rather than focusing on the rules and their application, focus on the real issue, which is the need for order.

## A suggested six-step process for resolving conflict

### 1. Define the problem or source of the conflict

Plan carefully for your meeting, preparing notes to demonstrate your concern. Use active listening skills to try to understand the caregiver's concerns and perspective. Be attentive to your feelings as you enter the meeting and the tone you wish to convey. If at the end of a meeting you and the caregiver can agree on the problem, that is a substantial achievement. Document the issue(s) and, if necessary, communicate with the caregiver in writing to confirm your mutual agreement.

### 3. Co-create a course of action

With the information gathered, co-create a course of action. Document the course of action and, if necessary, communicate with the caregiver in writing to confirm your mutual agreement.

### 5. Outline timelines and expectations

Agree on reasonable timelines. If necessary, communicate with the caregiver in writing to confirm your timelines and expectations.

### 2. Get all the information

When discussing issues with caregivers, provide opportunities to share information. Ensure that you are well-informed about the students in your classroom and that the caregiver is well-informed about your classroom expectations on an ongoing basis.

### 4. Develop strategies and possible solutions

Brainstorm ideas and decide which are practical and most likely to succeed. Decide together which strategy to use.

### 6. Arrange for follow-up as needed

Follow-up with the caregiver to discuss progress. Make modifications to the course of action if necessary and agree upon them. Take detailed notes after each meeting/discussion to avoid repetition.



*There may be early signs of potential conflict. Do not ignore issues that are brought to your attention. Do not ignore abusive language or behaviour. This will not resolve the conflict and may make the situation worse. Abusive language or behaviour should also be documented and reported. Depending on the issue, this report may be to your administration, your joint health & safety committee, and/or your unit president. If you are unsure, reach out to your unit president for consultation.*

## DE-ESCALATING CONFLICT

All interactions should be based on a foundation of mutual respect. If a conflict arises, try to put the situation in context and appreciate where the caregiver is coming from.

- If the caregiver is raising honest concerns, it is your responsibility, and in your best interest, to address the situation in a calm, professional manner.
- Remain professional and let the caregiver know that you value what they have to say, but notice if the conversation has become unproductive. If it has, offer to reschedule to a later date and end the conversation.
- Make every attempt to remain engaged and open to the caregiver. Only terminate meetings or discussions if the conversation becomes unproductive.
- Document these interactions and report them to your principal.
- You are not alone. You might want to bring in a third party if you anticipate that a meeting or discussion is going to be heated or deal with complex issues. Asking for help does not indicate weakness or an inability to handle difficult situations. You are entitled to seek support, and doing so shows good professional judgement
- [The Occupational Health and Safety Act](#) requires the school board to provide you with a safe working environment. Inform your principal if you are experiencing difficulty resolving conflicts with caregivers and document the fact that you have reported the problem to the principal.
- Review applicable school board policy. Ideally, there should be a meeting to discuss any conflict with caregivers. You should be present at this meeting, as any positive resolution will involve you. Remember that it is the principal's job to protect your working conditions. Discussions about your teaching duties, abilities, or performance appraisals should not be held in front of students or caregivers.
- Some school boards employ the use of facilitators or trained mediators. This can be helpful, especially when emotions are running high, because an independent mediator can bring an air of objectivity and establish a problem-solving atmosphere, enabling the parties to focus on the issues.

If at any time you feel a situation is getting out of hand, or that you are not receiving the proper support from your school administration, contact your local OECTA unit president or the Counselling and Member Services department at OECTA Provincial Office (1-800-268-7230).



*Debates about right and wrong are counterproductive. In a conflict, the challenge is to understand the other person's perspective and to help them to understand yours. It is a teacher's responsibility to be responsive to the needs of the students in their classroom. Some of these needs might result from concerns regarding accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity. Teachers should increase their professional knowledge in these domains. The Professional Development section at [catholicteachers.ca](#), and the AIDE resources available online, all provide helpful considerations to ensure you address the needs of all learners.*

## BEYOND CONFLICT: VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

In rare cases, interactions with caregivers can cross the line from upsetting to threatening or even dangerous. Bullying, harassment, and defamation are offensive behaviours that could seriously affect your physical and mental health or your status in the teaching profession.

While there has been a great deal of emphasis placed on bullying in schools in recent years, that focus has predominantly been on behaviours exhibited by students toward other students.

The reality is that more and more teachers are reporting being bullied by students and caregivers. Reports of harassment of teachers are on the rise. OECTA reports increasing numbers of calls from members who are being bullied or harassed online – either on social media posts or via email.

The same codes of conduct that apply to students, teachers, and staff also apply to caregivers. While on school premises or at school-related activities and events, caregivers must abide by the provincial and local school board codes of conduct. Inappropriate and disrespectful behaviours displayed by a caregiver, such as bullying, discrimination, and harassment must be reported, ideally in writing, to your school administration. Administration is responsible for the enforcement of codes of conduct and board policies, which can be used to influence caregiver behaviour. Document all your interactions with caregivers – it may be necessary down the road to show an emerging pattern of behaviour.

**Under the OHRC, harassment pertains to the enumerated grounds of:**

- Age
- Ancestry, colour, race
- Citizenship
- Ethnic origin
- Place of origin
- Creed
- Disability
- Family status
- Marital status (including single status)
- Gender identity, gender expression
- Receipt of public assistance (in housing only)
- Record of offences (in employment only)
- Sex (including pregnancy and breastfeeding)
- Sexual orientation

*The Occupational Health and Safety Act also applies to harassment and defines it similarly: "engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct against a worker in a workplace that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome" and includes workplace sexual harassment [subsection 1(1)]. These may be related to the OHRC but are not necessarily so.*

**Harassment – The Ontario Human Rights Code [OHRC] defines harassment as "engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome."**

*If the harassment is occurring online or in email there are a few additional steps you should take:*

- Print, screen capture, or make a copy of the offensive post or email.
- Notify school administration — the material may violate policy and if so, administration should request the caregivers remove the offensive material.
- Contact your local OECTA office — you may have grounds for a harassment complaint under your school board policy, a human rights complaint, a potential grievance, and/or a defamation suit.
- If you feel the matter is criminal in nature, also contact the police — only the police can obtain the Internet Protocol (IP) address from the Internet Service Provider (ISP) to verify who posted the material.
- Contact the Internet Service Provider (ISP) or website to have the offending material removed. Most websites and social media sites do have policies and protocols regarding the posting and removal of offensive material

**Defamation – The Black's Law Dictionary defines defamation as “a statement that tends to injure the reputation of a person referred to in it. The statement is likely to lower that person in the estimation of reasonable people and in particular to cause that person to be regarded with feelings of hatred, contempt, ridicule, fear, or dislike.”**

**Contact the police if you believe there is an immediate threat to your safety or if materials posted violate the Criminal Code or constitute a hate crime.**

If you believe that you are being bullied, harassed, or defamed, you are advised to contact your local OECTA unit office or the Counselling and Member Services department at OECTA Provincial Office (1-800-268-7230). Our legal support team can provide valuable advice on dealing with your complaint.

If this behaviour is affecting your personal health, seek advice from a registered medical practitioner, access your board's employee assistance program, and/or access your OECTA healthcare benefits through OTIP.



*According to the Ontario Ministry of Education in PPM 144:*

Bullying is behaviour that can be repeated or occur one time and can be carried out by an individual or group of individuals.

Bullying can occur in situations where there are real or perceived power imbalances between individuals or groups, and may be a symptom of racism, classism, homophobia, sexism, religious discrimination, ethnic discrimination, or other forms of bias and discrimination. Bullying can also be based on, but not limited to, body size, appearance, abilities, or other real or perceived factors. Perceptions about differences are often based on stereotypes perpetuated in broader society.

Bullying, including cyber-bullying, may be intentional or unintentional, direct or indirect. It can take many forms including physical (for example, pushing, tripping), verbal (for example, name calling, insults, threats, sexist/racist/transphobic comments), social, also known as relational (for example, spreading rumours, intentionally excluding others, humiliating others with public gestures) and causing harm to one's property.

It is important that teachers take the reporting of bullying seriously.

# CHAPTER 4

# RESPONSIBILITIES AND RIGHTS

The rights and responsibilities of teachers are outlined in a variety of legal documents. At the end of this document, there is an annotated list of some of these legislative requirements.

Understanding these rights and responsibilities will help you to successfully navigate your relationships with stakeholder groups including caregivers.



## TEACHER RESPONSIBILITIES

Regulation 298 of The Education Act details the 'duties of teachers' under the law. Some of these duties intersect with caregiver expectations, such as encouraging pupils to learn, maintaining discipline, and evaluating and reporting on the progress of pupils.

One of the gravest and most challenging responsibilities of a teacher, however, is your duty to report child abuse. This is outlined in greater detail by the Ontario College of Teachers' Duty to Report – Professional Advisory.

The Ontario Child, Youth and Family Services Act requires those who perform professional or official duties with respect to children to report suspected abuse where there are reasonable grounds. The report must be made to the local children's aid society. A report to another teacher or the principal is not what the law requires.

The types of abuse that a teacher must report are physical, sexual, emotional, domestic violence, neglect, abandonment/separation, and caregiver incapacity.

You are advised to document the time and date of the report, as well as the observations or reports from students that caused you to make the report. Your school board might have a policy requiring you to share that you made a report to the children's aid society with your principal. This documentation might be useful should you be required to testify months later.

It is likely that reporting suspected abuse will lead to tension with the caregiver in question. Anonymity is not always assured in these reports. When asked by children's aid society or police for contact information, you are advised to give the school's name, address, and telephone number. Home information is not required.

If you are confronted by the caregiver about your report, tell them that it is your legal duty and then inform your principal, in writing, that this interaction occurred. Keep a copy of your email as your written documentation of this incident.

Any board employee who responds to an incident of student behaviour for which suspension and/or expulsion must be considered, is required by law to fill out the safe schools reporting form. If you are unable to locate this form, call your local unit office. For additional information on required reporting forms, see the OECTA document 'Safety in Schools' available at [catholicteachers.ca](http://catholicteachers.ca)

## TEACHER RIGHTS

- Be informed of caregiver complaints made about you (if board officials act on those complaints).
- Be aware of the items contained in your personnel file.
- Have OECTA representation in any matter that is, or might be construed to be, disciplinary.
- Expect your employer to follow appropriate regulations, policies, procedures, and legislation.
- Request administration's assistance, in writing, with curriculum, assessment, classroom management, and discipline.
- Request assistance from administration, in writing, in all communications with caregivers.
- Be treated with respect and courtesy.

- Work in a safe environment, free from intimidation, bullying, and harassment.
- Give the school name, address, and telephone number if contact information is requested in relation to your reporting duties.

Your rights to a safe and inclusive work environment, free of bullying, harassment, and violence are enshrined in numerous policies and legislation, including the *Education Act*, *Safe Schools Act* and regulations, the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, and the *Criminal Code of Canada*.

## ADMINISTRATION RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Ensuring all members of the school community are treated with dignity and respect.
- Providing a safe workplace, which is free from bullying and harassment.
- Ensuring the board's code of conduct is enforced.
- Ensuring that the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* is enforced.
- Complying with applicable statutes, including the *Education Act*.
- Providing teachers with the appropriate supports and work environment so that they can do their jobs successfully.

Principals have a duty to prevent anyone whose presence would be detrimental to the physical and mental well-being of students from accessing the classroom. They can be empowered to direct people, including caregivers, to leave school property. They can also ask caregivers and others to respect and follow school behaviour codes and policies, and require them to follow meeting restrictions, which may include specifying meeting times, locations, attendance, and agenda.

## CAREGIVER RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Caregivers have the responsibility to abide by the law, behave in a civil and respectful manner, follow school and board rules and procedures, and adhere to the Provincial Code of Conduct.

There is no specific legislation that mandates or gives special attention to caregiver rights. However, they do have legitimately high expectations, which teachers should respect.

- Knowing what is being taught and how it will be taught.
- Knowing how learning will be evaluated and the evaluation and assessment criteria employed.
- Being fully informed of their child's progress, and alerted to problems if or when they arise.
- Upon request, and within the confines of any school policy, meeting with teachers regarding their child's progress and arranging with the teacher to visit the classroom.
- Knowing the approved classroom management methods in a class and in the school. This includes the teacher's classroom expectations and the school's philosophy and expectations regarding discipline.

While it is usually more beneficial and productive for a caregiver to contact you, the teacher, they may contact the principal, trustee, or school board personnel directly. Initial concerns should be redirected to the classroom teacher to address.



# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSION

Being proactive and thoughtful around your communication with caregivers will help set the tone for a professional relationship. Keeping in mind differing expectations, perspectives, and life experiences will help you understand concerns. Focusing on the facts and the impact over intent will help find a pathway forward. While most of your interactions with caregivers will be positive, there will always be conflict. It is important to be measured in your responses and seek assistance as needed.

Be aware that every school board has a variety of policies related to professional relationships which are usually posted publicly on their websites. This might include policies about appropriate use of technology, harassment, and home-school-parish connections, among others. Reach out to your local OECTA unit office if you are having trouble locating these.

- Establish a good communication protocol, which includes timely, clear, and positive communications with caregivers.
- Carefully consider how and when you communicate with caregivers to ensure maximum impact of your message.
- Discuss problems or concerns with caregivers and take responsibility for your own actions.
- Take responsibility for self-regulation and the language that you use. Some terms that may have been deemed 'acceptable' in days past might not be now.
- Be reflective and responsive to feedback you receive about your language if it causes offense. Apologize for causing hurt when necessary and commit to learning more. Review the AIDE resource 'Inclusive Language' for more information.
- Document all interactions and communications with caregivers.

- Take steps to understand the caregiver's perspective.
- Be an engaged and active listener.
- Don't ignore issues.
- Focus on solutions, rather than on assigning blame.
- Ensure your communication uses language that is easy to understand and provides caregivers the information that they need. Speak to your school administration at the first sign of a potential problem.
- Document interactions.
- Get help when you need it.
- Alert the police if you feel you are at risk.



If you have questions or concerns, contact OECTA's Counselling and Member Services Department at 1-800-268-7230

# CHAPTER 6

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION
<a href="http://catholicteachers.ca">catholicteachers.ca</a>	<p>The Catholic teachers website contains a vast array of information on professional development, the teaching profession and more. Be sure to check out</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Professional development opportunities</li><li>■ AIDE resources</li><li>■ Counselling and Membership Services</li><li>■ Government Relations</li><li>■ Bargaining and Contract Services</li></ul>
<b>CURRICULUM RESOURCES</b>	
<a href="http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/parents/welcome.html">Ontario Ministry of Education 'Welcome Parents'</a>	This ministry resource is a guide for caregivers to understanding their child's learning in your classroom. It includes links to TVO learn and parent guides to different areas of curriculum.
<a href="http://www.ice.on.ca">Institute for Catholic Education</a>	The Institute for Catholic Education provides the curriculum for Religious Education and Family Life, as well as a variety of resources for educators and teachers related to these.
<b>LEGISLATION</b>	
<a href="http://www.ontario.ca/page/child-youth-and-family-services-act">Child, Youth and Family Services Act</a>	Included in this act is your duty to report on suspicion of abuse, among other responsibilities.
<a href="http://www.ontario.ca/page/education-act">Education Act</a>	This act outlines the responsibilities of a variety of different stakeholders in Ontario schools
<a href="http://www.ontario.ca/page/occupational-health-and-safety-act">Occupational Health and Safety Act</a>	This act outlines the rights of workers in health and safety.
<a href="http://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-college-teachers-act">Ontario College of Teachers Act</a>	The Ontario College of Teachers regulates the teaching profession. All Ontario teachers in publicly funded schools are required to be members.
<a href="http://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-human-rights-code">Ontario Human Rights Code</a>	This act outlines protected grounds for human rights in the province of Ontario.
<a href="http://www.ontario.ca/page/teaching-profession-act">Teaching Profession Act</a>	This act discusses the Ontario Teachers' Federation and outlines its objectives
<a href="http://www.ontario.ca/page/workplace-safety-and-insurance-act">Workplace Safety and Insurance Act</a>	The purpose of this act is to promote health and safety in workplaces, facilitate return to work and recovery of workers who sustain personal injury, among other responsibilities.
<a href="http://www.ontario.ca/page/policy-program-memorandum-128-provincial-code-conduct-and-school-board-codes-conduct">Policy and Program Memorandum 128: The Provincial code of conduct and school board codes of conduct</a>	This memorandum outlines the provincial code of conduct as well as recent changes to it.
<a href="http://www.ontario.ca/page/safe-schools-act-regulations">Safe Schools Act and regulations</a>	This act is "to increase respect and responsibility, to set standards for safe learning and safe teaching in schools."



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at 1-800-268-7230

[catholicteachers.ca](http://catholicteachers.ca)

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ASSOCIATION