

RELATIONSHIPS APPROPRIATE AND PROFESSIONAL



CATHOLIC TEACHERS AND COLLEAGUES

Catholic teachers collaborate professionally with colleagues to create rich learning environment for the students in their classrooms. This is both inherent to the good work you do in your classroom and reflected in the Education act which states that teachers are to: “to assist in developing co-operation and co-ordination of effort among the members of the staff.” During the school day, teachers must reasonably cooperate with one another to complete the necessary educational activities required for student learning. Failure to fulfil your duties as a teacher can amount to professional misconduct under Regulation 437 of the *Ontario College of Teachers Act*.

When conflict between colleagues arises in the workplace, teachers should do their best to resolve it collaboratively and quickly with the immediate parties involved. Resolving serious issues is primarily the responsibility of the employer. School boards have policies and procedures to address conflicts between employees.

Dealing with conflict is often difficult. In some boards, the Employee Assistance Program can support teachers in dealing with such challenges. Consult your local collective agreement and your health benefits provider for resources that support your mental and physical health when dealing with conflict. Should you require assistance or advice, contact your local OECTA unit representative. Visit catholicteachers.ca for a list of local unit presidents.

There are several considerations when managing relationships with colleagues:

- Every person has the right to a workplace free from all forms of harassment and bullying under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) and the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC). Under no circumstances should you ignore such behaviour.
- Be aware of your school board’s harassment policy and procedures.
- Timeliness is often required if a complaint is being made to the school board.

RELATIONSHIPS APPROPRIATE AND PROFESSIONAL CATHOLIC TEACHERS AND COLLEAGUES

Understanding 18 (1)(b) the 'Adverse Report'

It is often best to seek to resolve conflict with colleagues personally, privately, and directly, before seeking third-party assistance within your school or board. This expectation is listed in regulation 18 (1)(b) under the Teaching Profession Act. If you make an adverse report about a colleague, the regulation requires you to provide your colleague with a 'written statement of the report' within 72 hours, with the following exception at 18 (1) (c):

“...a member who makes an adverse report about another member respecting suspected sexual abuse of a student by that other member need NOT provide him or her with a copy of the report or with any information about the report.”

Your Rights to a Harassment-Free Workplace and 18 (1)(b)

Any worker in a school board, including teachers, have rights to a discrimination and harassment-free workplace under the Ontario Health and Safety Act (OHSA), and the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC). Additional rights for teachers to be free from discrimination and harassment may also exist pursuant to school board policies. Examples include codes of conduct, human rights, and harassment policies.

If you believe your human rights are being violated under the OHSA, OHRC, related board policy, or if you have been subjected to harassment, you may choose **not** to provide your colleague with an adverse report. The OECTA Handbook provides that these rights take precedence over Regulation 18 (1)(b) and would not result in discipline by OECTA. Knowing when you have a professional obligation under 18 (1)(b) of the Teaching Profession Act can be difficult. You can also consult with your local OECTA unit president.

The Association also has policies and procedures to support you related to your human rights. See OECTA's Member's Guide to Workplace Human Rights Concerns and Complaints.

Allegations and Investigations

If you face an allegation of professional misconduct, the investigation may be conducted by a number of agencies, including the police, children's aid societies, Ontario College of Teachers, the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal and, your school board. These investigations may occur sequentially or simultaneously.

Regardless of the situation, it is imperative that you respond appropriately. It is in your best interest to:

1. CONTACT your local OECTA unit or the Provincial Office IMMEDIATELY.
2. DO NOT provide any information or make any statements without first consulting with OECTA staff or legal counsel.
3. This is the ONLY statement you should make: "I am willing to cooperate, but I am unable to comment until I contact OECTA / my legal representative."

See the OECTA Resource 'Teaching in the 21st Century' for additional information on allegations and investigations.