

RELATIONSHIPS APPROPRIATE AND PROFESSIONAL

ONTARIO ENGLISH
Catholic
Teachers
ASSOCIATION

CATHOLIC TEACHERS AND PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CAREGIVERS

This document provides advice to Catholic teachers on communicating with parents, guardians, or caregivers (all of which will be collectively referred to as caregivers in this document). Additional information can be found on the [Catholic teachers website](#).

Interactions with caregivers should be student-centered, identity-affirming, and for the benefit of each unique student. Regulation 298 of the *Education Act*, Duties of a Teacher, outlines that you must “participate in regular meetings with pupils’ parents or guardians.” Therefore, communication with caregivers is not only important for the educational growth of all students, but also a legal requirement. Local collective agreements may contain parameters on communication and meetings with caregivers.

You should always maintain a professional manner when communicating with caregivers, even if communication is difficult. Consult your local collective agreement and your health benefits provider for supports for your mental and physical health in dealing with conflict. Should you require assistance or advice, contact your local OECTA unit representative(s). See the [Catholic teachers website](#) for a list of local unit presidents.

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CHECKLIST

Verbal Communication with Caregivers

DO

- Ensure you are aware of the student's legal guardian and therefore official contact.
- Start communication early and with a positive tone. Consider an introductory phone call so the first interaction is a positive one.
- Make caregivers feel welcome and let them know when and how they can reach you.
- Let them know that you welcome information that might affect progress in the classroom.
- Before communicating about a concern, use your professional judgement to consider the best way to convey the information you wish to share.
- Communicate any behavioural and/or academic concerns early on.
- Document all communications.
- Consult your board's policies and procedures on classroom/school visits and ensure your classroom practices comply. These procedures should be clearly explained to them. See the Ontario's Provincial Code of Conduct for guidance.
- When communicating, be prepared and stay focused: address only matters related to student learning.
- Communicate on-site, ideally during working hours, using board-provided technology.

DON'T

- Wait until problems arise to make contact.
- Give out your personal telephone number or home address.
- Get defensive: you are not required to respond to issues related to your teaching practice, nor should you speak about any other student or compare students.

Written Communication

DO

- If you choose to communicate in writing, review and edit written communications to ensure the tone is professional.
- When reporting, either in person or in writing, be objective, concise, and considerate.
- Exercise the 24-hour rule before responding in writing.
- Vet your response through a colleague or administrator for objective feedback.
- Send email communications during working hours through your work email account only. The delay delivery function can assist in arranging delivery during your workday.

DON'T

- Assume that your tone in an email will be interpreted as positive.
- Assume that report cards are the only required communication.

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Consultation

DO

- Consult with other professionals in your school, such as your special education resource teacher, your administrators, or others responsible for the educational programming of students, to ensure you have up-to-date and complete information before you communicate.
- Ask your principal to attend meetings that might be contentious.
- Prepare for these meeting ahead of time, working with your principal to review what will be said and ensuring that you and your admin are on the same page.
- Share the purpose/agenda of the meeting in advance, which should focus on supporting student learning. **At no time should the topic be evaluative of your work, nor should you be subject to reprimand during a meeting with a caregiver.**
- During the meeting, take steps to de-escalate conflict by maintaining professional composure and remaining on topic.
- Terminate the meeting politely but firmly if the tone changes to abusive or confrontational.
- Contact your local OECTA unit office for advice on appropriate health and safety reporting responsibilities, or any other concerns you may have.
- If you feel you are in immediate danger, contact the police.
- If a principal reprimands you in the course of a meeting with a caregiver, take notes and inform your local unit office once the meeting has ended. Use the principle, “work now, grieve later.”

DON'T

- Assume you can manage all issues on your own.

Cultural Awareness

DO

- Be culturally relevant and responsive when communicating. Awareness of different ways people demonstrate respect will help avoid misinterpreting body language or facial expressions that might be different from your own.
- 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. This demonstrates respect for the diversity of your students and their families.
- For additional information on culturally relevant and responsive practices, and anti-oppression, see OECTA's Safer Spaces Series and Anti-Oppression in Practice: A Guide for Catholic Teachers on catholicteachers.ca

DON'T

- Assume your lived experiences are representative of those of your students and their families.
- Assume that teaching materials used in the past are currently appropriate.

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Confidentiality

DO

- Maintain confidentiality. In all settings, including staff rooms, be aware of professional boundaries, and privacy.
- Move yourself to a private space if you need to discuss a student with a colleague, and stay focused on the issue at hand.
- See [OECTA's Teaching in the 21st Century](#) for additional details on professional boundaries.

DON'T

- Share personal details of a student without consent, or without an educational purpose.
- Gossip about students.

If contacted about a child custody case, contact your local unit office for advice. Be aware that:

- Under no circumstances should you respond, verbally or in writing, to any inquiry of this nature until you have spoken to OECTA.
- Decisions regarding the disclosure of any information that would be contained in the Ontario Student Record (OSR) is the responsibility of school board administration.
- Information contained in the OSR is privileged and subject to the *Freedom of Information Act*. Teachers are not able to share this information. For more information on your requirements under this act, contact your [local unit office](#).
- If you are required to appear in court regarding a student, seek direction from your administration, in writing, on what information you can disclose.

REMEMBER:

Under no circumstance should you endure any form of verbal and/or physical abuse, this includes cyber-abuse or stalking.