

## ALLEGATIONS AND INVESTIGATIONS

If you face an allegation of improper professional conduct, the investigation may be conducted by a number of agencies, including the police, Children's Aid Society, Ontario College of Teachers, and/or your school board. These agencies may act individually or in concert.

Regardless of the situation, it is imperative that you respond appropriately.

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 or any legal representative."

**REMEMBER:** *There is no such thing as an "off the record" conversation.*



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# Relationships Appropriate and Professional

MAINTAINING PROFESSIONAL  
STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOUR  
IS ESSENTIAL FOR TEACHERS



This brochure presents advice for members concerning their professional relationships with students, parents, colleagues, and the employer.



Counselling and  
Member Services

Your actions are under constant scrutiny, and cases of professional misconduct before the Ontario College of Teachers are on the rise.

You need to avoid any comments, actions, or online posts that might be considered inappropriate or unprofessional.



## STUDENTS

A teacher is in a position of trust, regardless of the age of the student. Your actions will be measured against a higher standard than those of other individuals. In order to receive the respect you deserve, you should treat students with respect and care.

Some activities will always be unacceptable, such as:

- Any form of sexual relationship with a student, regardless of age
- Providing personal information
- Dating students, even adult students or former students
- Touching students when reprimanding or disciplining them
- Being alone in the classroom with a student
- Writing/exchanging cards or letters with a particular student or students
- Any electronic communication of a personal nature, including texting or emailing
- Any form of interaction with students on your personal social media accounts
- Meeting a student or students outside school or in an isolated location
- Playing favourites
- Giving gifts to an individual student or students

Other activities can also create problems, such as:

- Classroom activities that might be interpreted as inappropriate
- Discussion and/or teaching supports that use inappropriate content
- Driving students in your personal vehicle
- Interfering with the personal life of a student, unless it is due to a statutory requirement, such as the duty to report under the *Child and Family Services Act*
- Improper use of the internet in the classroom, such as having students visit sites that have not been pre-screened for content

**REMEMBER:** Teachers should take great care to avoid relationships with students that cross professional boundaries.

Review OECTA's *On Thin Ice: Maintaining Professional Boundaries* booklet and video for more information on maintaining professional boundaries with students. Also review the *Electronic Communications* booklet for more advice on the appropriate use of email, social media, etc.

## PARENTS/GUARDIANS

The relationship between teachers and parents/guardians should be positive, impartial, and for the benefit of students. You should always maintain a professional manner when dealing with parents, even if communication is strained or difficult.

- When reporting to parents, either in person or in writing, be objective, concise, and considerate.
- In social settings, be aware of boundaries – avoid gossip and comments concerning teachers, staff, or students.
- Address only matters related to the educational performance of the student – you are not required to respond to issues related to your teaching practice, nor should you speak about any other student or compare students.

If a parent or lawyer in a child custody matter contacts you, you are not required to provide any information.

- Decisions regarding the disclosure of any information that would be contained in the Ontario Student Record (OSR) is the responsibility of school board administration.
- Under no circumstances should you respond, verbally or in writing, to any inquiry of this nature until you have spoken to OECTA.
- If you are required to appear in court regarding a student, seek direction from your administration on what information you can disclose.

If you find yourself in a difficult or threatening situation with a parent, take steps to de-escalate the conflict.

- Terminate the meeting politely but firmly if a parent becomes abusive or confrontational.
- Where appropriate, have a colleague or administrator attend any subsequent parent meetings.
- Document your interactions and inform your administrator.
- Seek advice and assistance from OECTA as needed.

**REMEMBER:** Under no circumstance should any member endure any form of verbal and/or physical abuse from a parent or guardian. This includes cyber-abuse or stalking.

For more great tips and advice, read OECTA's *Building Positive Relationships with Parents* booklet.

## COLLEAGUES

Relationships between colleagues should always be professional. During the school day, teachers must cooperate with one another to complete the necessary educational activities required for student learning.

However, as in any workplace, conflict between colleagues can arise. Resolving such discord is primarily the responsibility of the employer, and school boards have policies to address such matters. These may be accessed through school board websites or designated personnel. In some boards, the Employee Assistance Program can assist staff to resolve conflicts.

Dealing with such situations is often difficult. Should you require assistance or advice, contact your local OECTA unit representative(s) or the OECTA Provincial Office.

There are several things to be aware of when considering how to manage relationships with colleagues.

- Every person has the right to a workplace free from all forms of harassment and/or bullying. Under no circumstances should any member ignore such behaviour.
- It is best to seek to resolve conflict with colleagues personally, privately, and directly, before seeking third-party assistance within your school or board.
- If you make an adverse report about a colleague to an administrator, you must furnish your colleague with a written account within 72 hours. This requirement is detailed in Regulation 18(1)(b) under the *Teaching Profession Act*.
- Timeliness is often required if a complaint is being made to the school board.

**REMEMBER:** Conflicts between colleagues are primarily the responsibility of the employer to resolve.

## EMPLOYER

Knowing your rights and responsibilities as a professional ensures a healthy employer-employee relationship. Be cognizant of your responsibilities under legislation, regulations, and school board policies and procedures, but also understand how employment laws and your collective agreement provide you with the right to a safe and productive workplace.

Your employer has the right to request that you complete duties assigned to you. However, assigned tasks must fall within the duties of a teacher as outlined in the *Education Act* or your collective agreement. Any request from an employer that exceeds a reasonable expectation (as outlined in the duties of a teacher) or is the work of another non-teaching employee in the school does not require your compliance. If you are unclear as to whether a request from your administrator is reasonable, contact your OECTA school representative or your local unit office.

Below are some tips for managing your relationship with your employer.

- Be familiar with appropriate channels for expressing concerns and bringing about change – and use those channels.
- Be assertive rather than aggressive when addressing issues.
- Be aware of your employer's duties and responsibilities.
- Don't gossip with colleagues about issues related to your employer.
- Be mindful of your rights as a professional, as an employee, and as a member of OECTA.

Also, be wary of situations where your employer is advising you to avoid OECTA involvement. You can **ALWAYS** call your union for advice and/or representation.

Contact your local OECTA unit should you have any concerns regarding your relationship with your employer or if you question the direction or demands your employer is making of you.

**REMEMBER:** You have the right to request to be accompanied by an OECTA representative during any meeting with your employer.

Other OECTA resources that can help you in managing your relationship with your employer include *Safety in Schools, What You Need to Know: Your Obligations for Reporting and Responding* brochure, *Reporting Abuse* brochure, and *Managing Stress & Promoting Wellness* booklet.