

Supporting Members Throughout the Pandemic

“The more things change, the more they stay the same.” This old adage holds true when we look at our current pandemic predicament and member responsibilities. This bulletin focuses on conduct members may keep in mind as they navigate distance teaching and learning.

Distance Learning Tips

Continuing to provide instruction to students in a non-traditional manner outside of classrooms and schools creates a unique set of challenges for members. It is important that members remember that their communication and interactions with students, families and colleagues need to continue to be professional. Members should be aware of the expectations of school boards and understand their role as work is conducted from home. Questions and concerns should be raised with the direct supervisor or school administrator.

Members should make sure they take time to ensure that electronic interactions with students, parents and guardians are positive and thoughtfully communicated. Members should be careful to take the necessary time to review their electronic communication with students and avoid quick interactions that aren't carefully composed. Interactions with students will be more widely observed than might normally be the case as parents and guardians will be taking a more active role in their child's learning. Wherever possible, ensure communication to your students is done in a group setting rather than individually. Think of how you might keep your “virtual classroom door” open while you continue to instruct your students.

Members should refrain from sharing personal information relating to family, health, relationships or other personal topics. It may be tempting to try to engage with students on a more personal level to alleviate some of the stress that they might be experiencing at this time.

Related to this is the temptation to post to Instagram, Facebook or other social media platforms updates about what is happening in your life. You wouldn't normally do this while you are at work and you should avoid doing so during the normal instructional day at this time. While you may not be physically at work, you are being paid and expected to be available for work. To avoid concerns you should save such posts for outside of the normal workday.

A challenging situation like the COVID19 pandemic is bound to have an impact on student mental health. ETFO members need to remember that we are not mental health experts. Rather than engage in discussions about how students are coping, encourage students to discuss those concerns with their family. School boards have made numerous resources available that parents and guardians might access to support their child. If you become aware that a student is in distress you should reach out to the appropriate board personnel immediately so that they can provide needed supports.

One of the challenges of moving to a distance education model is that the day is no longer controlled by start times, recess, timetables and bells. There is a blurring of the boundaries between professional and personal life. Try to set reasonable expectations for responding to students and parents and guardians. Members are expected to be available during the regular workday, however, it should not be an expectation that members are “on call” at any hour of the day or on weekends.

While the Ministry is not requiring that educators interact with students via video platforms, it is possible that some members might opt to do so. When participating in such interactions, it is important to maintain courteous and respectful relationships. Members must remember to exercise appropriate conduct while being aware of maintaining professional boundaries when interacting with students via video connections; be mindful of your surroundings and what others might see and hear, as well as how you present yourself and are seen by others.

Always remember that educators are held to a higher standard. In addition to legislative requirements that prohibit conduct that is unbecoming of a member, both the Ontario College of Teachers and College of Early Childhood Educators have codes of ethics and standards of practice regarding the treatment of staff, students and parents and guardians. School board policies may also have standards that apply to maintaining positive and respectful relationships within a learning community. All of these policies, standards and legislative responsibilities must also be considered while working from home.

Useful Web Links:

- PRS Matters Bulletin Volume 105, [Use of Electronic Communication in the Classroom](#)
- PRS Matters Bulletin Volume 82, [Professionalism: Advice to Members](#)
- OCT Professional Advisory, [Maintaining Professionalism - Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media](#)
- CECE Practice Note, [Using Social Media](#)
- CECE Practice Guideline, [Supporting Positive Interactions with Children](#)

A Members' Duty to Report under the Child and Family Services Act in a Virtual Classroom

Navigating new expectations and delivering online learning experiences for your students can lead to questions regarding your professional responsibilities. All members should be cognizant that the same level of care and professionalism is required when engaging in distance learning. This includes a member's legal obligation to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect to the Children's Aid Society (CAS) when they have "reasonable grounds to suspect". Members who fail to meet this duty can face charges under the *Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)* and a finding of professional misconduct by their professional College.

The duty to report is a legal duty that arises under section 72 of the *CFSA*. It is important that members be mindful that under the *CFSA*, everyone has a duty to report "reasonable grounds to suspect" that a child may be in need of protection as set out in section 72(1) of the *CFSA*. This duty applies regardless of whether one is a professional named in the *Act* or is acting in their professional capacity.

For more information on your Duty to Report, please refer to:

- PRS Matters Bulletin Volume 85, [A Member's Duty to Report under the Child and Family Services Act](#)
- College of Early Childhood Educators, [Duty to Report](#)
- Ontario College of Teachers, Professional Advisory, [Duty to Report](#)

Tutoring and Conflict of Interest – Guidelines for Members

COVID-19 has created an unprecedented time for the world and education. Members are faced with the challenges of creating and delivering a continuation of learning program in a different learning environment for their students. Parents are tasked with facilitating the learning experience for their children. Members may be approached by parents to provide private tutoring for their child. Some members may be contemplating providing tutoring services to supplement their daily wage. Before engaging in private tutoring, members should know the Ontario Teachers' Federation policy on tutoring:

- Members are legally able to engage in tutoring on their own time.
- Teachers must **not** tutor their own students for remuneration.
- The teacher should consult the student's regular teacher.

Teachers are bound by the Professional Misconduct Regulation 437/97 under the *Ontario College of Teachers Act*. Section 26 states that a teacher is guilty of professional misconduct when practicing the profession while in a conflict of interest. Members are viewed as public servants and are held to higher standards than other employees in conflict of interest situations.

Many Boards have a policy on tutoring. Educators must be knowledgeable about the existing Board policy. Educators who breach a Board policy may be disciplined and/or reported to their College. Here are some guidelines which you should consider before tutoring:

- Members should not advertise private tutoring through connections at the school, through school or board publications, or through the board's computer network.
- Members tutor students at their own risk and may not be eligible for ETFO support should problems arise from the private tutoring situation.

The full list of specific guidelines can be found in PRS Matters Bulletin Volume 28, [*Tutoring and Conflict of Interest - Guidelines for Members*](#).

Wellness During Covid-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has created countless stressors as we struggle to keep ourselves and our families healthy and safe. There is a huge financial burden experienced by many of our occasional members as jobs no longer exist and income instability is the norm. Our students also struggle with the same issues of safety, financial loss and uncertainty. Stressors may trigger strong reactions from our students. Educators may provide reassurance, but be mindful that you are not mental health practitioners and must be aware of your professional limitations.

You may also experience strong reactions to the unknown whether, it is because you have lost your daily work assignment or because your work environment has changed. Not having stability, answers to your questions or fully knowing the expectations placed upon you may create unease and add to fear and anxiety. It is normal to feel unsettled, even anxious. You must remember to care for your well-being.

One way to quell anxiety is to get reliable facts on COVID-19. Rely on credible sources of information rather than social media or in chat rooms. While chat rooms can be a way to network, they don't always provide the most credible facts. Information about job related issues should come soon from the Ministry of Education and school boards. Your Federation is always available to support you and answer questions where possible. Subscribe to ETFO member newsletters at etfo.ca if you have not already done so.

A second way to assist with stress and anxiety is to maintain daily routine. This may be difficult with young children at home or an elderly parent who you must now attend to. Make a daily schedule to follow. Implement time in the schedule for a simple undertaking you enjoy such as daily yoga or perhaps a family walk (respecting physical distancing from others, of course). Most importantly, it must be something that resonates with you.

A third way to assist with stress and anxiety is to maintain social networks. Social isolation can create profound feelings of sadness and fear. As social beings we must find ways to use technology to our advantage to maintain and create relationships. Find opportunities to connect even if it is a loud conversation from across the street with a neighbour. Listen to others but remember to also communicate your thoughts and feelings. Be careful about communicating negative comments on social media about your employer. While these are difficult times, we still have an obligation to maintain high professional standards which includes online conduct.

- PRS Matters Bulletin Volume 96, [Member Mental Health](#)
- PRS Matters Bulletin Volume 67, [Member Mental Health](#)
- Public Health Ontario, [Covid-19 Public Resources](#)
- [Canadian Mental Health Association](#)
- [Mental Health Commission of Canada](#)
- Federal Government [facts](#)

WSIB Coverage While Working at Home

Members have WSIB coverage while working from home during the shut-down. If a member is injured while performing a work-related duty or an activity closely related to work-related duties, they may have WSIB entitlement. If you suffer an injury while working at home during the shut-down, we encourage you to seek medical attention as soon as possible and to report the injury to both the school board and the WSIB.

For more information on WSIB processes, you can access [A Member's Guide to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board](#).

If you have further questions or concerns, contact the WSIB counsellor-on-duty at 416-962-3836 or 1-888-838-3836.

For further information, contact your local ETFO office or an ETFO Professional Relations staff in PRS at 416-962-3836 or 1-888-838-3836.

Your Federation is always available to assist you both at the local level and at ETFO

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