



Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)

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Tips on Members' Use of Social Media: Advice for Locals

ETFO continues to support the responsible use of social media by members, provided its use is consistent with high standards of professional conduct. Members have used social media as a valuable teaching tool, to engage in “online activism” to generate positive social and political change, and in support of their union during collective bargaining rounds.

Here are some key messages local leaders can share with members:

- Social media sites have the potential to provide a number of exciting and innovative ways for members to interact with their classes and the wider school community. They can be used to encourage group discussions, to facilitate collaborative projects, and provide peer-to-peer support. Social media sites also provide opportunities for members to communicate with groups of parents/caregivers and students in an effective and efficient manner.
- However, communicating with individuals through social networking sites tends to promote an even more casual style than e-mail, and sometimes does not meet the standards of professionalism expected of educators.
- Anything posted on social media can be: forwarded, taken out of context, copied, manipulated and impossible to remove from cyberspace.
- ETFO members are not required to maintain neutrality around labour relations issues. However, despite the significant protections that the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* provides, an employee's freedom of expression is not absolute. For example, employees cannot make comments about their employer that are false or malicious. The line between members' ability to speak freely as unionized workers and their responsibilities to the employer can be difficult to define. The line is dependent on the specific context around each situation. ETFO members may reach out to their local or to the provincial office to help define that line.
- Members should be aware that their employer:
 - has the right to restrict employees' personal use of social media during work hours;
 - can take disciplinary action against an employee for online comments about the employer that are false or malicious.

Here are some tips local leaders can share with members:

- Manage your privacy settings so that only those whom you personally approve have access to your page. You should similarly request that your friends not post photos or other material that could reflect badly on you.
- Know there is no “private” on social media. Consider all your social media posts (including posts you have protected through privacy settings) to be public and assume they’ll be read by your employer.
- Be professional at all times. Where your right to freedom of expression overlaps with your job, it’s best to ensure your posts are professional, temperate and thoughtful, not heated, hostile and impulsive.
- Slow down. Pause and reflect before expressing your views on social media sites.