

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

With Students:

Your students deserve to be treated with respect and care. The relationship between teacher and student is one that is:

- friendly but professional
- frank but considerate
- helpful but non-invasive

Regardless of the age of the student, teachers are in a position of trust and should take great care to avoid relationships with students that cross professional boundaries.

Unacceptable Behaviours

In general, activities that take a teacher beyond the expectations of the employer could easily qualify as boundary violations. These include:

- becoming too personally involved with students – friend, confidante, surrogate parent
- seeing or meeting students in private or non-school settings
- writing or exchanging notes, letters or emails
- serving as a confidante with regard to a student's decision about his/her personal issues
- giving gifts or money to students
- inviting students to one's home/cottage
- driving individual students to or from school
- giving one student undue attention
- being alone with a student with the exception of an emergency situation
- sharing your personal problems with students
- sharing personal information about a student with a third party
- being alone with a student

Always:

- speak calmly
- use positive phrases
- remain professional
- be non-judgmental
- be non-racial
- be reflective
- re-state and re-phrase for understanding
- be polite and respectful
- be receptive
- be open, honest, fair
- think before you speak, take a deep breath
- empathize

Never:

- swear
- threaten
- intimidate
- be sarcastic
- use personal attack
- dwell on past incidents
- yell
- use slanderous language
- demand
- trivialize
- say things you will later regret

Almost any teacher can fall victim to lack of understanding of professional boundaries. This can translate into the member making serious mistakes—career threatening ones—in the management of teacher-student relationships. What makes the issue of professional boundaries an important and dangerous one for teachers is the fact that teachers are responsible for recognizing in themselves whether they are ‘at risk’ of crossing boundaries and, if they are, subsequently addressing the issue. Further, teachers have a responsibility to address this issue when they witness a colleague who may be crossing boundaries. Administrators and colleagues need to recognize danger signals in other teachers’ interactions and intervene. In serious situations, reporting suspicion of child abuse may be required.

Any act of professional misconduct can lead to disciplinary measures being taken by the Ontario College of Teachers. Even an unfounded allegation of professional misconduct could be permanently damaging to a teacher, his or her family and the profession.

If allegations of improper conduct are made against you, contact the Counselling Department of OECTA at 1-800-268-7230 for advice before making a statement to anyone.