

Managing Your Online Reputation

Online services such as social media and messaging apps have changed the way we connect, share our stories, and talk about what matters to us. These digital tools can help us feel more connected with our communities and make communicating easier than ever, but educators must be conscious of protecting their reputations when engaging online.

Information can spread extremely quickly across the internet. It's essential for members to consider how both their own posts and any content that others share about them can shape their professional reputation and digital presence. Your reputation as an educator is built not only through your work with students and colleagues, but also through how others perceive you based on your online representation.

Unfortunately, there is often little oversight or moderating on digital platforms. Anonymous accounts allow individuals to say things online that they would never say face to face, which can lead to posts that include misinformation and harmful content that can be hurtful, inappropriate, or damaging.

Members may also face other forms of harmful online conduct. This can include impersonation accounts, the unauthorized sharing of personal information ("doxxing"), coordinated or viral harassment, and the widespread sharing of information or allegations that may be misleading or taken out of context. Photos, videos, and recordings can be made and shared without your knowledge, and sometimes even changed with artificial intelligence to give a false impression.

Most reputable social media platforms let you flag these posts, but cleaning up harmful or untrue content online is rarely simple, and it's not always possible to erase every trace. Even after you've reported something, it may remain posted for a while or not be removed at all.

Platforms also usually won't give you information about an account unless they are legally compelled to do so. Often, the only way to find out who posted something is through an in-person investigation at your school. That's why it's important to keep a record of what happened and tell your administrator immediately. If you suspect a student or parent is behind a malicious post, your school board may need to step in to determine what happened and decide on next steps.

Managing your online reputation is about being proactive, not just reacting after the fact. The best defence is to be thoughtful about your online presence and act quickly if an issue arises by reporting it to your principal.

Best Practices for Protecting Your Professional Reputation Online

- Be mindful of your digital footprint and regularly review information that is publicly available about you online.
- Use strong privacy and security settings on personal accounts and enable multi-factor authentication, if available.
- Limit the amount of personal information, photographs, and other content that is publicly accessible online.
- Avoid connecting with students or parents on personal social media accounts or other online platforms.
- Consider setting up a Google Alert for your name to help monitor new publicly available online content.
- Document harmful online activity promptly by saving screenshots, links, dates, times, and any other relevant information.
- Report content that violates a platform's terms of service using the platform's reporting tools.
- Notify your administrator when online activity may affect the school environment, your professional responsibilities, or your safety.
- If you become aware of an impersonation account, report it to the platform immediately and document all relevant information.
- If personal information has been shared without your consent, take steps to secure your accounts, document the activity, and notify appropriate authorities as required.
- Assume that online content may be copied, shared, altered, archived, or reposted, even after the original content has been deleted.
- Do not engage in public arguments or attempt to respond to harassment online, as doing so may escalate the situation or create additional concerns.

For more information, contact your local ETFO president or provincial Professional Relations Services staff at 416-962-3836 or 1-888-838-3836.

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