

## Managing Current Events and Sensitive Issues: Tips for Members

On occasion, ETFO members find themselves having to manage the impact of current events or sensitive issues/topics in their personal and professional lives.

Dealing with current events and sensitive issues is not limited to planning for instruction and assessment. It is to be expected that ETFO members may have personal opinions, views, and feelings about these issues. However, how and when members might choose to express those opinions, views, and feelings - both inside and outside of the workplace - can come under scrutiny.

It is important to remember that ETFO members are held to a high standard, both at work and away from work. Members may be subject to formal scrutiny from professional regulatory bodies like the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) or the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE), or by school boards, Children's Aid Societies, and law enforcement. It is also possible for any parent, student, or member of the public to make a complaint to these bodies that could lead to an investigation.

### Current Events/Sensitive Issues and Off-Duty Conduct

ETFO members may feel the need to make public statements or participate in public activities that are connected to a current event and sensitive topic. When doing so, it is important to understand that off-duty conduct can have an impact at work.

Posts on platforms like X (Twitter), Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, etc., can be subject to immediate scrutiny by one's employer, colleagues, students, and school community. In some cases, members can face disciplinary action for off-duty conduct where the conduct harms the employer's reputation, interferes with the performance of the member's duties, causes other employees to feel uncomfortable working with them, or is inconsistent with the professional expectations for someone in a position of trust.

### Current Events/Sensitive Issues in the Classroom and Workplace

Depending upon their role and assignment, ETFO members might be expected to engage students in learning that includes the integration of current events. The [Social Studies](#) curriculum, for example, includes the following:

*Teachers need to integrate current events and issues within the curriculum expectations, and not treat them as separate topics. The integration of current events and issues into the curriculum will help students make connections between what they are learning in class and past and present-day local, national, and global events, developments, and issues. Examining*

*current events helps students analyse controversial issues, understand diverse perspectives, develop informed opinions, and build a deeper understanding of the world in which they live. In addition, investigating current events will stimulate students' interest in and curiosity about the world around them. The inclusion of current events in social studies, history, and geography will help keep the curriculum a relevant, living document.*

Curriculum documents include questions, sample questions, and other specific examples related to expectations that should be used to guide planning and instruction. These examples relate directly to the curriculum topic and expectations. They also assist to frame what current events or sensitive issues could be appropriately integrated, as well as how they can be integrated into classroom learning goals.

Including a current event or sensitive issue in classroom instruction requires members to exercise professional discretion in determining if, when, and how that integration will occur. Planning for such integration should consider curriculum and learning goals, assessment, universal design, differentiated instruction and age appropriateness, in addition to class and student profiles. School boards often issue resources that clarify how to manage specific current events and sensitive issues in the classroom. As employees, ETFO members are required to make themselves familiar with, and follow the guidance in, those board resource documents.

At times, it might be tempting to forego planning and consultation in order to immediately integrate a current event or sensitive topic into classroom instruction. This is not a recommended course of action. Members should be seeking consultation and feedback from supervisors, parents and/or students to identify and address concerns before a current event or sensitive topic is included in classroom activities.

Most workplaces, including school boards, have a code of conduct outlining what is acceptable workplace behaviour. It is important to know those policies and your employer's expectations. Conduct outside of the workplace can still fall within an employer's code of conduct and the professional standards of the OCT or CECE, particularly where the conduct is seen to be detrimental to the profession, the reputation of the employer, or the culture of the school.

If a member is thinking about integrating a current event or sensitive issue into classroom activities, or may be participating in public activities related to a current event or sensitive issue, the following tips can assist in avoiding unnecessary professional difficulties.

#### **Tips for members at work:**

- Ensure that the introduction of current events or sensitive topics into classroom activities is tied directly to curriculum and is age appropriate.
- Avoid introducing topics that may trigger, traumatize, or otherwise negatively impact students.
- Be aware of the employer's code of conduct.
- Be aware of the employer's expectations about communicating around any specific topic.
- Be aware of the employer's current communication or guidance on the topic.
- Seek clarification and guidance from your union and your administrator/supervisor.
- Provide administrator/supervisor-approved communication to families in advance of introducing a current event or sensitive topic to students.
- Forego communication around events and topics that do not directly impact on your work or that might be seen as critical of your employer.

- Have a plan to respond and redirect issues that might be raised by students or others so you do not get drawn into issues unintentionally.
- Follow up with your supervisor anytime something unexpected occurs or students raise a current event or sensitive topic that you were not planning to address.
- If a teacher, be aware of the OCT [Standards of Practice](#), [Ethical Standards](#), and [Professional Advisories](#).
- If a DECE, be aware of the CECE [Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice](#) and [Practice Guideline](#) expectations.

#### **Tips for members outside of work:**

- Be aware of the employer's code of conduct.
- Be aware of the employer's expectations for communication around any specific topic.
- Be aware of the employer's current communication and guidance on the topic.
- Avoid engaging in public communication, including on social media platforms, in ways that are contrary to the employer's code of conduct.
- If you are a teacher or occasional teacher, avoid engaging in public communication, including on social media platforms, in ways that are contrary to the OCT Standards of Practice, Ethical Standards, and Professional Advisories.
- If you are a DECE, avoid engaging in public communication, including on social media platforms, in ways that are contrary to the CECE Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice and Practice Guideline expectations.
- Do not assume privacy on any social media platform, regardless of settings – anything posted online can be seen and shared by others.

**For more information, contact Professional Relations Services staff at 416-962-3836 or 1-888-838-3836 at the provincial office.**

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