

Managing Current Events and Sensitive Issues: Tips for Members

On occasion, ETFO members may find themselves having to manage the impacts of current events or sensitive issues/topics in their personal and professional lives. While members are entitled to have opinions, views, and feelings about events and issues, they must be careful about how and when they choose to express these.

As education professionals, ETFO members are held to a high standard and 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. Any parent, student, or member of the public can lodge a complaint about a member to these bodies that could lead to an investigation

Current Events/Sensitive Issues and Off-Duty Conduct

Members might wish to make public statements or participate in public activities that are connected to a current event or sensitive topic. When doing so, it is important to understand that off-duty conduct can have an impact at work.

Many members may believe their right to freedom of expression under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is "absolute" and, as such, that they are protected from discipline for engaging in this right. However, a recent court decision clarified that membership in a regulated profession, including being a member of the OCT or CECE, carries specific legal and professional obligations that can lawfully limit an educator's freedom of expression.

Engagement 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 if it 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.

In June 2025, the OCT released a new professional advisory (PA) entitled [Addressing Hate and Discrimination](#). In the document, the OCT clearly articulates that professional scrutiny extends beyond what you explicitly post to your individual social media account. Members should be aware that "liking," "retweeting," sharing, or endorsing content that demeans or alienates others could be seen by the college as professional misconduct. Members must be cognizant at all times of how their online actions could be perceived by students and the community, regardless of their intentions.

Current Events/Sensitive Issues in the Classroom and Workplace

Depending upon their role and assignment, 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 analyze 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 and examples related to curriculum expectations that should be used to guide planning and instruction. These help frame which current events or sensitive issues could be appropriately integrated into classroom learning goals.

Members must also exercise professional judgement in determining if, when, and how such integration will occur. Planning 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, members are required to make themselves familiar with and follow this guidance.

While members are entitled to hold individual political opinions and beliefs, the classroom is not an appropriate setting for personal political advocacy. Instruction should remain balanced, aligned with the Ontario curriculum, and non-partisan. Members must consistently reflect on their professional practice to avoid pitfalls such as presenting personal opinions as fact; promoting or opposing specific political parties, movements, or candidates; and framing issues in a way that pressures students to adopt their viewpoint. This approach upholds students' rights to form their own informed opinions and protects members from accusations of indoctrination.

Members must also be aware that discussions about many sensitive issues may impact students who identify as Black, Indigenous, racialized, or 2SLGBTQ+, as well as students with diverse cultural, religious, linguistic, and family backgrounds. If not carefully addressed, these discussions risk reinforcing stereotypes or bias.

The OCT's *Addressing Hate and Discrimination* states that "what [a member] may consider well-intentioned could be experienced negatively by students, parents, colleagues, or the community." When incorporating current events or sensitive issues, members must ensure they use an equity lens and consider the impact on students.

Avoid deficit-based language, ensure that no one group is positioned as “the problem,” and explicitly and purposefully create space for multiple perspectives without forcing individual students to self-identify.

At times, it might be tempting to forgo planning and consultation to immediately integrate a current event or sensitive topic into classroom instruction. This is not a recommended course of action. Members should seek 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 these 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 if it is seen as detrimental to the profession, the reputation of the employer, or the culture of the school.

Addressing Hate and Discrimination directs members to engage in reflection about identity, power, privilege, bias, and how their words and actions may be perceived by others. The CECE has similar expectations included in its code of ethics and standards of practice. Members must examine their biases and assumptions, consider intent versus impact, and reflect on student responses and outcomes when developing their programs. It is critical to ask:

- Why am I bringing this topic forward?
- How does it serve the learning goals?
- Whose voices are centered or excluded?

If you are 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 help avoid 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, and not used as a vehicle for personal political advocacy.
- Avoid introducing topics that may trigger, traumatize, or otherwise negatively impact students.
- Be mindful that well-intentioned actions or language may be experienced negatively by students, families, colleagues, or the broader community.
- Be aware of the employer’s expectations about communicating around any specific topic.
- Engage in ongoing reflective practice before, during, and after instruction involving current events or sensitive topics.
- Use balanced, credible, and curriculum-aligned resources that represent multiple perspectives, and explicitly teach students how to analyze sources, recognize bias, and form their own informed opinions.

- 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.
- Forgo communication around events and topics that do not directly impact your work or that might be seen as critical of your employer.

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.
- Use caution when posting, liking, or sharing on personal social media accounts. Ensure that all online engagement aligns with the legal and professional obligations of the OCT and CECE.
- 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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