

The Different 'Roles' of Members

ETFO members who are also parents with children in the same school, or school board, face a difficult professional juggling act. Essentially, they play a number of different roles within the system. These roles are not always compatible and this incompatibility can be the source of professional difficulty at times.

Member as Parent-Advocate

The first role of an ETFO member in this situation is as a parent. It is important to advocate on behalf of one's child; there is nothing more frustrating than seeing your child struggle or seeing the school system make a decision that you feel adversely affects your child. But, it is crucial for ETFO members in this position to always be cognizant of their other roles, whether as a member of the teaching profession, as a member of ETFO or as an employee of the board, when they pursue their role as a parent-advocate.

As an advocate for your child, you should ensure that your actions do not compromise your other roles.

Member as Professional

Another role of an ETFO member in this situation may be as a member of the teaching profession.

Teachers do have a code of ethics that they are expected to follow. In particular, they should be aware of their obligations under the *Teaching Profession Act*. Specifically Section 18 (1) (b) of the Regulation under the *Act* provides that:

A member shall,

...on making an adverse report on another member, furnish him* with a written statement of the report at the earliest possible time and not later than three days after making the report.

It would be unacceptable for a member of the profession to make an adverse report to an administrator of his or her child's school about the child's teacher, unless there is compliance with s.18 (1)(b). The teacher would be required to put the report in writing and provide a copy of that report to the child's teacher within 72 hours. Failure to comply with this expectation could result in a complaint to the member's affiliate and possible sanctions. The one exception to this requirement would be if the negative report related to an allegation of sexual misconduct involving a student made by a member against another member.

Furthermore, if any ETFO member publicly criticizes a colleague or the school board, any member of the public may file a complaint with the College of Teachers, College of Early Childhood Educators, or the school board alleging that such comments were "unprofessional". Also, public comments about teachers, or anyone else for that matter, must not be defamatory.

Member as Employee

ETFO members in this situation are also in the role of employee. As an employee of the board, staff do have the right to complain about breaches of the collective agreement and the avenues to explore a resolution are set out in the collective agreement. These activities are directly related to the employment relationship between the employee and the employer.

ETFO members should be cautious in taking part in community action against their employer in issues that involve their child's education. For example, if the district school board were to make a decision regarding staffing or school closure that the member was not happy with because of a perceived impact on his or her child, they would have to be cautious in how they advocate for change. Active and vocal participation in such an activity must always be professional and appropriate, or the member risks being disciplined for "insubordination". While you have the right to freedom of expression, you must carefully balance this right against your role as employee.

Collective Actions

There are many occasions when staff are vocal in their opposition to their employers without being insubordinate. For example, during the collective bargaining process ETFO members often participate in a collective activity such as wearing appropriate protest buttons or distributing leaflets in an information picket, as a part of a union sponsored protest. Such collective actions are legitimate exercises of the union's rights.

It is rare that ETFO members would be disciplined for such collective activity. The same is not true for highly critical public statements instigated by a member without union sanction, or advice from Professional Relations Services (PRS).

Points to Remember

ETFO members who find themselves in difficulty because of their competing roles should remember the following:

- Talk to your child's teacher first and involve the teacher in any discussions about your child's progress.
- If you do find it necessary to make a negative comment about a teacher to a board administrator, remember your obligations under the *Teaching Profession Act*, and comply with them.
- If you have concerns about the decisions made by the board speak to those who are responsible for the decisions in a calm and professional manner. You must balance your right to freedom of expression with your role as an employee. Consult PRS when in doubt.

If you have concerns about such issues, you should consult with your local office or contact PRS.

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

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