

CYBERTIPS

FOR TEACHERS

The use of technology has increased dramatically in recent years, but the standards of professionalism have not changed. Teachers are professionals and expected to model ethical and appropriate cyberconduct. Teachers hold a position of trust with students and will be held accountable if their actions expose students to inappropriate material or communications. Remember, *nothing is truly private when you communicate digitally*. When you use school board equipment and networks, your employer has access to all your messages and any sites you have browsed.

WHEN PRIVATE BECOMES PUBLIC

Nothing posted is ever completely erased from the Internet. Anything can generate unintended consequences far into the future. “Friending” students, posting pictures of partying, or sending overly casual messages or texts to students, parents and others may lead to professional difficulties you did not anticipate. People tend to feel safe when surrounded by “friends”. While sitting alone in front of a monitor, it is easy to forget that you are on a public forum. Consequently, the line between our public and private lives becomes blurred, making it easy to mistake a webpage for a diary.

DO’S AND DON’TS OF USING EMAIL

- Do maintain exemplary professional standards when sending email messages to students, parents, colleagues and administrators.
- Don’t use your personal email accounts to contact students or parents.
- Do keep copies of all your email messages.
- Don’t share your user name and password with colleagues or students.
- Do use a teacher voice when communicating with students via email.

- Don’t leave your computer on and unattended when students are around.
- Do use a signature that includes your name, assignment title and school name.
- Don’t send unnecessary attachments with your emails.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

The growth of social media since 2004 has been nothing short of phenomenal, giving rise to a wide range of networking sites such as Twitter, YouTube, MySpace, LinkedIn, Flickr and Google+. Both Facebook and Google+ allow their users to form groups/circles of “friends” and publish information of varying nature in text, image or video as status updates. They allow friends to interact with each other, including the ability to “tag” others in photos. Both these sites encourage users to gather as large a number of friends as possible because it helps generate enormous revenue from targeted advertising.

Social networking sites can carry tremendous benefits in one’s professional development but can also present pitfalls. As educators, we have a professional image to uphold and how we conduct ourselves online holds no exceptions. Before launching a Facebook or Google+ page for your class or school, please check your school board policy with respect to the types of information that can be posted and shared with the world. With a little forethought, these social networking sites can offer a variety of educational benefits without risking any safety to students or members of the school community.

Users of social networking should consider the following:

- Familiarize yourself with the networking site’s privacy policy and activate your own privacy settings.

- Never “friend” a student on your personal Facebook or Google+ account. You can set up a separate profile to be used only for school, based on the professional teacher-student relationship. This will require using a different email from that which you’ve signed up for your personal account.
- Do not permit images of yourself to be taken and posted on any site without appropriate privacy safeguards; learn how to “untag” photos.
- Never post criticism of—or share confidential information about—colleagues, students or administrators.
- Never post confidential images or information about yourself.
- Do not post anything on a social media site that you would not post on the bulletin board outside of your classroom.
- Establish professional boundaries. Do not share any of your personal information with students (.eg. photos), and do not succumb to doing so if students ask
- Only communicate with students online in media where a record or transcript of each conversation is automatically made, to have as evidence if any concerns arise down the line. Please note that you must download special apps in both Facebook and Firefox to be able to log Facebook chats.
- If you’re going to “chat” with students online, ensure you set up “office hours” so that you are free to end the conversation when the time is up. You may also want to set time limits on how long you speak with each student.
- Interacting with colleagues online can be a great way to stay connected. However, you should avoid using online conversations to vent frustrations arising either from your professional or personal lives.

CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is the use of information and communication technologies to bully, embarrass, threaten or harass another person. It also includes the use of these technologies to engage in conduct or behaviour that is derogatory, defamatory, degrading, illegal or abusive.

Despite all precautions, if you or one of your students become targeted by cyberbullying:

- Make copies of all questionable messages, web postings, information and other related material and data, including the URL.
- Demand that the sender stop transmitting or posting the material and state that the conduct is unacceptable and inappropriate; do not further engage the person who is targeting you as this may escalate the situation.
- Advise the administration of your school if the situation requires immediate action and/or the inappropriate communication continues.
- Access appropriate support and guidance through the school board or district cyberconduct policy or manual.
- Request that the administration contact the parents of the student who is cyberbullying you or one of your students.
- Inform and involve your school-based occupational health and safety committee.

- Contact your teacher organization if the actions taken to address the inappropriate communication are ineffective or if you need further support or advice.

At least two forms of cyberbullying are considered criminal acts—communicating repeatedly with someone if the communication causes a person to fear for his or her health and safety; and publishing defamatory libel—something that is designed to insult a person or likely to hurt a person’s reputation by exposing him or her to hatred, contempt or ridicule. Spreading hate or discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or disability may be a violation of the Canadian Human Rights Act and/or provincial or territorial human rights legislation.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Activities that can result in disciplinary action against a teacher:

- Visiting inappropriate websites (i.e. those featuring adult, racist or pornographic content).
- Sending or forwarding offensive jokes and pictures via email.
- Online gambling using school board equipment.
- Downloading audio, video or text-based materials in violation of copyright laws.
- Using the employer’s equipment to engage in activities related to a second occupation.
- Constant text messaging, instant messaging and/or emailing during school time.
- Web browsing to sites not related to the curriculum.

- Posting pictures of yourself, especially if they are suggestive or inappropriate.
- Posting comments about students, parents, colleagues or administration.
- Engaging in personal email exchange with students.
- Engaging in inappropriate conversations about fellow colleagues through email or social networking sites.
- Criticizing principals, teachers, superintendents, school trustees or school boards—personally or professionally—online.
- Sharing confidential school board information through the board email system or a social networking site.

MORE HELPFUL ADVICE FOR TEACHERS

Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens

Cyberespace : La prudence est de rigueur
www.aefo.on.ca/Bulletins/618_28mai10.pdf

Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario Electronic Communication and Social Media - Advice to Members

www.etfo.ca/AdviceForMembers/PRSMattersBulletins/Pages/ElectronicCommunicationandSocialMedia.aspx

The Manitoba Teachers’ Society

www.mbteach.org/library/mtslibrary.html

Nova Scotia Teachers Union

Internet and Communications Technology Policy
www.nstu.ca/images/pklot/Guidebook2011websept2011.pdf (page 71)

Centrale des syndicats du Québec

Booklet on use of social media (both available in English and French)

www.csq.qc.net/sites/1676/documents/english/media_sociaux_a.pdf

CLASSROOM RESOURCES

www.media-awareness.ca

Media Awareness Network and its Web Awareness Program features lesson plans, classroom activities, background articles and Canadian resources for media education. It also offers practical tips for helping parents manage media in the home.

www.cyberbullying.ca

This is a great resource site for teachers, parents and students (only available in English).

www.ctf-fce.ca

For more information on this issue, please visit the Canadian Teachers’ Federation Web site.

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