



Ontario
College of
Teachers

Ordre des enseignantes
et des enseignants
de l'Ontario

Appendix for the Professional Advisory

Addressing Hate and Discrimination

These case studies work in conjunction with the *Professional Advisory Addressing Hate and Discrimination*.

The advisory is available under our member resources section at oct.ca.

Content warning

The content in this advisory may be sensitive for some individuals. Please note that the terms and approaches used in this document were current at the time this advisory was released.

Case Studies

These scenarios are based on actual cases to provide Ontario Certified Teachers (OCTs) with practical examples for addressing hate and discrimination in different environments, both online and in-person. Each scenario is written from the point of view of an OCT and provides general guidance on how OCTs should best proceed.

The scenarios are organized under three key categories:

- **Address** the incident by recognizing and responding to acts of hate and discrimination within learning environments.
- **Build awareness** and understanding of professional, ethical, and legal obligations to avoid discriminatory conduct and foster safe, equitable and inclusive learning environments.
- **Know your role** through increased understanding of professional expectations and how your actions inside and outside the learning environment, both in-person and online, must reflect professional standards and ethical conduct.

1. Freedom of expression

Scenario: “I can say what I want on social media and other online platforms. It’s called freedom of expression. I’m interested in current affairs, and I want to say what I want to say.”

Address it: Maintain professional standards by avoiding offensive, derogatory or discriminatory language. Before posting, “liking,” sharing or otherwise endorsing content online, consider the potential impact on students and the school community. Could your actions hurt the learning environment, damage your reputation, or reflect poorly on your employer, school, colleagues, or the teaching profession as a whole? Ask yourself if the content could demean or alienate others in the school community. Do not share discriminatory or hateful content.

Build awareness: As an OCT, you always represent the teaching profession, both at work and outside of work. Understand your professional boundaries and responsibilities related to the appropriate

use of electronic communications, social media, and other online platforms. As a 2024 Ontario Divisional Court case stated: “When individuals join a regulated profession, they do not lose their Charter right to freedom of expression. At the same time, however, they take on obligations and must abide by the rules of their regulatory body that may limit their freedom of expression.”¹

You should also consider whether or not any comments made outside of the classroom could impact your professional identity and obligations. Could the comments be considered demeaning, degrading and/or discriminatory?

You will also want to consider if your conduct reflects the standards of care, trust, respect and integrity. OCTs “honour human dignity, emotional wellness and cognitive development. In their professional practice, they model respect for spiritual and cultural values, social justice, confidentiality, freedom, democracy and the environment.”²

Know your role: OCTs are held to high ethical standards. Failing to uphold professional standards may harm students and undermine principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. This can lead to a College investigation and potential outcomes directed by the Investigation Committee or the Discipline Committee.

2. Sharing political and personal beliefs

Scenario: “As an OCT, I should be able to share all my beliefs with my students and colleagues. I believe that some races are more prone to violence and pose a threat to safety. Those who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+ put family values at risk. Students need to learn about the risks to safety and society.”

Address it: Maintain professional standards by not using any discriminatory or derogatory language. As an OCT, you are required to uphold professional and ethical standards at all times. This also applies to off-duty conduct, as this type of behaviour can have strong negative impacts in the classroom, the community, society, and on the reputation of the teaching profession.

Build awareness: Politics and beliefs that discriminate against or target specific groups with hate, have no place in any learning environment. Behaviour and actions that go against the College’s professional and ethical standards can lead to a College investigation and potential outcomes directed by the Investigation Committee or the Discipline Committee.

For example, an OCT cites their religious beliefs as grounds for refusing to use the gender pronouns of a non-binary student. Ontario’s *Human Rights Code*, R.S.O., 1990 (the *Code*) explicitly protects a person’s chosen name, gender identity and gender expression, including the right to self-identify their gender. Not using an individual’s chosen name, misgendering or refusing to use an individual’s chosen pronouns is a form of discrimination.³

Another example is a person refusing to acknowledge same-sex marriages. The protection of the *Code* “extends to all individuals who are denied equal treatment because of sexual orientation.”⁴

Know your role: As an OCT, you should be aware of the leadership role you have in classrooms, administrative spaces, other learning environments, and in the community at large. You should also be aware of how your role can ignite, maintain, and perpetuate discriminatory behaviour and oppressive approaches that adversely impact students and others in the school community.

3. Addressing microaggressions with a colleague

Scenario: “My racialized colleague teaches art. I told them their talents are wasted and that they should, instead, be teaching math because their culture is known for excelling in math. My colleague seemed upset by my comment.”

Address it: Engage in a respectful and open conversation with your colleague to understand their perspective. Discuss how your comments negatively impacted them to avoid similar issues in the future. Offer a sincere apology to your colleague, acknowledging why the action was inappropriate and the impact of your comment.

Build awareness: Microaggressions must be addressed as they are discriminatory and can have a negative impact on those affected. Refer to your employer’s policies or reach out to your school administrators and your union representative, if applicable, for advice on how to navigate this issue.

Know your role: Ontario regulation defines what constitutes professional misconduct in teaching. Also, Ontario’s curriculum states, “Ontario’s education system, at all levels, must respect diversity, promote inclusive education, and work towards identifying and eliminating barriers to equal treatment in education that limit the ability of students to learn, grow, and contribute to society.”⁵

As an OCT, you are expected to act accordingly.

4. Using culturally inappropriate resources

Scenario: “I teach at an elementary school and am at a loss for finding resources to teach Social Studies. I would like to use something age-appropriate like the movie *Pocahontas*. I think it would be a great teaching tool, especially since I can also rely on my Indigenous student, even though he doesn’t look like one, to share his lived experience to help the rest of my class better understand Indigenous issues.”

Address it: Educate yourself to understand that Indigenous, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit community members are diverse in cultural practices, knowledge, languages, and appearances. Do not single out students based on their social identities or lived experiences as a teaching tool. Use only culturally and historically accurate teaching materials.

Build awareness: All resources should be thoroughly reviewed before being used in the learning environment. If uncertain, check with your supervisor (vice-principal, principal), Indigenous education lead, or

school/employer equity lead. Failing to use culturally and historically appropriate resources could constitute professional misconduct or bring about other College measures.

Media portrayals of Indigenous women, such as those seen in Pocahontas, often rely on simplistic and limiting stereotypes – depicting them either as virtuous and in need of protection or as unworthy of respect. They reinforce harmful narratives that shape societal perceptions and can negatively affect the self-identity of Indigenous girls and women.⁶

Know your role: As an OCT, you must adhere to Ontario’s curriculum. Per the Ministry of Education, “Curriculum expectations are mandatory, and courses of study and classroom programs in each grade must be developed from them.”⁷

It is also important to note that, “In an inclusive education system, students must see themselves reflected in the curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, so that they can feel engaged in and empowered by their learning experiences.”⁸

The Ontario Curriculum also states “human rights law guarantees a person’s right to equal treatment in education. It requires educators and school leaders to prevent and respond appropriately to discrimination and harassment, to create an inclusive environment, to remove barriers that limit the ability of students, and to provide accommodations, where necessary.”⁹

5. Diverging from the curriculum

Scenario: “I feel it is wrong to teach my Grade 8 students about gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation as indicated in the health and physical education curriculum. As an OCT, I can decide what is appropriate to teach to my students.”

Address it: Stay within the Ontario Curriculum as it outlines mandatory learning expectations. In addition, review the *Human Rights, Equity, and Inclusive Education* program planning section of the Curriculum and Resources website¹⁰ that includes policy and instruction which is part of the curriculum for all subjects and disciplines in Grades 1 to 12.

Build awareness: Straying from or ignoring the curriculum can have repercussions, impacting both your professional standing and your students’ learning. It can also have employment consequences and can lead to a College investigation and potential outcomes directed by the Investigation Committee or the Discipline Committee.

Adhere to professional standards and boundaries, in particular, teaching within curriculum expectations, and being mindful of how personal views and conduct can impact students. Maintaining professionalism, respecting students’ diverse backgrounds and perspectives, and upholding ethical standards are essential aspects of effective teaching practice.

Know your role: Recognize that your role is to facilitate learning within the curriculum framework set by the Ministry of Education and to create inclusive and supportive learning environments for students. Teachers’ performance is assessed by

their employers, and a component of these assessments is their knowledge of the curriculum and their ability to teach it to their students.

As an OCT, you have a responsibility to ensure that any materials used in your role promote inclusivity and respect, adhering to the curriculum to prevent an environment of hate and discrimination. You are responsible for planning and implementing learning and assessment activities that use appropriate, high-impact instructional strategies, including culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy, to support students in achieving the curriculum expectations.¹¹

6. Making a bad joke

Scenario: “I connect with my students by making them laugh, and they usually appreciate my sense of humour. During a lesson on *Canada’s Food Guide*, we started discussing different food choices. Some students mentioned that their families don’t eat certain foods for religious reasons. Wanting to keep the mood light, I joked, ‘I don’t think I could ever give up bacon – I’d probably change my religion before I gave that up!’ It was a harmless joke. However, the next day, my principal spoke with me about a concern raised by a family who found my comment offensive and dismissive of their beliefs. I was shocked – I never meant to insult anyone. I just thought I was being funny.”

Address it: Apologize to your class and acknowledge that it was inappropriate to joke about religion. Foster environments where all students feel safe, heard, respected, and empowered to share their feelings, thoughts and lived experiences in ways that do not expose them to harm.

Build awareness: OCTs are expected to adhere to the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession*, which includes a commitment to ongoing professional learning. This commitment “is integral to effective practice and to student learning.”¹²

As an OCT, there are resources available to help expand your knowledge on how to foster an inclusive learning environment. Visit the Find an AQ section of our website at oct.ca.

Know your role: As an OCT, you are expected to adhere to *Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (CRRP)* by taking an inclusive approach to teaching and learning. “In an inclusive education system, students must see themselves reflected in the curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, so that they can feel engaged in and empowered by their learning experiences. Students need to experience teaching and learning that reflect their needs and who they are. To ensure that this happens, educators in Ontario schools embrace *CRRP*, which recognizes that all students learn in ways that are connected to background, language, family structure, and social or cultural identity.”¹³

7. Hate symbols in a learning environment

Scenario: “Someone placed a swastika and a hateful comment on the walls of one of the washroom stalls.”

Address it: Take a photo for record keeping. If it is safe to do so, remove or cover the symbol and hateful comment immediately. This should be done regardless of whether or not it is easily seen.

Involve your supervisor (vice-principal, principal or other) to discuss with students and the school community about why such actions are discriminatory, unacceptable, and harmful. Utilize developmentally appropriate resources to support these discussions without displaying the hate symbol or words that could retraumatize students. Inviting an employer-approved community resource person could enhance the discussion. Continue these conversations throughout the year to build understanding and promote inclusivity. Please also consult your employer policies, procedures and protocols as you may be required to report this to the police.

Build awareness: As a school community, there are a number of ways to promote a culture that supports diversity and inclusion:

- Create safe spaces where students and the school community can share their experiences without the fear of being judged.
- Support students to value and respect differences.
- Help students and the school community understand why hate and discrimination are unacceptable.
- Collectively develop anti-bullying policies and appropriate codes of conduct.
- Have a system in place to deal with incidents of hate and discrimination.
- Promote a culture in which reporting hateful or discriminatory behaviour comes without fear of repercussions.

Know your role: It is critical for OCTs in any role, including teachers, consultants, principals, vice-principals, supervisory officers, and/or directors of education, to address discrimination and hate. Failure to do so could be interpreted as accepting or even

promoting this type of behaviour. This may lead to a College investigation and potential outcomes directed by the Investigation Committee or the Discipline Committee.

8. Treating students with exceptionalities differently

Scenario: “My colleague said they are purposefully and more often disciplining students who have been identified as exceptional (i.e., behaviour, communication, intellectual, physical, or multiple). They believe students with exceptionalities need more discipline and must be pushed harder to succeed in life. My colleague also does not provide accommodations identified in the students’ Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and refers to these students using derogatory names.”

Address it: Report the behaviour immediately to your vice-principal or principal. If you are a member of a teachers’ federation, consult with the federation affiliate about your responsibilities when making an adverse report about a unionized colleague. If you are a vice-principal or principal, consult with your supervisor and provide the appropriate support to students who are impacted directly or indirectly.

As a profession, OCTs are responsible for using appropriate pedagogy, assessment and evaluation, resources and technology in planning for and responding to the needs of individual students and learning communities.¹⁴

Build awareness: The OHRC states that “stigma, negative attitudes and stereotypes can lead to inaccurate assessments of people’s personal characteristics.”¹⁵ Each student has their own unique strengths

and needs. As OCTs are responsible for instruction, assessment, and evaluation, you must provide all accommodations, modifications, or alternative programming outlined in the IEP.

Discriminatory actions and behaviour are contrary to the College's *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession*. Such behaviour can lead to a College investigation and potential outcomes directed by the Investigation Committee or the Discipline Committee.

Know your role: According to the OHRC, "The duty to accommodate people with disabilities means accommodation must be provided in a way that most respects the dignity of the person, if doing so does not cause undue hardship."¹⁶

As an OCT, you are expected to practice with care as part of the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession*. This "includes compassion, acceptance, interest and insight for developing students' potential. Members express their commitment to students' well-being and learning through positive influence, professional judgment and empathy in practice."¹⁷

9. Dismissing acts of hate and discrimination

Scenario: "During yard duty, I saw a few students making fun of a student because of their socio-economic status and skin colour. This has occurred several times in the past few weeks. They also posted a few things in our online classroom. It was just good-natured fun, and the student impacted was not overly upset and did not seem too affected by it."

Address it: As an OCT, you are best positioned to lead efforts to support an inclusive learning culture. Being a passive bystander is not conducive to creating or maintaining a safe, inclusive and welcoming learning environment. While an impacted student may not seem affected, the hateful or discriminatory behaviour or comments are unacceptable and must be addressed. Check in with the impacted student and provide support.

Consider taking an educative, collaborative, and community-focused approach. This could include:

- Addressing the issue with the students involved through conversation, as they may not be aware of the severity of their actions, or the impact they could be having on others.
- Involving parents, if appropriate, so they are aware of the issue and have an opportunity to be part of the solution.
- Engaging the school (including other educators, administrators, students, and your employer) to have open and honest discussions about diversity, acceptance and understanding.
- Examining and sharing resources that address the dismantling of hate and discrimination to educate and help students understand the impact of their actions and encourage more inclusive and respectful behaviors. These resources may be available through the College's Margaret Wilson Library.

Build awareness: Understanding intersectionality is essential for all OCTs to effectively recognize and address instances of discrimination and hate. Failure to do so could be interpreted as accepting or even promoting this type of behaviour, which can lead to a College investigation and potential

outcomes directed by the Investigation Committee or the Discipline Committee.

OCTs are obligated to address bullying in all forms, in person and online, by taking preventive measures, following progressive discipline protocols, supporting students, and promoting understanding and respect for all.¹⁸

Please refer to the College's *Professional Advisory: Responding to the Bullying of Students*.¹⁹

Know your role: As an OCT, you are responsible for student safety, which extends to the mistreatment of students by other students during daily interactions. Under the *Education Act*, you have an obligation to maintain order and discipline in the classroom and on school grounds.²⁰ Additionally, OCTs are required to report to their principal any serious incidents or behaviour for which a suspension must be considered.

Principals have an obligation to investigate all reported bullying incidents and follow all additional and required protocols when dealing with these incidents.²¹ This can include speaking with the parents of involved students, implementing progressive discipline measures from verbal warnings to possible suspension, expulsion, and involving the police when required.

Additional Resources

Additional resources are available at the websites of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, the Government of Ontario and the College, including the College's Margaret Wilson Library. Many additional qualification courses are also available for ongoing professional learning. A list of resources is available on the College website at oct.ca.

Endnotes

1. Peterson v. College of Psychologists of Ontario, 2023 ONSC 4685 (CanLII), <https://canlii.ca/t/jzvdy>, retrieved on 2025-04-04
2. oct.ca/public/professional-standards/ethical-standards
3. ohrc.on.ca/en/questions-and-answers-about-gender-identity-and-pronouns
4. ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-discrimination-and-harassment-because-sexual-orientation/part-i-context-sexual-orientation
5. dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/program-planning/considerations-for-program-planning/human-rights-equity-and-inclusive-education
6. coursera.org/learn/indigenous-canada/
7. dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/what-is-curriculum/curriculum-structure
8. dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/program-planning/considerations-for-program-planning/human-rights-equity-and-inclusive-education
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12. oct.ca/public/professional-standards/standards-of-practice
13. dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/program-planning/considerations-for-program-planning/human-rights-equity-and-inclusive-education
14. oct.ca/public/professional-standards/standards-of-practice
15. ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-based-mental-health-disabilities-and-addictions/5-ableism-negative
16. ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-based-mental-health-disabilities-and-addictions/13-duty
17. oct.ca/public/professional-standards/ethical-standards
18. *Accepting Schools Act*, 2012, S.O. 2012, c. 5
19. oct.ca/resources/advisories/bullying
20. *Education Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. E. 2
21. *ibid*

About The Ontario College of Teachers

The College is the regulatory body for Ontario's teaching profession.

Self-regulation recognizes the maturity of a profession and acknowledges its members can govern themselves. It means the government has delegated its regulatory authority to those with the specialized knowledge required to do the job.

A self-regulating profession protects the public interest by setting standards of competency and conduct. It has the right and responsibility to license and discipline its professionals, including suspending and revoking those licences.

Our mandate

As the regulator for Ontario's teaching profession, the Ontario College of Teachers protects the public interest by safeguarding students and supporting students' well-being. All educators working in Ontario's publicly funded elementary and secondary school systems are required to be members of the College. Our role and authority are set out in the *Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996*.

The College's role and the advice provided

The College's mandate is to serve the public interest by regulating the teaching profession to protect students. By providing OCTs with practical advice to help address hate and discrimination, the College aims to help OCTs nurture a sense of belonging and inclusivity within learning environments, thus creating conditions for students to thrive in the classroom and beyond.

The College does not tolerate acts of hate or discrimination of any kind. OCTs are held to high ethical standards and standards of practice. Contravening these standards, including by engaging in hateful or discriminatory behaviour, may be considered professional misconduct.



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