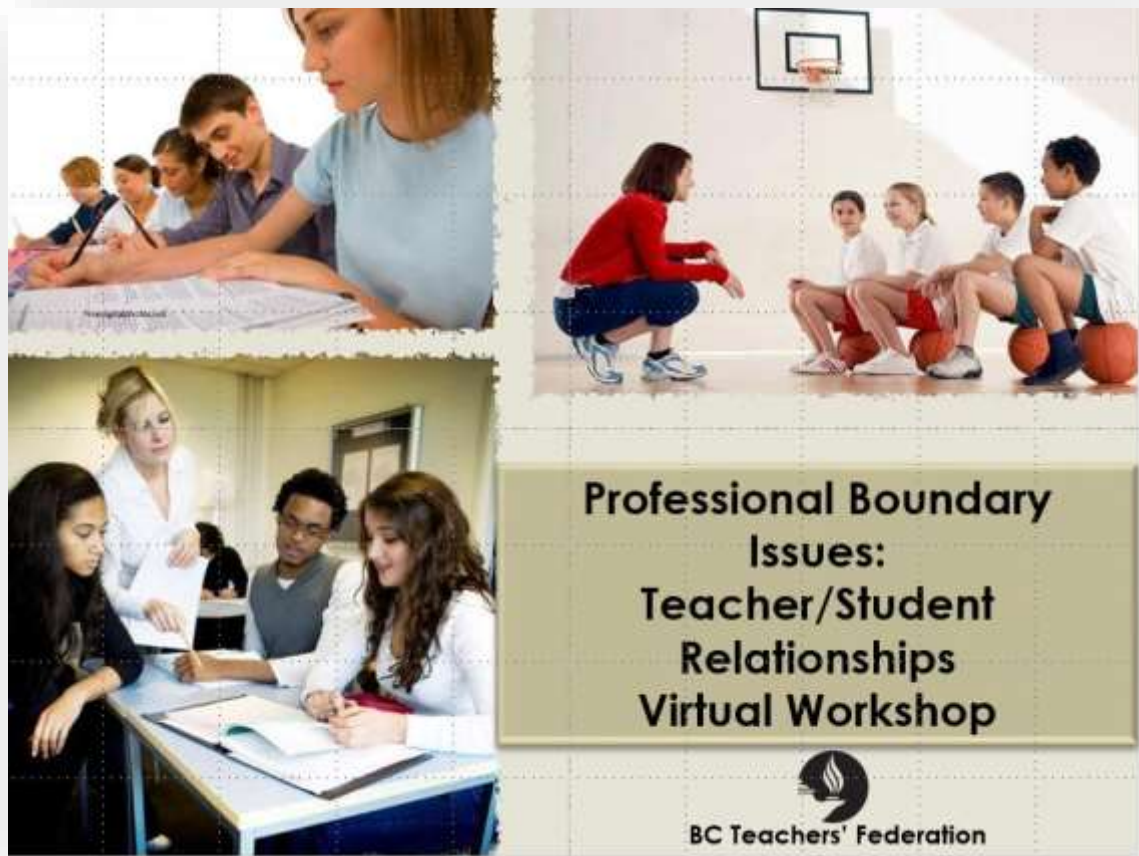


# **Professional Boundary Issues: Teacher/Student Relationships**

**Participants' handouts**



**Revised June 2020**

**British Columbia Teachers' Federation**  
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## **Some Danger Signs**

This is not a definitive list, nor does each of these behaviours apply to all teachers in every context or situation.

- frequent private conversations with the student
- discussions about the student or teacher's private life
- socializing with the student as a friend
- comments or discussions on or about sexual matters
- compliments or comments on the student's physical appearance
- personal notes to the student
- verbal or written expressions of affection
- exchanging gifts
- off-duty visits with the student
- visits to the student's home
- hugs and touching
- secrecy surrounding the relationship
- excessive attention to the student relative to the rest of the class and/or other activities outside the boundaries of a traditional student-teacher relationship
- electronic mail conversations
- social networking and publishing of web documents
- accessing the employer computer network for personal use.

## Scenarios

### One

Mr. D is a 35-year-old tech ed. teacher at a rural high school where adults sometimes return to complete their grad requirement. Marcy is an adult student in his class. Marcy joins a group of students who come in after school on Friday to help clean up the shop. Soon, Marcy begins to come in by herself to offer additional assistance. With a heavy teaching load, Mr. D is delighted with the extra help. At Christmas, Mr. D buys Marcy a small gift and a card of appreciation. In February, Marcy gives Mr. D a valentine card and a box of chocolates. One Tuesday after working later than usual in the shop, Mr. D offers Marcy a ride home and suggests that they stop for coffee. Marcy invites Mr. D to come skiing one day. Mr. D and Marcy are observed together in the hot tub by a colleague from the school.

### Two

Linda first met Mr. B when he was her math teacher in Grade 10. She was having difficulty with math and Mr. B suggested that she stay after school for some additional help with her assignments. The after-school help became a regular practice and, over time, the teacher and student began talking about other things. Linda was having troubles at home with her parents, who were having marriage difficulties. Mr. B confided to Linda that his own marriage was in trouble, and that his wife was growing increasingly distant from him. He suspected that she might be involved in another relationship. Linda felt sorry for him and encouraged their conversations about their difficulties at home. Because these conversations often ran late into the day, Mr. B sometimes drove Linda home. A month later, Mr. B asked Linda if she would babysit for him. Because Linda lived some distance away, arrangements were made with Linda's parents to have her spend the night as Mr. B had a guest bedroom. Sometimes, when Mr. B drove Linda home, they would park in front of her house and talk for a while. On one occasion he told her that she was very special to him, and presented her with a gift of a gold chain and pendant.

### Three

Mrs. L is a first-year teacher at Southcove Elementary School. She and her husband are active members of the local church. Mrs. L is concerned about Ashley, a Grade 4 student in her class. She often notices that Ashley comes to school looking dirty and disheveled, and that Ashley often does not bring a lunch. Mrs. L has started packing an extra lunch and bringing it to school for Ashley.

Ashley often has bruises on her arms which she says she gets from playing with her older brothers, but Mrs. L suspects that Ashley's mother may be responsible for them. Mrs. L increasingly feels that she should help Ashley through these difficult times. Because Mrs. L has two children of her own, she invites Ashley to come over to play on the weekends. Ashley enjoys these visits and tends to come over every Sunday after the family return from church. Ashley's older brothers, who are supposed to

look after Ashley while her mother is at work, are quite happy with this practice because they don't have to keep an eye on her. Mrs. L decides to invite Ashley to attend church with them on Sundays. She encourages Ashley to take part in Sunday school activities and explains to Ashley how important it is to accept Jesus as her saviour so that she will go to heaven. Mrs. L's oldest daughter is preparing to enter catechism classes before her first communion. Mrs. L thinks this would be a good opportunity for Ashley to do the same thing, so enrolls Ashley in the same classes. Ashley says that she should ask her mother first, but Mrs. L convinces her that she should take the classes first and then invite her mother to her first communion.

#### **Four**

Mr. K is a young Grade 8 teacher at Evergreen Middle School. He is a competitive swimmer and coaches the boy's swim team. He is a very enthusiastic teacher and spends much extra time in his classroom before and after school. He welcomes students to "hang out" in his classroom, and many of the boys on the swim team are often there. They often wrestle with Mr. K and he has become affectionately known to them as "Mr. K the Killer." They often greet him as such in the hallways. These wrestling matches continue into practices at the pool, and the boys will sometimes try to gang up on Mr. K and pull his trunks off in the pool. There is sometimes towel snapping fights in the locker room as well. On one occasion, Mr. K snapped a student and left a large welt on his thigh. In consoling the student, Mr. K suggested that he should not tell his parents of the incident. Over time, other students begin to complain to other teachers that Mr. K favours his "swim-team boys" in his science class. On one occasion, another teacher, Mrs B, informs Mr. K of what she is hearing other students say. Mr. K explains that he treats all his students equally and that there is nothing to worry about. Mr. K offers to take the swim team to a special swim camp in Calgary over the summer. It is two weeks out of his summer holidays, but he explains to the staff that he doesn't mind spending extra time with these "great kids."

#### **Five**

Ms J is a 25-year-old secondary school teacher in her second year of teaching in a large metro school. Students like her ability to relate to their lives, and many female students have approached her to talk about their problems with boyfriends, peer pressure, and home situations. Just before Christmas, a parent called Ms. J to complain that the teacher has advised her daughter, Susan, to see a doctor about getting birth control pills. The parent explains that she does not approve of her daughter's suspected sexual activity and would not permit her to use birth control of any type. Several months later, Susan tells Ms. J that she believes that she is pregnant, but is afraid to tell her mother and to go to the family doctor. She asks that Ms. J accompany her to a walk-in clinic. Ms. J locates a clinic and takes Susan after school the next day.

#### **Six**

Student A and B are female students in Mr F's Grade 12 English class. Student C attends the library block that Mr F supervises. Mr F sent student A a private Facebook message telling her he had a crush on

her friend, student B. Mr F told student A that he had to keep his distance from student B but was concerned that comments he had made on student B's report card might upset her. He wanted student A to tell student B that he had not intended to be mean to her.

During his library block Mr F shared personal stories with students, including student C. For example, he shared an embarrassing nickname he had been given that had a sexual connotation. Student C reported feeling uncomfortable on hearing this. During the school year Mr F would periodically compliment her on her looks and she reported feeling weird as a result.

Mr F had contact with students on social media after graduation, one of whom was student C. In the summer he sent student C a message on snapchat: "I usually judge how much someone loves me by how much time they spend on my face." He went on to write "You are not expecting me to still treat you as a student are you? That's not something I would say to a student". Student C and Mr F exchanged messages and Mr F suggested that student C and her friend join him for a social event. Mr F knew that student C was under the legal drinking age at the time and wrote "I am on the reserve side of the river so no one enforces the drinking age."

## **BC Teachers' Council**

### **Professional Standards for BC Educators**

1. Educators value the success of all students. Educators care for students and act in their best interests.
2. Educators act ethically and maintain the integrity, credibility and reputation of the profession.
3. Educators understand and apply knowledge of student growth and development
4. Educators value the involvement and support of parents, guardians, families and communities in schools
5. Educators implement effective planning, instruction, assessment and reporting practices to create respectful, inclusive environments for student learning and development.
6. Educators demonstrate a broad knowledge base and an understanding of areas they teach
7. Educators engage in professional learning.
8. Educators contribute to the profession.
9. Educators respect and value the history of First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada and the impact of the past on the present and the future. Educators contribute towards truth, reconciliation and healing. Educators foster a deeper understanding of ways of knowing and being, histories, and cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

Source: [www2.gov.bc.ca](http://www2.gov.bc.ca)

[https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/teach/teacher-regulation/standards-for-educators/edu\\_standards.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/teach/teacher-regulation/standards-for-educators/edu_standards.pdf)

## **BCTF Code of Ethics**

The Code of Ethics states general rules for all members of the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) for maintaining high standards of professional service and conduct toward students, colleagues, and the professional union. Members are advised to contact local union officers or appropriate BCTF staff for advice on how to proceed with issues related to the BCTF Code of Ethics.

1. The member speaks and acts toward students with respect and dignity, and deals judiciously with them, always mindful of their individual rights and sensibilities.
2. The member respects the confidential nature of information concerning students and may give it only to authorized persons or agencies directly concerned with their welfare. The member follows legal requirements in reporting child protection issues.
3. A privileged relationship exists between members and students. The member refrains from exploiting that relationship for material, ideological, or other advantage.
4. The member is willing to review with colleagues, students, and their parents/guardians the practices employed in discharging the member's professional duties.
5. The member directs any criticism of the teaching performance and related work of a colleague to that colleague in private. If the member believes that the issue(s) has not been addressed, they may, after privately informing the colleague in writing of their intent to do so, direct the criticism in confidence to appropriate individuals who can offer advice and assistance.\*It shall not be considered a breach of the Code of Ethics for a member to follow the legal requirements for reporting child protection issues.
6. The member acknowledges the authority and responsibilities of the BCTF and its locals and fulfills obligations arising from membership in their professional union.
7. The member adheres to the provisions of the collective agreement.
8. The member acts in a manner not prejudicial to job actions or other collective strategies of their professional union.
9. The member, as an individual or as a member of a group of members, does not make unauthorized representations to outside bodies in the name of the Federation or its locals.

*2019–2020 Members' Guide to the BCTF*

## Boundary Issues

Question	Yes	No	Depends on...
Is it advisable for a teacher to offer a student a ride home?			
Is it appropriate for a teacher to join in student banter, which includes comments about another teacher?			
Is it appropriate for a teacher to have students visit her/his home?			
Is it appropriate to allude to a student's racial origin?			
Is it advisable for a teacher to re-tell to students a slightly off-colour joke heard on the radio?			
When students do not obey instructions, would it be advisable for a teacher to suggest they are hearing impaired?			
Is it advisable for a teacher to join in student banter that includes double entendre on words like toy, hot, or banana?			
Is it appropriate for a teacher to comment on a student's physical appearance?			
Is it advisable for a male teacher to discuss "hot chicks in bikinis" seen on the show "Survivor"?			
Is it appropriate for a teacher to hug a student?			
Is it appropriate to ask a student about church affiliation?			
Is it advisable for a teacher to hold primary students on her/his lap?			
Is it appropriate for a teacher to regularly attend a sporting event where one of her/his students is playing?			
Is it appropriate for a male teacher to read the front of a female student's T-shirt?			
Is it appropriate for a teacher to meet students after school for coffee?			
Is it appropriate for a Grade 5 teacher to take her/his class swimming every Friday night?			



## Cybertips for Teachers

### **Be professional**

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.

### **Be prudent**

#### **At work:**

- Maintain exemplary professional standards when sending email messages to students, parents, colleagues and administrators.
- Always keep a copy of your email messages.
- Use a teacher voice when communicating with students via email.
- Use Canadian spelling and grammar checks.
- Use a signature that includes your name, assignment title, and school name.

#### **But don't:**

- share your password with other colleagues or students.
- leave your computer on and unattended when students are around.
- send unnecessary attachments with your emails.
- write emails using all capital letters—it comes across as shouting.

#### **At home, don't:**

- use your home/personal computer to contact students or parents.
- permit images of yourself to be taken and posted on any site without appropriate privacy safeguards.
- post criticism of colleagues, students or administrators on social networking sites.
- share confidential information about students, colleagues, or administrators on social networking sites.
- post confidential images and information about yourself on social networking sites.

### **Be prepared**

Despite all precautions, if you find yourself the target of cyberbullying:

- Make copies of all questionable messages/web postings/information and other related materials and date, including the URL.
- Demand that the sender stop transmitting or posting the material and state that the conduct is unacceptable and inappropriate.
- Do not engage with the person who is targeting you as this may escalate the situation.
- Advise the administration of your school of the inappropriate communication if the situation requires immediate action and/or if the inappropriate communication continues.
- Access appropriate support/guidance through the school board/district cyberconduct policy or manual.

- Contact the parents of the student who is cyberbullying you.
- Inform and involve your school-based Occupational Health and Safety Committee.
- Contact your local teachers' organization if the actions taken to address the inappropriate communication are ineffective and/or if you need further support/advice.

**Remember**—Nothing is truly private when you use digital communication. When you are using board equipment and communication links, the board can access all your messages and online sites visited if any of this communication went through board servers or has been accessed using board equipment.

Forms of cyberbullying which are considered criminal acts:

- Communicating repeatedly with someone if the communication causes someone to fear for their own or others' safety.
- Publishing a 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, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, or disability may be a violation of the Canadian *Human Rights Act* and/or provincial/territorial human rights legislation.
- If there is a question as to whether the inappropriate communication is criminal or not, call the police. At this point it may also be necessary to involve Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and Mobile Telecommunication Service providers in addressing the inappropriate communication to the point of deleting the offending material from temporary/permanent sites and archives.

### **Know your rights, know your responsibilities**

Activities that can result in disciplinary action against a teacher:

- Visiting inappropriate websites (i.e., adult content, racist, pornographic).
- Sending or forwarding offensive jokes and pictures via email.
- Online gambling using school board equipment.
- Downloading audio, video or text-based material in violation of copyright laws.
- Using board/employer equipment to engage in activities related to a second occupation.
- Constant text messaging, instant messaging, and or emailing during school time.
- Posting pictures of yourself and sharing them over the net, especially if they are suggestive or inappropriate.
- Posting comments about students, parents, fellow colleagues, or administrators online.
- Engaging in personal email exchange with students.
- Engaging in inappropriate conversations about fellow colleagues through emails or social networking sites.
- Criticizing principals, superintendents, school trustees or school boards, personally or professionally, online.
- Sharing confidential board information through the board email system or a social networking site.

## **Want to know more?**

*mediasmarts.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.bullyingcanada.ca*

This is a great resource site for teachers, parents, and students.

*www.ctf-fce.ca*

For more information on this issue, please visit the Canadian Teachers' Federation website.

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