



# Professional Boundaries: A Guideline for Queensland Teachers



## **Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community.

We pay our respect to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.





# The Teaching Profession

What brings teachers together?





## Activity

# What defines the teaching profession?

Moral purpose | Vision | Beliefs | Ideals





The teaching profession has an expectation of high standards of ethical behaviour from its members. This Code of Ethics provides a formal framework of ideals designed to guide and encourage all teachers to achieve these high standards of ethical behaviour and professionalism in their dealings and relationships with students, families, caregivers, colleagues and the broader community.

Members of the teaching profession in Queensland are committed to the following values which underpin the profession: **Integrity, Dignity, Responsibility, Respect, Justice and Care.**

**We demonstrate Integrity by:**

- creating and maintaining appropriate professional relationships
- acting with impartiality, truthfulness and honesty

**We demonstrate Dignity by:**

- valuing diversity and treating students equitably and with care and compassion while respecting the uniqueness of family backgrounds
- valuing the effort and potential, and acknowledging the uniqueness, of each student

**We demonstrate Responsibility by:**

- giving priority to the education and welfare of all students in our care
- engaging in ongoing professional development and improving teaching and learning strategies
- working collaboratively and cooperatively with colleagues in the best interests of the education and welfare of our students

**We demonstrate Respect by:**

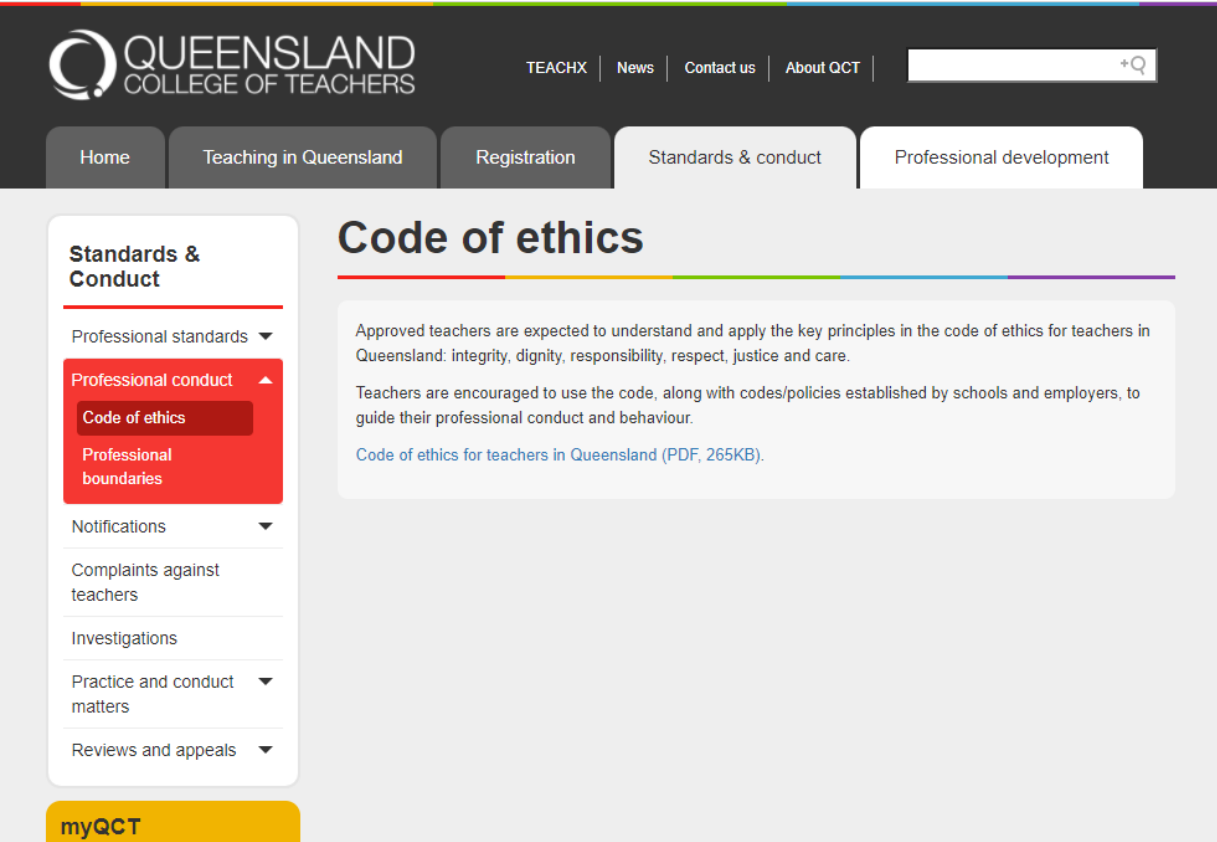
- acknowledging that relationships with students and their families must be based on mutual respect, trust and, where necessary, confidentiality and acknowledging the contribution these qualities make to students' wellbeing and learning
- acting with educational colleagues and the wider community in ways which enhance the profession

**We demonstrate Justice by:**

- being fair and reasonable
- being committed to the wellbeing of individuals and the community and to the common good
- resolving competing claims of different ethical principles and different interest groups through reflective professional discussion

**We demonstrate Care by:**

- having empathy for and rapport with students and their families and caregivers, colleagues and communities
- committing to students' wellbeing and learning through the practice of positive influence, professional judgement and empathy in practice



**Standards & Conduct**

- Professional standards ▾
- Professional conduct ▴**
  - Code of ethics**
  - Professional boundaries
- Notifications ▾
- Complaints against teachers
- Investigations
- Practice and conduct matters ▾
- Reviews and appeals ▾

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# Code of ethics

Approved teachers are expected to understand and apply the key principles in the code of ethics for teachers in Queensland: integrity, dignity, responsibility, respect, justice and care.

Teachers are encouraged to use the code, along with codes/policies established by schools and employers, to guide their professional conduct and behaviour.

[Code of ethics for teachers in Queensland \(PDF, 265KB\).](#)

**Standards & Conduct**

Professional standards ▼

Professional conduct ▲

Code of ethics

Professional boundaries

Notifications ▼

Complaints against teachers

Investigations

Practice and conduct matters ▼

Reviews and appeals ▼

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Log in



## Professional boundaries

### Professional Boundaries: A Guideline for Queensland Teachers

Teachers are responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries with students. Professional Boundaries: A Guideline for Queensland Teachers is designed to assist teachers. It can help teachers to consider the implications and potential consequences of engaging in certain behaviours with students. It can guide teachers in their response to certain situations to ensure their conduct meets the standard of behaviour expected of teachers in their relationships with students.

[Professional Boundaries: A Guideline for Queensland Teachers \(PDF, 254KB\)](#).

### Professional boundaries video resources

Rachel Drew, a partner from law firm Holding Redlich, spoke with the QCT about the difficulties that can sometimes arise for teachers in establishing and maintaining professional boundaries with children and students.

View Rachel's messages in the following three video playlists:

- [Communicating safely on social media](#)
- [Engaging with students](#)
- [Relationships with former students.](#)

### Additional resources

Additional resources have been developed to provide Queensland teachers and preservice teachers with a more detailed understanding of how to manage professional relationships with students. Use the resources [independent resources available to staff communities.](#)

## Professional Boundaries: A Guideline for Queensland Teachers


May 2016 (updated July 2017)

# Learning intentions

Develop a stronger understanding of strategies for dealing with potential breaches of the professional boundary

Enhance awareness of responsible and professional behaviour

Explore professional growth

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a white smartphone. The screen displays a social media gallery with several landscape photos. The background is dark and out of focus. The text 'social media' is overlaid in the upper right area.

social media

# Scenario 1: Social Media

Can a teacher be 'friends'  
with a student on Social Media?





# Social Media

Lewis Jensen is a Year 6 teacher. Jake is one of his students.

Mr Jensen tells the class that he likes gaming and has a Twitch channel.

Jake finds Mr Jensen's Twitch channel and views a live stream. Jake writes a chat message saying 'Hello Sir, it's Jake from class'. Mr Jensen gives Jake a shout out during the live stream.

As Jake now knows Mr Jensen's gaming username, he sends him a direct message inviting him to join in an online game, which Mr Jensen does. While playing they engage in generalised voice-to-voice chat.



## Activity

# Social Media

What are the negative consequences for the student and the student's family?

# Social Media - Negative consequences for the student and the student's family


- Potential for oversharing of personal information
- Development of a special relationship
- Student attachment to teacher
- Confusion about the teacher's role
- Behavioural problems
- Perception of favouritism
- Peer resentment/bullying



## Activity

# Social Media

What are the negative consequences  
for the teacher?



# Social Media - Negative consequences for the teacher

- Exposure of personal information
- Information may be passed on
- Relating to a student as a peer instead of as his teacher
- Increased behaviour problems from Jake and other students
- Damage to his reputation and position of authority
- Breach of employer policy → possible disciplinary action
- Complaint or notification to QCT → possible disciplinary action



## Activity

# Social Media

What are the negative consequences for the school and the teaching profession?

# Social Media - Negative consequences for the school and teaching profession

- Community and media interest in teacher-student relationships
- Damage to the school's reputation
- Damage to the school morale
- Damage to professional relationships within the school
- Damage to the public's trust in the teaching profession

# Issues and concerns







The risks arise when conversations:

- are conducted in private, without any transparency and
- are not authorised

This is because these conversations:

- can quickly become informal
- move beyond any valid educational purpose and
- lead to the sharing of personal information with no legitimate reason



# How to influence a positive outcome





# Electronic communication

- Is it necessary?
- Is it legitimate?
- Does it have educational validity or relevance?
- Is there an alternative and authorised means?

## Scenario 2: Counselling Students

What level of support and comfort can a teacher offer to a student?



Isabelle Green has been teaching for just over a year now. Emma is new to the school and spends a lot of time alone.

Miss Green stops and chats to Emma. Emma tells her that it is hard fitting in. Miss Green empathises and tells Emma that she is still finding it hard to fit in too.

Miss Green then makes a habit of stopping to say hello whenever she passes Emma in the school yard. After a week or two, she starts seeking out Emma, to check up on her.

Emma feels she can trust Miss Green. She tells her about the problems she is having at home with her mother since her parents' divorce. Miss Green's parents divorced when she was in high school too. She feels she can offer support and comfort.

Emma leaves home before her mother gets up because they always seem to fight in the morning. She often comes to school without lunch. On these days, Miss Green buys Emma lunch.

Krystal and Emma do not hand in an assignment when it is due. Miss Green speaks to Krystal in front of the class but speaks to Emma privately.



## Activity

# Counselling students

List some of the possible issues and concerns

# Counselling students: Issues and concerns



Balancing the need for rapport with the need for professional boundaries  
Over-familiarity with students carries a risk of perceived or actual favouritism  
Can be the first step towards more serious boundary breaches



Teacher may be emotionally dependent upon the student  
May be motivated by good intentions, but the behaviour is similar to that employed by those with sinister motives



# Negative consequences


for the student and the student's family







# Negative consequences for the student


- Dependent upon teacher
  - Risk of harm
  - Focuses on problems at home
  - Undermines parental authority
  - Reaction of other students
  - Greater difficulty fitting in with peers
- 

# Negative consequences for the teacher





# Negative consequences for the school

- School gossip
  - Jealousy or disrespect among students can lead to behaviour problems across the school
  - Damage to professional relationships within the school
  - Damage to the school's reputation
  - Damage to the school morale
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# Negative consequences for the profession

Community and media  
interest in teacher-student  
relationships

Damage to the public's  
trust in the teaching  
profession

# How to influence a positive outcome





# Conclusion

Be transparent

Follow advice from your  
principal or supervisor

Be accountable for your actions