



Building and Maintaining Positive Professional Full-Day Kindergarten Team Relationships

As of September 2014, Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK) will be fully implemented in Ontario. FDK classrooms have a team of two educators who work collaboratively as partners to provide a full-day of learning for four and five year olds.

DECEs (Designated Early Childhood Educators) are registered members of the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) and are obligated to adhere to the Ethical and Professional Standards of Practice for Early Childhood Educators.

The majority of DECEs in Ontario are members of one union, ETFO, CUPE, or OSSTF. Some DECEs are still not represented by a union. FDK teachers are members of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) and governed by their Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice and are members of ETFO or OECTA. DECE and Teacher collective agreements differ from local to local and as such can create misunderstandings. These misunderstandings can be avoided if each one understands the collective agreement language and entitlements.

FDK is a unique partnership. Here are some strategies and suggestions for you to consider to help build a positive and professional working relationship with your partner:

Building the Relationship

- Find out what each person brings to the partnership and get to know each other's strengths.
- Understand and share personal philosophies about learning in the early years.
- Agree to have a strong commitment to maintaining a respectful professional relationship with the students' best interest as the central focus.
- Remember that building a relationship takes time; you are working together to build a trusting, professional, and mutually respectful relationship.

Continually Communicating

- Time to talk and collaborate is key. Set ground rules for when, where, and how you will communicate to ensure you respect each other's needs and time outside working hours.
- Be proactive, before conflict happens, decide together how you will share concerns with each other.
- If potential conflict situations arise, make sure communication takes place away from students, their families, and other colleagues.

Remember... Conflict can be good. Dialoguing together can encourage discussions. Explore new ideas and thinking as you share your experiences from different backgrounds and situations.

If problems arise, how can you resolve them?

1. Talk with each other first. If you have a concern, go to your partner directly. Follow the ground rules that you set as a team.
2. Remember, the purpose is to move forward, make sure you have this goal in mind.
3. Presume positive intentions.
4. Be concise, state your concern, its effect on you, and what you wish to change.
5. Listen to the other person's perspective. One person speaks at a time, avoid interrupting.
6. Stay calm despite what the other may say and avoid personalizing the situation.
7. Be willing to compromise.
8. Conclude the meeting with a specific plan for improved communication.

Things to keep in mind:

- Focus on the issue and stick to the message.
- Choose words carefully. Avoid such words as: don't, should, ought, always, ever, must, and you.
- Avoid blame, insults, put-downs, giving advice, being evaluative, or gossiping.
- Seek to understand.

PRS MATTERS



- Focus your language statements on how the situation is affecting you and your ability to do good work for the students and the school community.
- Never undermine your partner in front of students, parents or other educators, either through your words, facial expressions or body language.

Available Resources and Supports for Conflict Resolution

Know who your local ETFO president is and make contact with them. Teacher and DECE local presidents meet regularly and work together on an ongoing basis to support members and provide advice with problem solving and mediation if necessary.

Your locals are there to support you in the following ways:

- Providing professional advice to support its members;
- Sharing what resources are available to you;
- Providing advice and guidance on how to approach the situation;
- Coaching you through your initial discussion;
- Brainstorming strategies you can put in place as team members;
- Offering clarification to any entitlements or limitations under your collective agreement(s);
- If necessary, facilitating conversations with you and your FDK partner; and
- Connecting you with ETFO Provincial PRS staff for support.

Before going to your principal, connect with your ETFO president or ETFO Provincial PRS staff to seek advice. They may suggest speaking with your administrator as a team and can offer support on how to approach the situation.

ETFO Member Rights and Responsibilities

ETFO represents teachers, early childhood educators, and other education workers in Ontario schools. The following provisions of the ETFO Constitution are directly relevant to the issue of respectful professional relationships, and apply to all ETFO members:

Article VI: Code of Professional Conduct

6.1 A member shall:

6.1.6 strive to eliminate all forms of harassment between individuals in the educational system;

6.1.7 endeavour to ensure equity and inclusiveness in the workplace; and

6.1.8 strive to achieve and maintain a high degree of professionalism and to uphold the honour, dignity, and ethical standards of the teaching profession.

In addition to the rights and responsibilities, each individual school board will have Respectful Workplace policies and will have its own standards that apply to the professional relationship between co-workers. Make sure you are familiar with your school board's policies and procedures.

Remember, working together, communicating, and being respectful of each other's experiences are key to building and maintaining positive and professional relationships in FDK.

For further information contact Professional Relations Staff at 416-962-3836 or 1-888-838-3836 at the provincial office. See also ETFO's website www.etfo.ca – Advice for Members.

PHW:JB:ST:KM

February 2014

Volume #75



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