

## Tips for Facebook and Twitter Users

Facebook is a global social networking website. Users can add “friends” and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about their activities. In 2018, Facebook surpassed 2 billion monthly active users worldwide. In Canada, there are 19 million users – more than one out of every three Canadians!

While there are many advantages to the site, users need to be cautious of the pitfalls as well; specifically, that inappropriate or unprofessional use can have personal and professional consequences. For educators, this is particularly important. Just as you don’t stop being a principal when you are at the grocery store on the weekend, you don’t stop being a principal when you post on your Facebook page.

You may use Facebook both personally and professionally. While the two are interconnected, here are some tips to keep in mind:

### For personal use

- Make sure you spend time establishing your privacy settings for both content and photos. Carefully screen who you want to see your information, as well as who can post to your page. Be aware, however, that even with privacy settings, others may see, copy or forward your posts without your knowledge. In general, don’t post anything you wouldn’t be comfortable seeing in a public setting.
- Understand the extent of the Internet: you are posting material that will remain in cyberspace indefinitely, that can be viewed by anyone around the world and that can be edited and/or forwarded by others without your knowledge. While you can delete things from Facebook, it can still be accessed, and may have even been copied or shared by someone without your knowledge.
- Understand that postings – and pictures – can follow you for years. Employers are now using search engines to see what information you have posted on social networking sites, looking for your “digital dirt.”
- Keep track of who you have accepted as a “friend.” Don’t complain about your job if you have added colleagues and/or your boss as friends.
- Professional and personal lives do not stay separate on social networking sites. If you are obliged to keep certain information confidential in your job, don’t talk about that information on your Facebook page, even in the Messenger application.
- Do not issue, and decline “friend” or “follow” requests from students. Consider the privacy implications of accepting these requests from parents. For more information on these guidelines, read the [Professional Advisory](#) for Educators from the Ontario College of Teachers.

- Be aware of your “digital reputation.” What you post on Facebook, or any other social networking site, speaks directly to your character.

There are many advantages to social networking sites and they will continue to grow in number and popularity. Don't avoid the sites but be smart when using them. Use common sense, be professional, be considerate of others and be aware of the long-term impacts of what you post on the internet.

## For professional use

You may want to use Facebook and/or Twitter to update parents on what is happening at school, respond to complaints and upload information about athletic and art events. This can be a continuation of your website, but in a format where parents can be more involved.

- Obtain consent forms before tweeting or posting any student work or other identifying information on social media or websites.
- Frequently check and update the privacy settings on all pages.
- Ensure that students are treated as in a classroom and apply the same rigorous professional standards.
- Always be
  - private
  - calm
  - professional
  - respectful
  - consistent

Caution should always be used when communicating online. However, this does not mean you must avoid it. It can be useful and positive to use social media as a tool to keep parents and community members informed. Just remember to stay professional and positive.

## Facebook and bad news

Some parents take to Facebook in the event of a crisis, bad news or scandal. There can be group pages created on the site about an issue in which parents share thoughts, news and ideas for action. It is important that these groups and parents are not ignored. They can quickly gain traction, and how they are dealt with is critical. Here are some points to remember:

- Be authentic and transparent. It is important that your audience trusts what you have to say.
- Only give out public information, and never share names or identifying information.
- Avoid heated comments. It is very possible someone will say something to upset you, but remain calm and take time before you give a carefully crafted and positive response.
- Avoid using personal accounts. Only use professional email and social media accounts for online encounters to do with your job.

- If the account leads to many posts about the situation, consider addressing it at a School Council meeting or in a communication directly to parents to provide context, correct the record, clarify misconceptions and dispel rumours. The school community may need to hear your side of the story. Ask your board communications department to help you draft this.

Social media can no longer be avoided. It is a way of communication between stakeholders and difficult to avoid. However, it is important to stay professional, private and to be cautious in all online interaction, just as you would in your school.

For more information on how to maintain professionalism online, visit the [Professional Advisory](#) made by the Ontario College of Teachers.

