

The background of the cover is white with several faint, grey, stylized circular icons scattered around. Each icon consists of two overlapping circles connected by a short horizontal line, resembling a pair of glasses or a simple molecular structure. The largest icon is a large black circle that frames the main title text.

PPTA

NEW ZEALAND POST PRIMARY
TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION
TE WEHENGARUA

www.ppta.org.nz

**GUIDANCE FOR
TEACHERS IN THEIR
RELATIONSHIPS
WITH STUDENTS**

MEMBERS' GUIDE

November 2008



Guidance for teachers

As part of a professional body, members have a responsibility to act in an ethical way and to encourage their colleagues to do likewise. Teachers have an obligation to maintain a high standard of conduct.

In all relationships with students, teachers must remain aware of the authority they have, which derives both from their professional position and the difference in age. Because of the power imbalance which exists between teacher and student, teachers must accept that it is their responsibility to control the nature of the relationships.

Guidelines for professional conduct are set out in the Code of Ethics section of the PPTA Constitution and in the Teachers Council Code of Ethics.

Behaviours which put teachers at risk

The following situations either in or out of school put teachers at risk and represent unacceptable behaviour:

- becoming over-familiar with students, through failing to maintain a professional distance; this includes the use of cell phone and email messaging and social networking sites
- entering rooms where students are dressing, (PE staff, coaches, cultural group leaders, drama teachers and participants in school camps are particularly vulnerable)
- invading a student's personal space by, for example, leaning over them closely at a desk
- touching students in any way that can be construed as sexual harassment, for example "patting" bottoms or hugging a student
- using any sexual name to refer to a student or group of students; or tolerating students' use of such language
- making sexist remarks



- commenting on a student's physical development, either to other students or colleagues
- spending a lot of time privately with individual students
- having intimate or sexual relationships with students
- using authority to lead a student to believe a relationship could be more than a professional one
- using pornographic or erotic material in teaching classes, displaying it in the school, or allowing students to distribute it or download it from a computer
- condoning or encouraging students to use alcohol or drugs.

In these situations it is the feelings or impressions of the student or the complainant which may prompt complaints about teachers under either STCA 3.4 or ASTCA 2.4. The result of a disciplinary process may be the dismissal of the teacher and/or deregistration. Criminal charges are sometimes laid.

Sources of authority for defining professional standards

1. The PPTA Code of Ethics makes it plain that members have a duty to confront and prevent the behaviours described. Therefore the PPTA branch must seek to ensure that its members behave ethically at all times.
2. Teachers Council Code of Ethics. This can be accessed on the Teachers Council website, www.teacherscouncil.govt.nz
3. The school charter, by its general statements on equity and its specific requirement for the school to have policy and procedures to prevent sexual harassment, supports the rights of students to a learning environment free of any sort of sexual harassment from any person.
4. The Employment Relations Act 2000 requires employers to ensure employees have a sexual harassment-free



environment and gives employees personal grievance provisions for protection against harassment.

5. The Human Rights Act 1993 gives protection to students and teachers against discrimination, including sexual harassment.
6. The collective employment agreements under which teachers are employed refer to their rights to take personal grievances (STCA Part 9, ASTCA Part 8).
7. The Crimes Act 1961 defines illegal behaviours.

Responsibilities and support

If a branch member becomes aware of any of the behaviours described in the first pages of this pamphlet, or behaviours similar to those described, there are several courses of action available. They include:

- branch/staff discussion on general principles and revision of school policy and procedures
- reporting the behaviour to appropriate people in the school
- seeking advice from PPTA field officers.

It is important that the matters in this pamphlet are discussed so that all members are aware of their responsibilities towards students, both personally and as union members.

The PPTA Women's Officer and field officers are available as resource people to discuss these matters or to take workshops within professional development programmes.



Advice and guidance

For further advice and guidance, consult your local PPTA field office.

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This pamphlet has been produced by NZPPTA / Te Wehengarua and provides the association's contractual interpretation. Nevertheless, it is not a substitute for the collective agreement and should be read in conjunction with the relevant clauses of the appropriate collective agreement.

Pamphlets in this guide series include:

- Beginning teachers
- Community education
- Employment relations problems/Personal grievances
- Guidance for teachers in their relationships with students
- Guidance for teachers working with Pacific students in secondary schools
- Guidance for teachers working with Māori students
- Introducing Te Huarahi Māori Motuhake
- Making schools safe for people of every sexuality
- Meeting procedure
- Overseas teachers
- Parental leave
- Part-time teachers
- PPTA support service
- Sick leave
- Teacher competence
- Teacher conduct and discipline
- Teachers' salary guide: Area schools
- Teachers' salary guide: Secondary schools
- The staff representative on the board of trustees

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