

Social Media Dos and Don'ts

Whether you're just considering becoming involved with social media or you've already established an identity on one or multiple sites, you need to use these channels wisely. OEA has developed the following guidelines on using social media to help protect yourself both personally and professionally.

DOs

- Know your privacy settings
- Understand the limits of online privacy
- Understand your First Amendment rights
- Learn the ODE's Code of Professional Conduct
- Learn your school's Acceptable Use Policy
- Keep work and play separate
- Monitor your own internet presence
- Contact OEA

DON'Ts

- DON'T post profanity, obscenity or anything that depicts you in an unfavorable light
- DON'T vent online or tell work stories
- DON'T post anything about or related to students
- DON'T accept an online relationship with anyone you don't know offline
- DON'T join groups that may be considered unprofessional or inappropriate

1. DO: First and foremost, know the privacy settings of every channel you use and keep abreast of any changes to them (see Additional Resources). You have to decide for yourself what level of privacy is right for you, however OEA recommends sharing only with people you know personally. For instance, on Twitter we recommend blocking your tweets so only individuals you approve can see them. Taking just a few minutes to establish strict online settings will go a long way toward keeping what you post restricted. Additionally, try to be “anonymous” whenever possible. Don’t include information that could put your identity at risk.
2. DO: That said, understand that there’s no such thing as a truly “private” post. Once you publish something through social media, you lose a degree of control over your message. Even if you set your privacy settings appropriately, to be shared only with people you know, your posts can still be captured via screenshot, printed, or copied and pasted into an email and shared beyond who you intended to see it.
3. DO understand the limits of your First Amendment rights. Free speech rights are fairly limited for educators: their speech is protected only if they speak out as citizens on “matters of public concern” and their speech doesn’t disrupt the school. So matters of personal concern, e.g. social activities, partying, personal gripes, etc., are not protected. Tenured teachers have far greater job security than probationary teachers — they can’t be fired except for “just cause” — but it’s not the First Amendment that protects them.
4. DO: Learn the Ohio Department of Education’s Licensure Code of Professional Conduct for Ohio Educators, available online: <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Teaching/Educator-Conduct/Licensure-Code-of-Professional-Conduct-for-Ohio-Ed>
5. DO: Find out if your school or district has an Acceptable Use Policy for the Internet and/or social media. Make sure everything you do online is in keeping with these and other pertinent policies, as well as state and federal laws and regulations. You will be held responsible for what you post both by your school and legal entities. If your school doesn’t have an official policy, take this opportunity to help develop one.
6. DO: Keep work and play separate. Regardless of your school or district’s policy, never use school property for personal communications. Do not log onto your email on the school’s computer. Do not bring your laptop to school and access the school’s network. Never access your personal email or send texts on your mobile device using the school’s Wi-Fi. Also keep a clear distinction between your personal and professional identities online. Don’t friend students, parents, and people you only know professionally, or otherwise connect with them through your personal account. If you want to use social media professionally, create a separate account for this and maintain appropriate boundaries and language at all times. Alternatively, you could use a social network specifically designed for connecting professionally.
7. DO: Monitor your own internet presence, so you’re aware of content posted by others about you or content posted by an imposter posing as you. Create a Google alert to notify you when anything about you has been posted. Monitor comments that are posted to your page and your friends’ photographs. Delete inappropriate language or content. If someone “tags” you in an inappropriate photograph, remove the tag and ask the friend to take the photo down.
8. DO: Contact OEA if you have any questions. If you’re about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, feel free to discuss it with your Labor Relations Consultant.
9. DON’T post profanity, obscenity or anything that depicts you in an unfavorable light, including, but certainly not limited to, any images with you drinking, using drugs, in questionable settings, with disreputable companions, in inappropriate attire, or engaging in illegal activities.
10. DON’T vent online. Under no circumstances should you ever tell stories about work that include personally identifiable details, such as full names, job titles, addresses, phone numbers, pay, or other information protected by state and federal privacy laws. Even eliminating any specific information about your situation and/or presenting it as a hypothetical puts you at risk.
11. DON’T post anything related to a student, no matter how harmless you think it is. Never counsel a student online.
12. DON’T accept an online relationship with anyone who you do not know offline. This is true for everyone, not just educators. Don’t assume Facebook friends of your friends are safe.
13. DON’T join groups that may be considered unprofessional or inappropriate, and leave any such group of which you are already a member.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Facebook Privacy Settings and Tools: <https://www.facebook.com/about/basic/>

Twitter Safety and Security Settings: <http://bit.ly/13xKQqd>

YouTube Policies, Safety, and Reporting: <http://bit.ly/1aWVzsy>

Pinterest Basics: <http://bit.ly/ZL0QwI>

Flickr Privacy and Sharing: <http://bit.ly/15IsJC>

Online Database of Social Media Policies: <http://bit.ly/KPYOJA>

How to Create Social Media Guidelines for Your School: <http://bit.ly/Lx3bJV>