

Trusted teaching



Ethics in Teaching:

Speaking Up Guide for Teaching Professionals

Ethics in teaching

Teaching is complex relational and intellectual work. Teaching is not only a technical role, but also an ethical one. It requires hour by hour, sometimes minute by minute, effective ethical reasoning. Ethics are essential to teaching (Truscott & Crook, 2016).

This means that what teachers and lecturers think, value and do really matters. One of GTC Scotland's roles is to champion and enhance this professionalism.

An established framework is in place to provide the foundations of professionalism in teaching, through [mandatory and aspirational professional standards for teachers](#); supportive professional standards for college lecturers; and a Code of Professionalism

and Conduct (CoPAC) for everyone on the Register of Teachers in Scotland, regardless of their individual role. **This framework is brought to life in and through our individual and collective professional practice.**

From time to time, we all engage with situations that present us with a professional challenge. Individually, we can be faced with an issue where something doesn't feel right, which requires us to have the professional courage to speak up.

Collectively, as a profession we can find ourselves reflecting on matters highlighted by a public inquiry or systemic investigation.

Why a focus on speaking up?

As individuals committed to the teaching profession, there is a need to continue to reflect on our professional responsibilities. The information in this document should be seen as support for that personal reflection, to guide professional behaviour and identify professional learning needs and discussion points.

It aims to promote and build confidence in addressing professional challenges, this includes having the professional courage to 'speak up' when you have concerns.

Anyone on the Register of Teachers needs to feel confident that their voices will be heard and respected, particularly when they feel something isn't right. Speaking up is a professional duty for all teachers and lecturers, including the need to take action in any workplace, to raise a concern if you've seen, heard or suspect wrongdoing or serious risk.

It is always better to have raised your concerns than to stay silent. By speaking up you could make a real difference or stop harm from happening. It is important that we enhance our self-awareness and professional confidence in raising and reporting any concerns we may have.

Teaching happens in different contexts, in different roles, within different learning and working cultures. Each context will have policies and procedures that need to be followed in certain circumstances, for example, when expressing opinions in public about your employer and an awareness of the Data Protection Act requirements on handling information about children, young people, adult learners and their families. Teachers need to treat sensitive, personal information about children and young people with respect and confidentiality and not disclose it unless required to do so by your employer or by law.

Teachers sometimes need to address inappropriate comments, views and behaviour from children and young people, for example, bullying or racism and will need to open conversations, individually or collectively, that can inform and educate that these views or behaviours are never acceptable.

As teaching professionals, we take the same stance with adults ensuring anyone who has experienced or has been a witness to unacceptable behaviour feels safe and knows it will never be acceptable.

Speaking up to protect the rights of children and young people

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) seeks to protect the welfare and development of children and applies to all children from birth to 18. Every child has rights, whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities or any other status.

Education is a highly relational system made up of people, relationships and is firmly grounded on having respectful and inclusive approaches which align with the expectations of the Equality Act 2010. This act outlines protections from discrimination, harassment, and victimisation for those with protected characteristics. It should be a core part of teaching practice to ensure all learners feel safe, included, and valued and that teaching professionals feel confident to speak out if there is discrimination, bullying or harassment of any kind.

Child protection guidelines and policies place a responsibility on everyone to protect children and young people from abuse or neglect, requiring you to report incidents or matters where

a child or young person has been harmed or placed at risk of harm.

You must raise any concerns which you may have about the behaviour of any colleague in connection with a child or protected adult, using the appropriate procedures in place.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is Scotland's multi-disciplinary strategy for enhancing the wellbeing of children in Scotland and is underpinned by the UNCRC. One aspect of this strategy is ensuring that information is handled in a way that respects the rights of the individual and ensures that children, young people, and families get access to the right support at the right time.

Children and young people spend a large amount of their lives in an educational setting; as a result, teaching professionals have a key role to play in child protection as they are often well placed to spot warning signs.



Speaking up about workplace issues

Speaking up can help stop a problem before it gets any worse and it could even prevent the wrongdoing, risk or danger, happening in the first place. Many employers have policies in place to support teaching professionals speak up about wrongdoing. Sometimes these are joint agreements with professional associations, which provide clarity about expected working practices and the routes available to speak up about concerns.

Speaking up about workplace issues is sometimes referred to as whistleblowing. Teaching professionals should understand their responsibilities under their employer's child protection and whistleblowing (or equivalent) policies. This requires maintaining up-to-date knowledge and understanding of child and protected adult procedures.

Protecting children involves recognising when to be concerned about a child's safety; understanding when and how to share these concerns; and knowing what steps are required to ensure the child's safety and wellbeing.

In line with your employer's Child Protection Procedures, there will be a designated member of staff who should be contacted. If you are ever in doubt about speaking up, or an individual's welfare and safety, you should speak to your designated contact, a line manager, a trusted colleague or a professional association representative when you have concerns and seek appropriate advice.



What you can do

Read your employer's child protection and whistleblowing policies (or equivalent) and ask yourself:

- What do I need to do to fulfil my role and responsibilities to this child, young person, protected adult or colleague?
- Am I secure in my knowledge of protected characteristics to feel confident to speak up?
- Am I maintaining my knowledge, skills and abilities by regularly participating in professional learning in relation to child protection?
- What action do I need to take in relation to my position of trust as a professional?
- Do I feel confident in my role as a professional to speak up and raise concerns?
- How can I find out who I should talk to, and what should I do, when something doesn't feel right?
- Should I seek assurance that the concern I have raised is being investigated?



Additional resources

[A children's rights -based approach: A guide for teachers](#)

[Action on Prejudice – Speak Up](#)

[Bystander Intervention – Right To Be](#)

[Equality and diversity: A guide for teachers](#)

[GIRFEC wellbeing guide](#)

[GIRFEC resources](#)

[National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland](#)

[NSPCC Learning – Child Protection System in Scotland](#)

[Professional Standards](#)

[Protect Advice – Speak up, stop harm](#)

[Scottish Association of Minority Ethnic Educators \(Samee\)](#)

[Whistleblowing – mygov.scot](#)

[Whistleblow – The Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland](#)



Professional Associations

[AHDS](#)

[EIS – Health and Wellbeing Resource](#)

[NASUWT – Wellbeing Tools for Teachers](#)

[School Leaders Scotland](#)

[Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association \(SSTA\)](#)

[UCU Scotland](#)

[Voice](#)

Thanks to all the teachers, lecturers and education professionals who helped GTC Scotland write this guide.

gtc
SCOTLAND

**General Teaching
Council for Scotland**

Clerwood House
96 Clermiston Road
Edinburgh EH12 6UT
T. 0131 314 6000
E. gpcs@gpcs.org.uk
www.gpcs.org.uk