



# Promising Practices for Respectful and Harassment Free School Communities

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## Introduction

Together, members of the school community share the responsibility of creating and maintaining a positive learning environment to ensure the highest level of success for all students. Conflicts and disagreements can and do exist within the school community and sometimes expand beyond the boundary of the school facilities through the use of media; however, it is hoped that when they occur, they are resolved quickly in a manner that respects all parties, and that contributes to a healthy and productive school.

Members of the school community include students, teachers, principals, school staff, parents and families, Elders, education leaders, community leaders, volunteers, and community members.

The NWT Superintendents Association (NWTSA), the NWT Teachers' Association (NWTTA), and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE), are committed to working together to build school communities where there is mutual respect amongst the various members of the school community, free from all forms of harassment.

## Purpose

The purpose of this document is to:

- Confirm the commitment of ECE, NWTTA, and NWTSA to build a respectful workplace that promotes the safety, well-being, dignity, and diversity of all members of the school community;
- Promote a common understanding of expectations and behaviours considered appropriate and inappropriate within, and in the delivery of, or access to, NWT Schools;
- Provide guidance to empower employees to resolve issues and address disrespectful and/or harassing behaviours in the school community that are not covered by existing territorial legislation, policies or the NWTTA *Code of Ethics*, such as harassment of school staff by members of the community; and
- Increase awareness of the impact of actions and discourse upon members of a school community within and outside the confines of the school.

School staff members are encouraged to bring concerns of disrespectful behaviour and harassment forward to their school administration and the NWTTA Central Office as soon as possible. The Department of ECE, NWTTA, NWTSA and Education Bodies will provide support, as deemed appropriate, to school staff throughout the resolution process.

★ **Please note: If there have been threats, assaults or worries about safety, consideration should be given to contacting the RCMP immediately in addition to notifying school administration.**



## Definitions

**Harassment:** Unwanted conduct that can be reasonably considered to have the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity and can reasonably be considered to result in creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual.

Harassment is an ongoing course of mean-spirited treatment which is known to be, or would be expected to be, unwelcome by a person or group. Harassment can include behaviours such as bullying, intimidation, humiliation, offensive jokes, and racial slurs or comments. It can also be unwanted physical contact from patting to pinching or punching, as well as showing sexually explicit images.

Repeated actions are generally considered to be actions that have occurred more than once, continue to happen despite requests to them stop and have a negative impact upon those who are the target of the actions.

Harassment can include, but is not limited to:

- Following someone for the purposes of intimidation;
- Threatening violence against someone;
- Being repeatedly verbally abusive, swearing, degrading, or insulting an individual or group;
- Repeatedly humiliating or embarrassing someone;
- Refusing to modify behaviour if it is known to be unwelcome;
- Refusing to talk to or interact with someone;
- Non-consensual physical contact; or
- Posting threatening or insulting messages on social media, in text messages, or by email.

**Disrespect:** To lack special regard or respect for a person or people. To show or express disrespect or contempt for, or low regard or esteem for someone or something, including rudeness or a lack of courtesy.

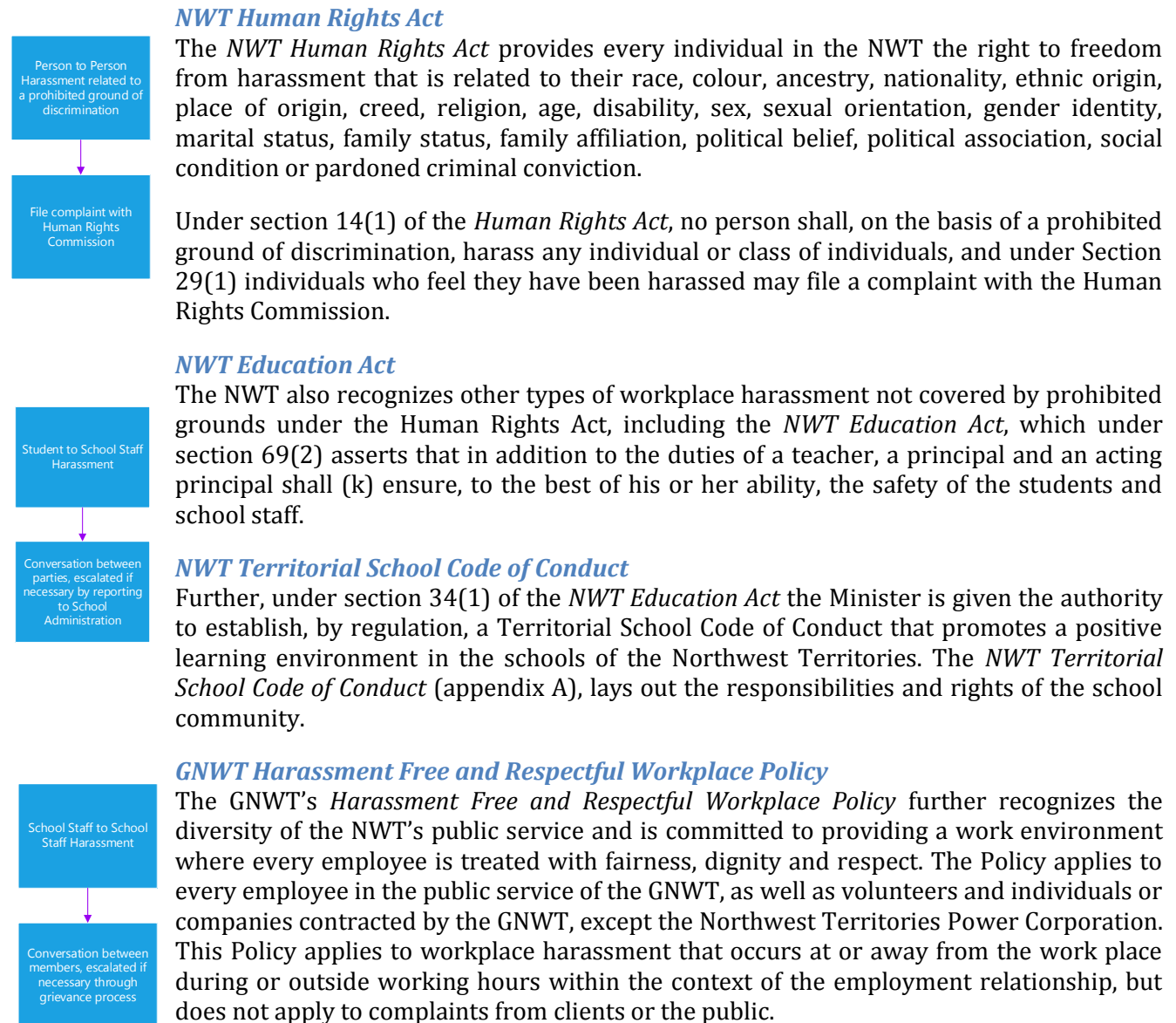
Disrespectful behaviour can include, but is not limited to:

- Verbal attacks that are personal, irrelevant or beyond the bounds of fair conduct and are used to intimidate, humiliate, undermine, offend, hurt or belittle a person;
- Refusing to cooperate or work with others;
- Conduct, comments or actions that when taken in isolation seem minor but when repeated can lead to a conclusion of harassment;
- Spreading malicious rumours or intentionally conveying false information about another person;
- Breach of confidentiality of another person;
- Non-constructive feedback addressed in such a way as to intimidate, undermine confidence or imply incompetence;
- Regular use of profanity and abusive language even if not directed to someone else; or
- Any comments, actions, gestures or conduct that is humiliating, offensive, hurtful, rude or belittling.



## Legislation and Policy Requirements

The following territorial legislation and policies are in place to support and protect the rights of members of the school community:



- ★ **Please note:** Many education bodies also have their own specific policies and procedures that should be considered in light of any workplace concerns; school staff should reach out to their school administration to make sure they are aware of any other policy requirements that may apply to their circumstances.



## Application

In situations which no existing territorial legislation or policies apply such as the Harassment Free and Respectful Workplace Policy, or when any member of the school community is found to be disrespectful and/or harassing, the School Administration, with support from ECE, NWTSA and NWTTA, will provide guidance to empower the employee to resolve the issue themselves, and/or take appropriate action themselves to end or limit the disrespectful and/or harassing behaviours to the best of their ability. This can include, but is not limited to, limiting the harasser's ability to enter an NWT School and/or attend NWT School functions and activities.

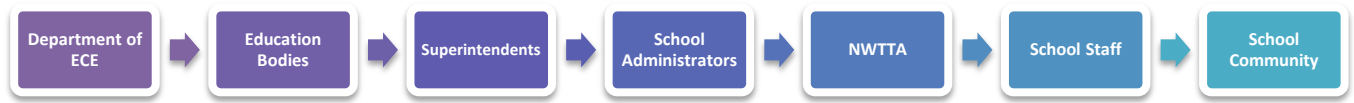
## Strategies

Each situation will be unique. In situations in which no existing territorial legislation or policies apply, school staff are encouraged to consider the following strategies:

- ☑ When an issue begins to emerge, try to respond proactively as much as possible. School administration may be able to assist with some suggestions about proactive strategies that could defuse the situation before it escalates.
- ☑ Bring all concerns of disrespectful behaviour and/or harassment forward to school administration, as soon as possible.
- ☑ Ensure that the NWTTA is also aware by contacting the NWTTA Central Office of all concerns of disrespectful behavior and or harassment, as soon as possible.
- ☑ Document all instances of the disrespectful behaviour or harassment, including date, time, location and people involved, as well as all future interactions with the individual.
- ☑ Make copies of all questionable messages, web postings, information and other related material and data, including URLs.
- ☑ Do not engage or respond to any emails, online posts or comments in a social media forum; group; page; or chat that are disrespectful or harassing.
- ☑ If you feel safe, try to meet with the person to find out more about the conflict and see if it can be rectified. Stay calm, speak about the facts, use 'I' statements, rather than 'you' statements and listen more than you speak.
- ☑ If you feel unsafe, do not attempt to meet with the person alone, instead seek assistance to resolve the issue from your supervisor and the NWTTA Central Office.
- ☑ Refer to the Promising Practices for proactive approaches to addressing harassment, resolving conflict, and developing and maintaining healthy relationships between members of the school community.



## Roles and Responsibilities



### Department of Education Culture and Employment (ECE)

The Deputy Minister of the Department of ECE is accountable for the administration and implementation of these promising practices, specifically to:

- Ensure work environments that are respectful and free from harassment;
- Ensure that Education Bodies are made aware of this document and the School Community Responsibilities and Rights as outlined in the *Territorial School Code of Conduct* (Appendix A); and,
- Provide guidance to all Education Bodies who are supporting school staffs who are experiencing harassment.

### Education Bodies

Education Body Chairpersons are accountable for the administration and implementation of these promising practices, specifically to:

- Establish and provide work environments that are respectful and free from harassment;
- Inform parents/community about this document and the School Community Responsibilities and Rights as outlined in the *Territorial School Code of Conduct* (see Appendix A); and
- Provide support to superintendents and school administrators who are supporting school staffs who are experiencing harassment.

### Superintendents

Superintendents of schools are responsible to:

- Establish and provide work environments that are respectful and free from harassment;
- Ensure that all Principals and other education body staff are made aware of this document and the School Community Responsibilities and Rights as outlined in the *Territorial School Code of Conduct* (see Appendix A); and,
- Provide guidance to school administrators who are supporting school staffs who are experiencing harassment.

### School Administrators

School Administrators, otherwise known as Principals and Vice Principals, are responsible to:

- Establish and provide a work environment that is respectful and free from harassment;
- Ensure that all school staffs are aware of this document;
- Ensure that all school staffs, Elders, Volunteers and visiting members of the school community adhere to the School Community Responsibilities and Rights as outlined in the *Territorial School Code of Conduct* (see Appendix A); and
- Inform the Superintendent, and provide support to all school staffs who are experiencing harassment.



### NWT Teachers' Association

The NWTTA is responsible to:

- Support the establishment and provision of a work environment that is respectful and free from harassment;
- Provide guidance and support to all NWTTA members who are experiencing harassment; and
- If requested, provide guidance to Superintendents and School Administrators in supporting all NWTTA members who are experiencing harassment.

### School Staff

All members of the School Staff are responsible to:

- Contribute positively to a work environment that is respectful and free from harassment;
- Be aware of this document; and
- Adhere to the School Community Responsibilities and Rights as outlined in the *Territorial School Code of Conduct* (see Appendix A).

### School Community

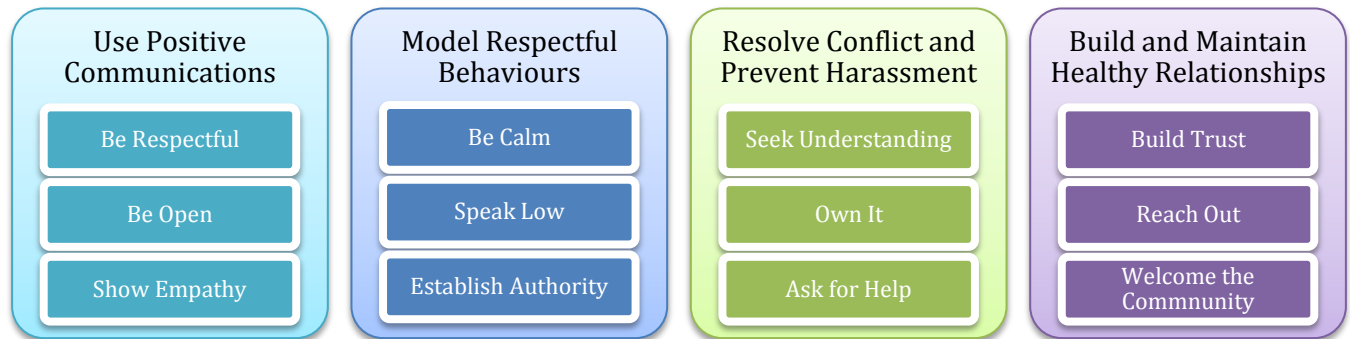
All members of the School Community are responsible to:

- Adhere to the School Community Responsibilities and Rights as outlined in the *Territorial School Code of Conduct* (Appendix A), and refrain from any form of harassment toward GNWT and school staff and students.



## Promising Practices

Twelve (12) Promising Practices have been identified for addressing harassment, resolving conflict, and developing and maintaining healthy relationships between members of the school community. It is always better to be as proactive as possible when dealing with difficult situations and difficult people. As each situation is unique and presents its own challenges to finding an effective resolution, it is difficult to prescribe common protocols; however, here are some promising practices that may be useful in defusing tense situations as well as providing constructive ideas to strengthen relationships. School staff should not be limited to the list below when seeking to implement relational approaches within their school communities.



### Use Positive Communications

#### 1. *Be Respectful*

No one likes to be treated as if they are incapable or incompetent. Treating all members of the school community with respect will help to keep communications positive. Refraining from responding to comments or inappropriate behaviours, be it in person, through correspondence or online, is a way to remain respectful and professional and can go a long way to ending the conflict or harassment. The ability to 'let it go' can send the message that a person does not need to defend themselves and that they will not jeopardize their professionalism by reacting inappropriately.

#### 2. *Be Open.*

Let the person know the intentions behind what happened; sometimes, people are resistant or confrontational because they feel the other person is just being difficult with them. Letting them in on the reason behind certain actions and the full background of what is happening can help them to empathize with the situation. Using 'I' statements, rather than 'you' statements further reduces the chance that a person hears blame being assigned, and listening more than speaking will help ensure the nature of the issue is understood.

#### 3. *Show Empathy.*

The words, "I am so sorry that happened" are highly effective and convey a great deal. First, it shows that the person listened to what was said and was concerned about everyone's well-being. In addition to acknowledging what happened, the person is providing an opportunity to establish a rapport with the other party. Sometimes, the person just wants a shoulder to cry on and other times they would like a remedy. Either way, showing empathy puts a priority on the situation. Simply apologizing that the situation occurred, can calm an irate person down and provide an opportunity to have a conversation to obtain the details. This is a highly effective way to have a discussion and increase relations.





## Model Respectful Behaviours

### **4. *Be calm.***

Becoming upset and lashing out at another person isn't the best way to get someone to communicate. Someone who is calm is seen as being in control, centered and more respectable. When an irate person sees that the other person is calm despite whatever they are doing, they will likely notice and also begin to calm down. Asking for some time to respond when confronted with an angry individual can also help. Hear them out and let them know that a response will be forthcoming once there has been some time to reflect on it. Waiting before responding is also an important strategy to ensure a response is based on fact and not emotion.

### **5. *Speak Low.***

People often feel defensive in difficult situations and will often talk at an elevated level and in an accusatory nature. It is quite common for the person on the receiving end of this conversation to become nervous. When one becomes nervous, coherent sentences are often lost and a person's voice can become shaky and lack confidence. With the lowered volume, the shakiness in the voice will become less obvious. In addition, the decreased volume forces the other party to focus more closely on what is being said. Instead of focusing on their own needs or concerns, the upset person must channel additional energy to listen to what the other person is saying. Furthermore, they will likely start noticing how loud they are speaking and how this will not benefit the conversation.

### **6. *Establish Authority.***

Another way to present confidence and authority in a difficult situation is to look the person directly in the eye. By looking the person in the eye, it shows that a person is interested in what the other is saying. It signals that they are concerned about the situation and are actively listening to acquire all of the information. Additionally, they are showing respect to the other person by giving them their undivided attention. Looking a person directly in the eye gives an air of self-confidence and self-assurance. This perception can help diffuse a difficult situation. By displaying self-confidence, a person can turn a lopsided conversation into one of equal cohorts who have a mutual objective.

## Resolve Conflict and Prevent Harassment

### **7. *Seek Understanding.***

Even when it may seem that the person is just out to get another person, there is always some underlying reason that is motivating them to act this way. Rarely is this motivation apparent. Taking the opportunity to identify the person's trigger will help give purpose or reasoning to their behaviour: What is making them act in this manner? How can you help to meet their needs and resolve the situation?

### **8. *Own It.***

Everyone makes mistakes. People have many responsibilities and there are many opportunities to error. When a person brings an error to light, the appropriate procedure is to be gracious and accepting of the information. If the person is taking the time to bring attention to the matter, the other person should be willing to put in the time to investigate. By acknowledging the possibility of an error and looking into it, the person feels that the other person cares enough to do the right thing. People are not infallible; they make mistakes and must own up to those mistakes.

### **9. *Ask for Help.***

In all likelihood, colleagues, administrators and friends have experienced similar situations in some way or another to that of someone dealing with a bad situation. They will often be able to see things from a different angle and offer a different take on the situation. Seeking out these people, sharing stories and asking for help can often be enough support to make amends and move on from the situation. If talking to others about a difficult situation, be sure not to promote hatred, undermine others, disregard others' right





to privacy, or otherwise violate the GNWT code of conduct, the NWTTA Code of Ethics, or any other related policies.

If things escalate to an uncomfortable level, bring concerns to a supervisor and the NWTTA to ask for support and assistance in mitigating the circumstance. Depending on the situation, supports may be available in the form of:

- Advice in terms of strategies to address the situation;
- Mediation; and
- Labour relations or legal advice.

## **Build and Maintain Healthy Relationships**

### ***10. Build Trust.***

To build trust, a person needs to make efforts to connect. People want to hear the good things that are going on around them, not only the bad. Sending a quick note or making a call can demonstrate interest in a child or their family. A quick email or call saying that a student did a great job on something or performed a random act of kindness can go a long way in building rapport with families. It shows that the teachers is looking at all the good things a child does and not strictly focus on the bad; these quick little notes lead to a positive perception. Parents recognize that school staff are there to support their child and in turn they build trust in them as an important person in their child's life.

### ***11. Reach out.***

Reaching out to the community and getting involved can build the school-community relationship. This is a win-win-win situation: students win as they see positive interactions between their school and home lives; the community wins as they see the school reflect their culture and community; and the school wins as the community may look more favorably on the needs of the school. After all, the school is willing to help the community, so the community should in turn help the school.

### ***12. Welcome the Community.***

Parents, families, Elders and community members should feel welcomed in the school. Dedicating a space within the school for the community and equipping it with a multitude of resources can make a huge difference for a school in terms of building a strong school-community relationship. Creating an inviting place that reflects the community, with cultural artifacts, comfortable chairs, and computer access is ideal. Resources for parents and families can be available. Past student projects can be placed on display. Future projects can be listed with sign-up sheets for volunteers. Welcoming the community into a school makes the school a less intimidating place for parents, families, Elders and community members.



## APPENDIX A

### Territorial School Code of Conduct

The purpose of the Territorial School Code of Conduct is to promote a positive learning environment in the NWT. Students, parents, elders, school staff and all members of the school community have the shared responsibility to establish an effective education system in a safe, respectful and caring atmosphere.

#### **School Community Responsibilities and Rights:**

1. To refrain from engaging in activity that disrupts or threatens to disrupt school operation.
2. To refrain from engaging in activity that interferes or threatens to interfere with the public or private rights of others.
3. To take a sense of ownership and responsibility for excellence in academics.
4. To ensure the physical safety and personal security of oneself and all others, exercising respect and self-discipline, and to refrain from engaging in assaultive behaviour.
5. To promote equity and fair treatment of oneself and others.
6. To refrain from discriminating against others, including on the basis of race, colour, ancestry, nationality, ethnic origin, place of origin, creed, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, family status, family affiliation, political belief, political association or social condition.
7. To recognize Canada's and the Northwest Territories' multi-cultural heritage, and to respect the value of different linguistic, cultural, historical, political and spiritual backgrounds.
8. To respect the different ideas and perspectives of others.
9. To develop meaningful relationships with self and others.
10. To build a strong sense of self, school and community.
11. To encourage and practice ethical behaviour with honesty and integrity.
12. To use kind and respectful language and conduct when communicating with others.
13. To respect one's own property and the property of others and of the school.
14. To personally refrain from and discourage others from possessing or using any kind of weapon at school.
15. To refrain from possessing, using, selling, purchasing or exchanging any illegal substances or paraphernalia.
16. To refrain from possessing, using, selling, purchasing, exchanging or being under the influence of intoxicating substances while at school.