



QUEBEC PROVINCIAL ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS  
L'ASSOCIATION PROVINCIALE DES ENSEIGNANTES ET ENSEIGNANTS DU QUÉBEC

Suggestions and guidelines:

# How To Intervene in Difficult Situations

Conflict and violence in schools



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Preface: QPAT would like to acknowledge the work of **Le syndicat de Champlain** and their document entitled **Comment Intervenir Dans Les Situations Difficiles?** which inspired QPAT's version of the guide.

In recent years, there has been an increase in reported cases of violence. Furthermore **the message QPAT has been receiving from members is very clear:**

## Violence in schools is a major problem.

### Violence is not trivial and must be taken seriously by everyone concerned

Before we begin, it is important to state the facts that brought us to the creation of this document. In the spring of 2018, a survey on violence was conducted. Here is a summary of the results:

56% said that they had been victims of at least one incident of violence at work in the previous two years;

47% of the incidents were perpetrated by students and 33% by parents;

More than 70% said that they did not always report incidents involving violence because:

- They felt they could manage them;
- They are part of the job, and in any case not being taken seriously;
- They are afraid of professional repercussions.

## Violence in schools is a reality – but it is not normal.

Following this survey, in the fall of 2019, QPAT launched a campaign: ***Teachers Have the Right To a Safe Workplace – Violence is Not Part of It***. This campaign is about the importance and duty of teachers to report cases of violence in schools. When speaking to teachers about this campaign, it was very clear that more needed to be done to help remove the stigma around violence in schools. For this reason, QPAT,

after collaborating with the Health and Safety Committee, the New Teachers' Committee, and meeting with close to 500 union delegates on the matter, decided to create a resource for teachers to help them deal with every-day difficult situations.

### For information on what to do when faced with incidents of physical or psychological violence:

Teachers Have The Right to a Safe Workplace – Violence is Not Part of it. Report Incidents:

<https://qpat-apeq.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/1197-QPAT-Pamphlet-Violence-EN.pdf>

We want to be clear that these guidelines do not take the place of reporting incidents, this must be done. Although it will not eliminate violence, this guide will hopefully provide strategies to potentially stop difficult situations in their early stages. These guidelines are ideas for teachers to consider before, during, and after a variety of difficult situations they sometimes face in their everyday work.

Every situation is unique and these guidelines may or may not apply to the situation you may be experiencing. Different possible scenarios will be explored here, however no matter the situation, there are some key points to keep in mind:

### Face-To-Face:

Whenever possible.

### Trust Your Instincts:

If a situation makes you uncomfortable and you can see that it may lead to something more serious, what steps can be taken to stop the incident from becoming more serious.

### Reach Out To Someone:

If a violent incident does occur, look around to see if anyone has witnessed or overheard the incident. If you were alone, it is advisable to go and tell someone about it as soon as possible. Reaching out to your union delegate to inform them or another member of staff that you trust may be a good first step. The important thing is not to isolate yourself in these situations.

### Document in Personal Logbook:

Even if a situation has not escalated to the point of being an incident of violence, it is advised to document some incidents (date, what was said, what was done). These personal logbook notes may be helpful down the line if you are asked to demonstrate in detail what happened to lead up to another incident. (please see [Appendix 1 – Logbook of Incidents example](#)).

## Report Incidents of Violence in Official School/Centre Registry:

Incidents of violence must be reported. No matter how mundane you may think it is at the time, by reporting it you may be preventing it from happening again whether it be to you, or to one of your colleagues. Ultimately, this will ensure that corrective measures are put into place. What this registry looks like can vary from place to place, however every school must have one. Find out where the registry is kept in your school/centre. This registry should be easily accessible to all staff members.

**Please note: It is important to verify if there are any additional official forms that exist when it comes to reporting incidents in violence. If so, these should also be easily accessible to all staff members.**

## Anti-Violence/Anti-Bullying Plan:

Ensure that your school has an up-to-date plan and that it is revisited every year, adjusted as need be. According to the Education Act, every school must have such a plan. It should be made aware to all staff members, students and parents at the start of the school year, and more importantly it must be used in such situations.

## Establish Your Own Personal Communication Procedure

Establish clear guidelines at the start of the school year when you meet with the parents such as the best way to communicate with you (agenda or other), procedure for returning calls and emails (in the shortest delay, other).

No matter the situation, it is advisable to take the following steps:

### 1. Speak to the individual involved to see if it can be resolved

It is recommended that the first step always be to attempt to speak to the individual the difficult situation is occurring with. In-person conversations are encouraged to avoid the misinterpretation that occurs when reading

a message where the tone or intention is not as clear as it is when the person is in front of you. Social media or even email messages are not the best tools to use in difficult situations. Speaking to the person also gives the person the benefit of the doubt - perhaps they did not know their actions and/or behaviours were harmful. Ultimately, even if after having done all of this and the problem remains, then you will need to be able to demonstrate that you took the time to express to the other that you wanted a certain behaviour or action to stop.

### **2. Speak to your administrator**

If you were unable to solve the situation with the concerned individual, speak to your administration. They must be kept aware of any problems and may be able to come up with a solution that may even solve the problem, particularly when it comes to dealing with difficult parents. In addition to this, your employer is legally obliged to ensure that you have a safe workplace.

### **3. Contact your local union**

If any situation escalates or fails to be resolved, do not hesitate to reach out for support.

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# **Difficult Situations – Different Scenarios**

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**For more information on the procedure for filling out an incident report:**

Health and Safety Accidents at Work  
A Collective Commitment, a Personal Responsibility

<https://qpat-apeq.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Health-and-Safety.pdf>

## Visit from a parent – scheduled

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**Situation** – A parent asks to meet with you. You are apprehensive about this meeting because you have reason to believe it is about the grade you gave their child on their last project. This parent tends to get worked up over their child’s grades and has raised their voice with other teachers in the past when it came to this issue.

### Before

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- Ask the parent to clarify the situation or problem they would like to discuss at the meeting.
- Gather all the information you may need prior to meeting the parent pertaining to this situation. The evidence that produced the grade is key.
- Prepare the overall points that you want to get across to the parent.
- If need be, ask someone to accompany you (a trusted colleague, your administrator). If you do, it is advisable to inform the parent that you will be accompanied.
- If you prefer to meet one-on-one with the parent, ask a colleague in a nearby classroom to stay close by in case of emergency, or advise the union delegate and/or administration of this upcoming meeting with parent.
- Set a predetermined length for the meeting and advise the parent of this (ask said colleague to come and get you at that specific time to enforce the end of the meeting).
- As much as possible, try not to let the upcoming meeting consume your thoughts and affect your personal well-being.
- Stick to the facts, and bring the conversation back to the facts, as need be.
- Try to find a possible common understanding of the situation.
- Clarify the expectations of the meeting.
- Look at different options and come up with solutions together.
- As much as possible, avoid reacting defensively or emotionally.
- If necessary, put an end to the meeting, indicating that meeting at a later date may be more productive.
- Leave your door open so that you can easily leave, if need be.

### After

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- Document the meeting: what took place, what was agreed upon, etc.
- Follow-up with a call or email to summarize what was agreed upon in the meeting.
- Analyze the meeting – was it satisfactory? What could have been done differently in a similar situation in the future?
- Inform the administration.
- Put in place solutions to the problem.
- Confide in a trusted colleague.
- Advise the union delegate if a situation occurred.
- If need be, fill out the incident report.
- In extreme incidents, it may be possible to establish with the administration that any future concerns are to be brought to the administration and all communication will be done via the administration going forward.

### During

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- Try to remain (or at least appear) calm and understanding of the situation.
- Listen to the parent without interrupting unless things get out of hand.
- Make notes on points you’d like to respond to or explain to the parent following their initial explanation.

# Visit from a parent – unscheduled

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**Situation** – A parent shows up unannounced at school wanting to speak to you. You do not wish to speak to this parent because they have monopolized your time before with a “quick question” in the past that ended up taking a lot longer than expected.

## Before

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- Verify your school’s procedure for parents dropping by during the day and their access to the building. All buildings should be secure.
- Ensure parents are aware of this policy and that it is being applied.
- Ensure that your school has a clear sign indicating how any school visitor must proceed when entering the school.

## During

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- Ask the parent to respect the school procedures and to make an appointment with you at a convenient time.
- Explain that you are not available.
- Ask them to go see the administration if they are in disagreement.
- Call the administration to deal with this parent.
- Make sure you are not alone, ask a colleague who is close by to stay until the parent is gone.

## After

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- Schedule a meeting and follow the steps in ***Visit from a Parent (scheduled)***.
- Ensure the administration sends a reminder letter of the school policies and procedures to this particular parent.

# Ever-present parent

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**Situation** – A parent is constantly in the school because they are volunteering. They feel like you are close because they see you on a regular basis. It seems normal for them to be stopping by your classroom, waiting for you to arrive in the school/centre parking lot, flagging you down at the grocery store to “talk”. They are not intending to harass you, however you feel like you are constantly being cornered.

## Before

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- Establish a clear form of communication with the parent that must apply to all parents, even though you may run into some more often than others. Ensure that this is respected.
- Establish a school procedure for parents who are allowed to be in the building on the communication process to respect and follow (a good place to discuss this is School Council and Governing Board).

## During

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- Advise the parent that you are not available and that they must schedule an appointment with you.
- If the parent persists, document the incidents (dates, reason for conversation).
- Advise the administration.

## After

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- Meet with the administration and parent to come up with a solution.



# Harassment from parent

**Situation** – A parent is constantly sending you emails questioning your teaching methods and the messages are now becoming insulting; questioning of your professional choices.

## Before

- Make sure that your personal communication procedure is shared at the start of the school year.

## During

- Read the message (or re-read it) when you are not distracted or busy to ensure that you are understanding what is written.
- See if there is a sub-text to the message that goes beyond what is being said in the email that may help you in understanding the situation.
- If the message is not clear, schedule a call or meeting with the parent to ask them to clarify the situation, and for you to explain where you are coming from.
- Do not reply on an impulse. Perhaps they wrote to you when their own emotions were high, but by doing the same it may only aggravate the situation.
- Stick to the facts in your response.
- Ask a trusted colleague to read your response before sending it to ensure that the message is sending the intended message.
- Sometimes the best response is “Noted. Thank you.” With your signature.
- Keep a copy of the message.
- Keep the administration aware of the situation and how you will respond.
- In some cases, it may be best to include the administration in your correspondence to the parent.
- Document all incidents in your personal logbook.

## After

- Ensure follow-up is in place to avoid being in the situation in the future.
- Meet this parent with administration.
- Record the events in your personal logbook (see [Appendix I](#)).
- If need be, stop all communication with this individual. Establish a system where they must speak to the administration if they have anything further to say on the matter.
- If necessary, file a complaint accordingly to the school board harassment policy.

# Rumours/Gossip by a parent or a group of parents

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**Situation** – You see an online comment made about one of your colleagues in a social media group.

## Before

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- Wisely choose which social media groups you wish to belong to. Sometimes the personal/professional line can become blurred.
- Avoid responding to school/centre related messages from parents sent via social media. Redirect the parent to your work email or the other form of communication you use for matters related to your work.
- Do not publicly comment on these platforms.
- Keep your eyes open if you feel a situation may get out of hand.

## During

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- If you see an inappropriate comment, take a picture of this – not to be shared but as proof in case it is removed or denied at a later time.
- Do not confront the person who posted the comment.
- Advise the person who has been commented on of the incident. Explain that you will not share this information with other colleagues, but you are available to support them
- Advise the administration about what happened.
- Encourage them to speak to the administration about the incident.
- Share the evidence solely with the targeted individual. This person can share with the administration when they are ready.
- Do not handle this on your own.
- Check in to see how your colleague is coping.

## After

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- Re-think what groups you wish to be a part of on social media.
- Be supportive as a staff to one another. This can happen to anyone and when the support is there, it makes it easier to handle.

# Aggressive student

**Situation** – A student threatens to strike you. It reaches the point where she forcefully runs into you as she is leaving the classroom.

## Before

- Ensure that your school has an emergency procedure for these types of situations (code of conduct, Anti-Violence Anti-Bullying Plan).
- Discuss as a staff how these situations are to be handled before they occur (school council, etc.) so that everyone is aware on how to proceed.
- Ensure that the administration enforces this procedure.
- Ensure that the students and parents are aware of the code of conduct, Anti-Violence Anti-Bullying Plan.
- Be aware of signs of aggressive behaviour that may lead to violence.

## During

- Stay calm (or do your best to appear calm) with your voice and body.
- Try to diffuse the situation, if you can.
- Ensure your safety and the safety of the other students.
- Seek help.
- In some instances, if the student is not in a good place, it may be best to ensure that this student does not leave the classroom alone.

## After

- Once the student has calmed down, speak to the student one-on-one.
- If you fear for your safety, speak to the student with the administration present.
- Ensure that the procedures are enforced by the administration.
- Meet with parents, administration.
- Document the situation in your personal logbook.
- Report the situation via the official incident report logbook.
- Seek medical assistance, if required.
- In very extreme cases, it may require that a police report be filed. Inform local union of such incidents.

**It is important to note that it is not acceptable to be physically hurt by any student, including those who are a very young age or who have special needs. These should also be reported in the registry and dealt with accordingly.**

When it comes to reporting incidents involving students with special needs, there is often a reluctance among teachers to do so. It is important to keep in mind that reporting can only help: you, your colleagues, and ultimately, the students. By documenting the incident (or multiple incidents), there is a record of past behaviours which can help identify possible triggers and ensure that a follow-up occurs and support measures are put into place. For more information on helping students with special needs, visit the Special Needs section of the QPAT website:

<https://qpat-apeq.qc.ca/special-needs/>

# Violence among students

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**Situation** – Students break out into a fight while you are on supervision at recess.

## Before

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- Ensure these school code of conduct/ Anti-Violence Anti-Bullying Plan is shared with students and parents.
- Ensure that the administration enforces these.
- Offer conflict resolution resources to students.
- Stay vigilant. If you see a group gathering or something suspicious, inform an adult who is close by to assist you.

## During

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- Quickly observe what is going on.
- Send someone for help if you are alone.
- Remove any potentially dangerous objects that may be around.
- Get other students (crowds) out of the way to avoid injuries.
- Call the students who are involved in the fight by their first name. This distraction may be all they need to get out of a situation they often don't even want to be in.
- Ask another adult to make sure that nobody is filming the incident that is occurring. If it is being filmed, it should be immediately stopped and dealt with before it is posted.
- Accompany the students involved to the administration.

## After

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- Confide in a trusted colleague.
- Analyze the situation to see what may have triggered the incident and if something needs to be done to prevent it from recurring.
- Ensure that the code of conduct/Anti-Violence Anti-Bullying Plan has been respected and enforced by the administration.
- Report the incident via the official incident report logbook, if need be.



# Oppositional student

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**Situation** – While you are teaching, a student is refusing to cooperate with you and do the task at hand.

## Before

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- Keep in mind that incidents with students are rarely personal.
- Try to see it coming: nip it in the bud when it is small before it gets worse.
- Make your classroom a safe space for students while maintaining types of behaviour that will and/or will not be tolerated.

## During

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- Try to stay calm.
- Keep your tone calm and collected.
- Try not to enter into a game or power struggle with this student.
- Diffuse the situation.
- Perhaps send the student on a “task” outside the classroom.

## After

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- Speak to a trusted colleague and seek for advice on how these types of situations are dealt with.
- Analyze the situation to see where it may have escalated.
- Speak to the student one-on-one. Building a rapport with students can take some time.
- If it happens again, you may have to take it further by involving support staff and/or the administration.
- Document the incident in your logbook.

# Colleagues

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**Situation** – You do not see eye-to-eye with a colleague who is part of the team you are working with. You work closely with this colleague and it is becoming more and more difficult to agree on issues related to pedagogy and the students that you teach. You are dreading the meetings that occur on a regular basis.

## Before

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- Listen to your colleagues when they are speaking without cutting them off, even if you disagree.
- Express your views when it is your turn to speak in a non-aggressive and non-directed way.

## During

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- Try to stay calm.
- Stick to the facts, avoid emotion or pointing the finger – even if it was done to you.

## After

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- If possible, speak to the colleague one-on-one to come up with a solution.
- Speak to the administration about what occurred and that an intervention should occur if someone is being personally attacked during a meeting.
- If the problem persists, seek further help so that you are not dealing with the situation on your own.
- Document the incident in your personal logbook.

# Administration

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**Situation** – You are not receiving the support that you need from your administration. In fact, they are the root of the problem.

## Before

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- Speak to them one-on-one to express your concern and to come up with solutions together.
- After that conversation, you may feel more comfortable havinmg someone with you for future meetings, such as the union delegate or another trusted colleague.

## After

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- If you are still not getting the support you need, do not hesitate to contact your local union to help you solve the situation.

## During

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- If an incident occurs and it is not the first time, remind the administration that you have already discussed this issue.

**The administration has the responsibility to provide you with a safe workplace. This includes ensuring:**

- that the Incident report forms are easily accessible and all staff members are informed of the procedure on what to do when an incident occurs.
- that the appropriate measures have been put into place to deal with the incident.
- follow-up with all those involved in the incident.

## Example of Personal Logbook

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**Important:** The personal logbook does not replace the official registry or any other official documents that exist in your school board to report incidents of violence. The personal logbook exists as a means of keeping track of situations that occurred that may be important to revisit down the line.

**Date of event:**

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**Names of witnesses:**

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**Details of what happened:**

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**Any follow-up that occurred:**

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