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La Cour supérieure de justice
The Honourable Brian W. Lennox
L'honorable Brian W. Lennox
former Chief Justice of the
Ontario Court of Justice
Ancien juge en chef de
La Cour de justice de l'Ontario

Dear OJEN Volunteer,

Thank you for giving your time to support public legal education for young people in Ontario. When you became an OJEN volunteer, you joined a community of over 1600 professionals who help run our justice education programs across the province. You are the reason that our small not-for-profit organization is able to impact over 200,000 youth in Ontario every year.

OJEN's approach to justice education is not just about sharing information about the law; it is also about building young people's legal capability. We create opportunities for young people in Ontario to learn about the law, build skills to manage legal problems, and meet people who work in the legal system. We want young people to feel comfortable and confident when dealing with the legal issues they face now, and in the future. Since our formation in 2002, OJEN has brought the legal, educational and community sectors together to collapse some of the barriers to access to justice in Ontario. Schools are vital centres of public legal education and support, and our school-based justice education programs will always be at the core of OJEN's work.

This volunteer orientation package will help you prepare for your time in the classroom. It includes information about your program, facilitation tips, OJEN's Volunteer Code of Conduct, and links to additional resources that are available through our website and some of our trusted partners.

We hope you enjoy your time volunteering with OJEN. If there is any way we can better support you, please reach out to your OJEN staff contact, or email us at info@ojen.ca. Please keep in touch – we love to hear your feedback!

To stay up to date with OJEN news and volunteer opportunities, sign up for our newsletter at ojen.ca/en/subscribe.

Sincerely,

Jess Reekie
Executive Director, Ontario Justice Education Network (OJEN)

Volunteer Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct (Code) applies to all individuals who volunteer with the Ontario Justice Education Network (OJEN) in any capacity.

OJEN is a charitable, not-for-profit, public legal education organization. We develop innovative educational tools and programs that share legal information and build the skills and connections young people need to manage the legal issues they face now, and in the future. We advance access to justice in Ontario by helping young people develop their legal capability and by fostering connections between the justice sector and the wider community.

With the support of 1600+ active volunteers, OJEN reaches thousands of young people each year through our public legal education programs and resources. While volunteers offer youth the benefit of their legal knowledge and expertise, they benefit equally from the insights they gain into the lived experiences of young people and the communities they serve. Recognition of the reciprocal nature of the learning experience is central to our public legal education philosophy.

OJEN's programs are youth-focused, practical, and honest. We connect with young people where they are, and on their terms. We respect their autonomy and their capacity to impact the world. We believe young people deserve to understand the law and the ways it affects their lives. We share information about the legal system as it is in practice, without minimizing or misrepresenting its challenges, problems, and issues.

The foundation of this Code is our commitment to providing a safe and respectful environment for young people, volunteers, program partners and staff.

General

1. As a volunteer with OJEN, you represent us in the eyes of the community. We count on you to conduct yourself in a manner that is professional and ethical.
2. OJEN programs are designed to provide legal information. Volunteers must not offer legal advice to anyone participating in an OJEN activity.
3. OJEN volunteers are expected to come prepared to their program. This includes reviewing any program agendas, facilitation notes, and training resources shared in advance.
4. We ask that volunteers be timely in their communications with staff and program partners.
5. We ask all OJEN volunteers to be open to giving and receiving honest and constructive feedback. This allows us to assess what aspects of our programs work well and what can be improved.

6. At the earliest opportunity, volunteers must declare any conflict between their personal interests and that of OJEN.
7. Intellectual property developed by a volunteer through their role with OJEN, (e.g., program agendas, facilitation notes, teaching resources, etc.) is the property of OJEN, although credit may be recognized, as appropriate. This does not include presentation materials developed solely by a volunteer for a Law Institute or an OJEN webinar where OJEN staff have not co-created these materials with the volunteer.

Cultural safety and inclusion

8. We want young people to feel respected and safe when they participate in an OJEN program. We ask that all volunteers work towards developing strong cultural safety and inclusive practices. This involves paying attention to how social and historical contexts shape the legal system and young people's experiences with it. It also means engaging in critical self-reflection and being honest about your own power and privilege.
9. Harassment, discrimination or the use of oppressive language or behaviour will not be tolerated.

Confidentiality and privacy

10. Volunteers must not use for their own purposes (including personal gain) any information obtained through their volunteer activities with OJEN, nor may they disclose this information to others.
11. Volunteers must not take or distribute their own photographs at an OJEN program when these photos include people other than themselves, including on social media. Not all youth participants sign OJEN's media release form, and we must be careful about photographing and distributing images of young people without their (or a parent/guardian's) consent.
12. Any requests for information about OJEN or access to our programs (from the media or external organizations) must be directed to an OJEN staff member.
13. Volunteers must maintain and respect the confidentiality of youth participants, program partners, other volunteers and OJEN staff. In all cases, assume that what a young person shares with you is confidential.

Exception: If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, you **must** contact the Children's Aid Society (CAS). You must do this if the child is or seems to be under 16. If the child is 16 or 17, you can choose to report your concerns to CAS, but you do not have to. To learn more about the duty to report, please visit the [Steps to Justice website](#).

- 14.** Volunteers must not have contact with youth participants from an OJEN program, outside of the OJEN program. Please do not meet one-on-one with these youth. Our programs take place in classrooms and community centres where we expect teachers and youth workers to be present when the program takes place.

Handling conflict

- 15.** If a disagreement or verbal conflict occurs in the delivery of a program, volunteers are expected to listen to other people's perspectives before calmly and respectfully responding. We invite debate and discussion and want to ensure that people feel comfortable voicing their opinions.
- 16.** If you witness harmful behaviours or conflict between youth, or between a youth and staff, or you and a young person, please do not try to advise or discipline. Instead, alert the teacher, community partner, or an OJEN staff member.
- 17.** If you have a problem with anyone you encounter through your volunteer activities with OJEN, or if you notice another volunteer, teacher, community partner or staff member acting in a way that contravenes this Code, please alert an OJEN staff member.

This Code outlines minimum standards and does not cover every contingency. All OJEN volunteers are expected to comply with this Code. Failure to do so may result in the termination of the volunteer's involvement with OJEN, or other remedies as necessary to protect OJEN, our partners, other volunteers and our youth audience.

Preparing for your visit

OJEN volunteers serve a lot of different roles in the classroom. Your OJEN staff contact will tell you the general purpose and structure of your visit. You may be asked to coach a mock trial team, provide legal information, discuss careers in the justice system, or something else entirely. We will connect you with the classroom teacher who is hosting your program, and you should work together to finalize the format and logistics. Please take the initiative and start this conversation by emailing the teacher as soon as possible. Some school boards have extra security measures in place which may include vulnerable sector checks. Your OJEN staff contact and/or teacher will advise you of any such requirements.

Logistics

Talk to the teacher in advance to confirm the following details:

- The time, location, size, and grade of the class;
- What to do and where to go when you arrive;
- What is available in the classroom;
 - Almost all classrooms have a chalkboard or white board, but the availability of reliable WIFI or a PowerPoint presentation system will vary.
- What needs to be printed (e.g. handouts, worksheets);
 - Teachers can print things in black and white, but only with advance notice and a copy of the materials.
 - Send documents in PDF format wherever possible to simplify printing.
- Security protocols or public health requirements that are in effect for the school;
- Online platforms the class uses and how you should log in (if remote/virtual);
- Polls or breakout rooms that need to be set up in advance (if remote/virtual).

Plan to arrive at least 15-20 minutes before the session starts. You will probably need to check in at the main office. You should ensure that you and the teacher have each other's contact information in case of emergency. Your work clothes are fine, but police officers should not wear their uniform unless the teacher agrees otherwise.

Preparing for the program

If you received an agenda or other program materials, please read them closely and be prepared. Note the learning objectives and general goals of the program; they will guide you in making quick decisions about what to prioritize.

If you have not been sent a lesson plan, make a general outline of what you would like to cover and establish timelines for each part. Ensure that your content reflects the teacher's priorities for the session. Do not plan a lecture. Give students a chance to apply what they have learned, so aim to invite class participation and discussion every 10 minutes. When you need to explain a complex subject or give instructions to students, plan what you are going to say. Try practicing out loud.

During your classroom visit

Proceed as you and the teacher have agreed. The teacher will remain in the room with you and can help steer conversation and make links to the curriculum. When in doubt, defer to them.

Your role

Your role as a legal volunteer is to share your knowledge and experience with the students. This might include information about your career, anecdotes from your practice, and broad information about the law. Remember that you cannot give legal advice.

If someone else is facilitating the program, let them lead. If not, then be prepared to lead the class. Maintain a warm, welcoming environment and make sure students feel comfortable asking questions. In the event that students are disruptive or unruly, remember that classroom management is the teacher's responsibility. They know their students best and will take a disciplinary role, if it becomes necessary.

Privacy and photographs

The teacher may want to take photos for social media. You may agree or decline to appear in them. If you want to take photos, you must ask the teacher first. They will know whether the students (or their guardians) have completed media release forms.

Opening and closing the session

Introduce yourself informally; share your area of law and an example of the kinds of clients, cases, or issues you work on. Remember, it's not a job interview! You could say something about why you chose this career. Finally, tell students what you will be doing in the session.

To close the session, thank the students and teacher. You may want to share your contact information and invite students to reach out with any questions.

Tips for talking to students

- Introduce yourself with your pronouns.
- Ask youth participants to also share their name and their pronouns. Or use names, instead of pronouns, to avoid misgendering. Use gender neutral language – for example, use "folks" instead of "guys" to refer to a group.
- Remember that there may be students in the class who have experienced legal problems personally or through their families. Speak about those involved with care, respect, and sensitivity.
- Come to the classroom aware of sensitive or contentious issues that may arise, particularly those around racial disparity and experiences of discrimination and racism.
- Explain the "why" of your content: why is the law the way it is? What is it supposed to accomplish? What is the logic behind this decision or policy?
- Students love issues of fairness and justice, so use that interest to draw them in.
- Make connections to current events or interesting cases, if possible
- Use age-appropriate anecdotes but be careful not to get sidetracked.

- Don't be afraid of silence (especially in virtual programs). Students need time to think and formulate questions or answers.
- Pay attention to the audience. Watch for fatigue or confusion. You can always take a break, revisit a difficult concept, or invite questions.
- Time will go very quickly. Keep an eye on the clock.
- Avoid jargon, but use the correct legal terms. When you introduce a new term, explain what it means. Use clear and simple language.
 - Community Legal Education Ontario's [Steps to Justice website](#) provides plain language definitions for many common legal terms in the [glossary](#).
- Be careful with acronyms. Put acronyms or key terms on the board so you can refer back to them, if you are going to use them more than once.

Presenting in online classrooms

Students are likely to keep their cameras and microphones off. Many school boards have rules in place that require them to do so for privacy reasons. Do not pressure students to turn on their cameras or mics; instead, ask them to type their questions or comments into the platform's chat function. Remember to keep an eye on the chat while you are presenting.

Some students may be viewing from a tablet and may have trouble keeping additional documents and the video conferencing window on screen at the same time. Share your screen to show documents, where possible.

Additional tips for talking to students in online sessions:

- Give clear instructions for how you want students to respond to you. Direct them to chat or the Q&A function, if available.
- Read comments or questions from chat out loud before you address them. This will help students who have not been watching the chat and encourage participation.
- Use headphones, if possible. This will reduce the chance of echoes or audio feedback.
- Keep your camera on and respond to comments the same way you would in person. Your face communicates a lot in this context!
- If you have technical problems, don't get flustered. Students are very used to this! Stay calm, acknowledge the issue, and move forward.
- Have a "low-tech" back-up plan for all of your activities. Keep it simple.

Consider different learning styles

Knowing more about different learning styles can help you prepare for an engaging and interactive classroom visit. As you get ready for your classroom visit, consider the different learning styles below and think about ways you might incorporate the various engagement tips in the session.

OJEN classroom visits aim to vary activities and approaches by incorporating at least 2-3 different learning styles. If your visit involves lots of group discussions, consider dividing the youth into smaller discussion groups, before reconvening as a large group. This approach gives young people who are shy or uncertain the chance to participate more fully.

Learning Style	Description	Engagement Tips
Visual spatial	Processes information best when it is seen Pictures over words Images of ideas	Use slides and videos to illustrate legal concepts Provide paper and pens/crayons Ask participants to draw an answer, then share
Social interpersonal	Learns best with others Likes communication and feedback Enjoys group discussions	Small and large group discussions Circle set-up for discussion
Kinesthetic (Physical)	Finds success with hands-on opportunities	Use activities that require movement, like: "Line up," "4 corners," or a "Build a mock courtroom"
Logical	Learns best through logical reasoning Likes steps and systems Thinks and plans before acting	Map out steps to a solution Provide ample time to reflect and organize thoughts, before sharing
Verbal linguistic	All about written and spoken words Writes notes and outlines Enjoys group discussions	Small and large group discussions Activities that require writing and then presenting

Managing legal issues

Use clear, everyday language

It is important to avoid acronyms and jargon (legal or otherwise), but use the correct legal terms. When you introduce a new legal term, explain what it means. Use clear and simple language. Community Legal Education Ontario's [Steps to Justice website](#) provides plain language definitions for many common legal terms in the [glossary](#).

Legal information vs. legal advice

When addressing hypotheticals, be careful that you aren't giving legal advice. Remember legal information is general and not specific to one situation. It doesn't interpret the law or try to make guesses about what might happen. Legal advice addresses a specific situation. The point of legal advice is to tell the person what to do or to predict possible outcomes.

You do not want to give legal advice to anyone who isn't your client – it can cause problems with confidentiality and lead to complaints against your licence. More importantly, someone could act on advice you gave them without full knowledge of their situation and it could cause them harm.

Just saying you can't give legal advice isn't enough. In practice, people without legal training can have a hard time understanding the distinction between information and advice. Sometimes they think it's "just a disclaimer" you have to say. It can be a hard line to navigate. Be careful about how you answer questions, especially "hypothetical" ones – sometimes they are not really hypothetical at all.

Learn more: [Legal information vs. legal advice: What is the difference?](#)
(Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta)

Addressing misconceptions

Be clear but gentle when correcting misconceptions about the law. You can explain that there is a lot of misinformation about the law and what someone can do to resolve a legal issue. It's easy to see and get that information from a story in the media, from TV, social media or from someone who may have been misinformed.

Questions and answers

If you do not know the answer to a question – that's ok! Explain that you will need to look it up or consult with a colleague, and get back to them at the next session (if applicable). You could also offer to follow up with the teacher and share the answer with them if you won't be returning to the classroom.

Making referrals

Be ready with the name of the [local legal clinic](#), relevant public services, advocacy groups, community or other relevant organizations.

You can direct youth to the [Law Society Referral Service](#) and [Justice for Children and Youth](#) which provides legal services for young people under 18 and homeless youth under 25 in Ontario.

Questions to consider

Here are some questions that students often ask in OJEN classroom programs:

Working in law

- How do you get to be a lawyer?
- How do you get to be a judge?
- Do you have to work a lot of hours?
- Can you be a lawyer if you don't like public speaking?

Courts and tribunals

- Why do cases take so long?
- Why do you wear robes?
- Who are all the people who work in a courtroom?
- What happens if a judge is biased?

Criminal law and policing

- Why does there seem to be so much police violence?
- What do I do if police stop me in the street?
- Who polices the police?
- How do youth vs adult criminal records work?

Civil law

- Why does [legal topic] work like that?
- Do you think the law favours one side or the other?
- What do you think about [a recent decision or topic in the news]?
- What's a paralegal and what do they do?

Access to justice issues

- Why are lawyers so expensive?
- Why does it take so long for a case to be heard?
- The outcome of [a recent case] seems bad. What do you think?
- How does legal aid work?
- When do lawyers do pro bono work?

Your personal journey to a career in law

- What did/should you take in university?
- How hard are law school classes/LSATs/bar exams?
- What's the best part or biggest challenge of your job?
- How much money do you earn?
- What's your most interesting case?
- How are you able to defend criminals?
- Do you ever disagree with a decision?