

**CLEVELAND HEIGHTS TEACHERS UNION**  
LOCAL 795 - AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS  
**DEMOCRACY IN EDUCATION • EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY**

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The Union Steward as Defense Counsel

From time to time situations will arise when the building steward will need to represent a colleague in meetings with administration that are investigative, confrontational or both. These meetings may involve administrative fact finding about alleged teacher improprieties. They could take the form of a conference that includes parent/guardians and/or central office administrators. If the purpose of the meetings is to discipline a teacher, the problem has progressed too far. Call the union office.

What follows are guidelines to assist you in representing your members at the aforementioned meetings. In such situations you assume the role of defense counsel.

Preparation for the meeting.

1. Find out from administration the purpose of the meeting and who will attend.
2. Do not allow the meeting to take place if you are not ready. Demand a meeting time that allows time for you to prepare.
3. Have the member write a complete account of the incident or events in question. Details are important. Do not give this document to administration.
4. Meet with the member prior to the conference. Explain your role; be supportive.

If, in your preliminary meeting, the member admits guilt to any form of child abuse or sexual harassment, have the member call the union office immediately.

5. Instruct the member as follows:
  - a. Listen carefully to questions. Do not answer questions immediately – reflect for 2-3 seconds.
  - b. Respond only to the questions asked – short answers are best (yes/no).
  - c. Ask for clarification if you don't understand.
  - d. Answer truthfully.
  - e. Volunteer nothing. Don't guess. Don't speculate.
  - f. Do not argue – even if asked leading/argumentative questions.
  - g. Don't let silence throw you off.
  - h. Do not make any self-deprecating comments i.e. "I lost control", "I blew it", "I used poor judgment", etc.

### The meeting.

1. Take accurate notes – Be sure to indicate that the date and time of the meeting and list names of all present.
2. Sit next to the member.
3. Request copies of all documents, witness statements, etc.
4. Do not allow any bullying or browbeating.
5. Do not share your personal notes or the member's notes or written accounts.
6. Feel free to stop the meeting. If you need to consult privately with the member, state such and leave the room.
7. Feel free to end the meeting. If the meeting begins to deteriorate (i.e. name calling, belligerence, etc.) announce that the meeting is over and leave the room with the member.
8. Do not shoot from the hip. If the member is asked to a response or explanation that requires time to prepare, ask to schedule another meeting within a day or two to properly respond.
9. Inquire as to what happens next, i.e. procedures or steps administration plans to take.
10. Summarize for clarity. Recap the key points raised in the meeting.

Keep the meeting focused. If the meeting involves a parent/guardian complaint and the parent/guardian is present, the focus should be: "What can we do to help the student succeed?"

### Debriefing – Follow Up

1. After, the conference, meet with the member. Discuss what transpired at the conference. Be supportive and reassuring.
2. Instruct the member to keep the matter confidential.
3. Make copies of all pertinent documents including your meeting notes and forward them to the union office.
4. Call the President or Vice-President to relate your account of the meeting and to discuss any further administrative actions that are planned.