



OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Pastoral Care in Secondary Schools

What Is Pastoral Care?

Pastoral care involves being with, listening to, and extending a helping hand to anyone who is hurting, confused, lonely, or simply curious about life's large and small questions. It provides spiritually centred counselling to anyone in need. Pastoral care has been a positive influence over the years in many public institutions such as universities, hospitals, military bases, and penitentiaries.

Pastoral Care in Secondary Schools

For over 20 years, spiritual counselling has been available for secondary school students in the Ottawa area. Clergy or similarly designated persons from faith communities recognized by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) have been invited into secondary schools to counsel students on personal, social, or spiritual matters. Guidelines for this service were reviewed and updated in 2001–2002 by the Board in consultation with representatives of school administrators, student councils, school councils, the Community Council on Ethnocultural Equity, and the Coordinating Committee for Pastoral Care in Secondary Schools.

The Coordinating Committee for Pastoral Care in Secondary Schools seeks to involve representatives from all faith communities including: Aboriginal, Baha'i, Buddhism, Christian, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and Sikhism.

Who Are Pastoral Care Workers?

Pastoral care workers in secondary schools are caring women and men of mature faith with gifts in pastoral care and counselling who are identified, endorsed, and/or accredited by their faith community.

Though maintaining their own religious faith perspective, pastoral care workers are careful not to impose it on those they seek to help. However, they do try to practise and share those enduring higher values upon which our society and educational systems are based such as personal integrity, compassion for others, and respect for the rights, beliefs, and traditions of others.

Pastoral care workers can refer people to agencies and institutions that provide additional support.

How Does Pastoral Care Work in a Secondary School Setting?

Pastoral care workers are available on a voluntary, part-time basis to students and staff in several of the secondary schools.

Principals may initiate the program in their schools through consultation with the Pastoral Care Coordinating Committee and their staff, student council, and school council.

The pastoral care worker's regular weekly contact with students, staff, and principals helps to establish an ongoing relationship in the school.

Lunch hour, extra-curricular sports time, social events, or bus arrival time are some of the opportunities that pastoral care workers use to make themselves known and available.

Just as each school has its own character, each pastoral care worker brings his or her own personality and gifts to the role. Workers usually meet twice each year to share their ideas and experiences, support one another, and continue learning to enhance their contribution in this field.

How do Pastoral Care Workers and School Guidance Counsellors Work as a Team?

Pastoral care workers and school guidance counsellors both have the same aim — to help students develop to their full potential in society. The difference is one of emphasis. Guidance counsellors are required to be primarily occupied with the academic, career, and social development of students. Pastoral care workers focus on personal and spiritual concerns. Spiritual questions relate to many topics and include purpose in life, self-worth, relationships, values, death, and faith.



Pastoral care workers work alongside staff on issues such as those related to grief, suicide, substance abuse, peer pressure, peer counselling, and parent–teen communication. They are also on hand to give moral and spiritual support in times of crises, such as accident or death, and still present later, when other crisis-support people are no longer available but recurring concerns surface.

How Is the Program of Pastoral Care Administered?

The Coordinating Committee for Pastoral Care in Secondary Schools oversees the program for the District. At present it is composed of representation from the following religious faith traditions: Aboriginal, Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim.

This committee encourages and supports pastoral care work by interviewing candidates who wish to become pastoral care workers and facilitating placement in schools requesting a worker. It provides ongoing opportunities for workers to keep current with information and programs to enhance their work in schools.

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