



LIFE – Legal Information for Everyone | A PLE Toolbox

Resources for lawyers and paralegals delivering Public Legal Education in Ontario

WHY SHOULD LAWYERS AND PARALEGALS DO PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION (PLE)?

Helping people understand how the law affects them meets the professional and pro bono obligations of lawyers and paralegals, strengthens our justice system and improves our approach to practice.

- **Providing PLE is part of the statutory obligations of the Law Society of Upper Canada and its membership.**
The professional obligation for lawyers and paralegals to provide PLE is found in the rules of conduct.
 - **For lawyers,** Rule 3.01(1) of the Rules of Professional Conduct states, “A lawyer shall make legal services available to the public in an efficient and convenient way.” The commentary under this rule explains, “A lawyer may assist in making legal services available by participating in the Legal Aid Plan and lawyer referral services and by engaging in programmes of public information, education or advice concerning legal matters...” Find the Professional Rules of Conduct here: <http://www.lsuc.on.ca/for-lawyers/resources-for-lawyers>
 - **For paralegals,** Rule 8.02(1) of the Paralegal Rules of Conduct states, “A paralegal shall make legal services available to the public in an efficient and convenient way.” Find the Paralegal Rules of Conduct here: <http://www.lsuc.on.ca/for-paralegals/resources-for-paralegals/>
- **PLE builds legal capability in the public and promotes early resolution of legal problems.** A legally capable person is one who can recognize that an issue has a legal dimension, knows how and where to ask for help, and understands that resolution of legal issues is best done early, with the potential for fair and effective results. To build these capabilities, people need a combination of knowledge about the system, skills for communicating their experience and preparing for legal processes, and, most importantly, trust that the system can produce a reliable, affordable result and that there are professionals they can rely on in the process. PLE builds trust in the legal system by providing people with opportunities to have positive and meaningful interactions with lawyers and paralegals through which they are treated respectfully by representatives of the justice system and have legal terms, processes and other helpful resources like court forms explained. People who have trust in the justice system are more likely to feel comfortable looking for online information about their rights or asking questions of a paralegal or

lawyer early on in a conflict when resolution is still easy, cheap and low-stress. For more information about how effective PLE can build legal capability review Module 3 of the Legal Information for Everyone resources.

- **PLE helps create a more efficient justice system.** PLE makes the jobs of lawyers and paralegals easier because people approach their legal problems with more confidence and are better prepared. A trusting and more informed public will see lawyers and paralegals as integral to resolving certain legal problems. Not only will they approach these legal professionals earlier in their legal crises but they will also do so with confidence. Early resolution of legal problems takes the pressure off the courts and addresses problems of delay and cost improving the administration of justice as a whole.
- **PLE keeps lawyers and paralegals connected to the community.** Beyond fulfilling important pro bono professional obligations, it is also important for legal professionals to talk to the public (outside of an advocate-client relationship) so that they hear about how different groups in society perceive and experience the justice system. By answering people's questions about the law and about how the justice system works as well as listening to people's past negative experiences dealing with a legal problem or a legal professional, lawyers and paralegals can correct some of the misinformation and misconceptions that people have and, more importantly, adjust their own practices so that they are addressing the actual needs and concerns of the public in their work.
- **Time spent on PLE may count towards the required Continuing Professional Development (CPD) hours for lawyers and paralegals.** The Law Society of Upper Canada requires all lawyers and paralegals practicing law or providing legal services to complete a minimum of 12 hours of CPD in eligible educational activities each calendar year. At least three of the hours must be professionalism hours, related to professional responsibility, ethics and/or practice management and no more than nine of the hours must be substantive, related to substantive or procedural law topics or related skills.
- **To learn more** about the Law Society of Upper Canada's CPD requirement and what constitutes eligible educational activities visit the Law Society's website at: <http://www.lsuc.on.ca/CPD-Requirement/>
- **See the attached memo** from the Ontario Justice Education Network (OJEN) about how and when OJEN's Justice Education activities qualify as CPD.