
Addressing Potential Student Impairment: Guideline for Maintaining a Safe Learning Environment

New Brunswick Community College (NBCC) is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for all students, staff, and visitors, which can be compromised by impairment. NBCC Staff have a duty to address concerning behaviour that could lead to potentially unsafe conditions. We have an obligation to ensure fitness to work and a safe learning environment, while providing appropriate resources to support our students.

Impairment can result from a wide variety of causes, including many that are temporary or short term. For example, many issues may be a source of distraction and divert a person's attention away from their tasks, such as:

- family or relationship problems;
- fatigue (mental or physical);
- traumatic shock (e.g. experiencing stress or anxiety after a troubling personal incident like a fire or robbery);
- disability (mental or physical) and the treatment of medical conditions with therapies or medications that may cause side effects (e.g. radiotherapy causing tiredness, antibiotics causing nausea, prescriptions which reduce motor function or vision);
- illness (acute or chronic)
- substance use, including alcohol or other drugs (legal or illegal);
- being tired due to a lack of sleep, long work periods, or working more than one job;
- experiencing disruption to body's circadian rhythm as a result of shift work or seasonal time change;
- assisting a child or family member, or caring for a young infant;
- preparing for stressful activities (e.g. examinations);
- having unresolved conflict within the College environment (e.g. with Instructors or other students);
- experiencing sexual harassment or bullying; and
- being exposed to extreme cold (can lead to lower mental alertness and decreased hand dexterity) or heat (can lead to increased irritability, loss of concentration and decreased ability to perform skilled tasks or heavy duties).

How should NBCC Staff respond to concerns about a potentially impaired student?

NBCC staff and students are responsible to be active and engaged stewards of health, safety, and well-being at NBCC. As such, to deal with the risk of potential harm that could result from impairment, measures must be taken to ensure health and safety.

Since the source of impairment can be wide-ranging (see the variety of examples above) and the reason for diminished capacity is irrelevant to immediately addressing a potential safety concern, it is vital to concentrate on the problematic **behaviour** that is being observed.

Concerns about potential impairment risk usually arise when a person is behaving in an "unusual" manner, or their observed conduct is "uncharacteristic" to their known personality. In such a case, the observer must identify and respond directly to the "peculiar" behaviour, regardless of its origin.

For example, where:

- a student can't stop laughing / yelling / crying and is disrupting the class; or
- a student is staggering / slurring speech / can't hold tools / is falling asleep,

It is not necessary for an observer to know how to diagnose or measure the source or reason for the conduct (i.e. whether this is due to mental illness, substance abuse or a "bad day"). All that is required is that the staff member take appropriate action to address the disruption or personal crisis that is occurring.

Such a situation, while necessitating action, should not involve a confrontation with the student to accuse them of "impairment." Any inappropriate behaviour, even where the source is suspected to relate to some impairing source or substance, must be addressed in a diplomatic and effective manner. This approach will meet NBCC's obligations to ensure health and safety and learning outcomes, without requiring staff to know how to "diagnose" or "treat" impairment.

What should be done by NBCC Staff to respond to concerning student behaviour?

Once a problematic behavioural issue has been identified and a staff member is concerned that follow-up is required, further actions may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- speak to the student in a private area to discuss his/her behaviour;
- call for first aid or emergency medical assistance, if deemed necessary;
- reinforce any concerns for the safety of the student (and others) and, based on the circumstances, discuss resources or make referrals to NBCC support staff (e.g. counselling), where applicable;
- assign alternate non-safety sensitive activities, or remove the student from the class if deemed necessary;
- if applicable, notify the appropriate Academic Chair (AC) and/or other instructors who may be supervising the student later in the day;
- if necessary or deemed appropriate, call a taxi, or arrange with an employee/friend to take the student home; and

if the problematic behaviour potentially constitutes a breach of the *Student Code of Conduct*, complete a Program to Assist Student Success (PASS) form and submit electronically for referral to the appropriate Academic Chair (AC) for action. The PASS form can be found at <http://forms.nbcc.ca/Workflow/Form?uri=pass>. Remember, it is not staff's duty or area of expertise to diagnose a student or attempt to determine if he/she has a disability. Staff members can, however, observe changes in a student's attendance, performance, or behaviour. On this basis, Staff can initiate dialogue about the issue(s) as related to education/learning outcomes, discuss possible solutions and give direction to access available resources and support staff within the College. Use your best judgment and common sense. Provide support and practice empathy, not sympathy. Focus on behavioural directions and solutions. If misconduct persists and disciplinary action is deemed necessary, it is important to follow through.

NOTE: *This Guideline is intended to help NBCC Staff respond to problematic student behaviour that they believe may pose a potential risk of harm (i.e. to prevent harm from occurring). Where a serious incident (near miss) or an accident actually occurs upon NBCC premises, such events must be formally reported to WorkSafeNB, by completing required forms and conducting a workplace investigation. For more information, consult a member of your Campus' Joint Health & safety Committee or review WorkSafeNB resources <https://www.worksafenb.ca/employers/>*