



Abusive Behaviour Toward Staff

Approved	Revised	Related Policy	Supporting Documents
March 2022	n/a		

POLICY

Everyone has the right to a workplace free from violence, threatening, or abusive behaviour and to be treated with consideration, dignity and respect. The Nova Scotia College of Counselling Therapists has therefore adopted a *zero tolerance* approach to inappropriate behaviour and aggression toward staff.

This policy is intended to establish expectations about interpersonal behaviour in the workplace, and to inform staff and others about the procedures in place to manage and minimize the risks of abusive behavior toward College staff. More specifically, NSCCT commits to:

- ensuring all staff are educated on how to identify abusive behaviour
- helping staff identify situations that pose an increased risk of abusive behaviour
- reducing staff vulnerability to abusive behaviour (i.e., environmental control)
- informing staff of controls in place to prevent and manage abusive behaviour
- providing staff with strategies to mitigate risk and to manage abusive behaviour when encountered from, 1) other staff, 2) directors, 3) committee members, 4) registrants, and 5) members of the public
- empowering all staff to exercise their agency in helping to maintain a work environment free from abusive behaviour
- pursuing robust action against all persons responsible for abusive behaviour toward staff

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- The College has a duty to care for all of its staff whether working on-site or virtually.
- We believe that all those who correspond with the College, including those expressing concerns, dissatisfaction or complaints, have the right to be heard, understood and respected. We believe our staff share these same rights.
- We value our employees and volunteers and any form of abusive behaviour directed toward them will not be tolerated.
- College staff are required to treat each other and everyone to whom they provide service in accordance with the values of:
- **Fairness:** staff will act fairly, be transparent and treat people equally
Respect: staff will be respectful in engaging with others
Person-centred: staff will put people at the centre of their work activities
Integrity: staff will be impartial and act to uphold the legislative mandate of the College
Efficiency: staff will endeavour to provide the best possible quality and public value from their work
- We believe that a safe workplace is a necessary condition for allowing staff to live up to these values and reaching their work potential

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy, "abusive behaviour" is defined as:

Any incident, in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work. In this context, "incident" means any unwanted, unplanned event that has the potential to cause harm or injury. This may also take the form of behaviour which is intimidating or demeaning and can include:

- **Violence** can be physical, or non-physical and include threats, abusive behavior and language (verbal and written), escalating agitation, yelling and intimidating body language
- **Unreasonable demands**—a demand becomes unreasonable when it impacts substantially on staff work. Examples of this may include, repeatedly demanding responses within an unreasonable timeframe, or insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff when not practicable or appropriate.
- **Unreasonable levels of remote contact**—volume and duration of telephone, text or email contact by an individual that causes distraction, unease for a staff member. This typically occurs over a short period, e.g., multiple calls in one day or one hour.

- **Unreasonable uses of processes**—for example, abusing the professional conduct process by filing vexatious, unfounded or frivolous complaints in order to challenge professional judgments of staff or to repeatedly litigate decided issues
- **Socially unacceptable language** in reference to a staff member's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, culture, or body.
- **Sexual behaviour** -- used to threaten, intimidate or cause discomfiture.

PROCESS

During an Incident involving abusive or escalating behaviour, the staff member should calmly but clearly end the encounter (e.g., closing the meeting or ending the phone call). If the staff member determines that it is safe to do so, they should first advise the abusive individual of why they are terminating the encounter. If the staff member feels threatened, intimidated or is concerned for their personal safety, they should end the encounter and extricate themselves from the situation as quickly and safely as possible. If necessary, this may include calling 911 for emergency assistance.

All employees have the legal right to report any incident in which they have been subject to abusive behaviour to the police. They also have the right to expect the College to support them in this decision and to, assist them throughout the process as required.

Following an Incident of abusive behaviour, the staff member should report the situation as soon as possible to the Executive Director/Registrar (or to the Board Chair if the incident involves the EDR). It is the responsibility of the Executive Director/Registrar to respond to all incidents of abusive behavior toward staff. The EDR may initiate any or all of the following actions:

- A. Investigate or cause an investigation to take place to obtain details of the incident.
- B. Report the incident to appropriate organizations (e.g., police, employer of the person alleged to have committed the abuse, etc.)
- C. Advise the responsible party of the accusation, why their behaviour was unacceptable, the impact their behaviour has had, and discuss steps for moving forward.
- D. File a complaint* against any registrant of the College accused of abusive behaviour toward staff, to the appropriate regulator if the accused is a regulated health professional, to the person's employer if they are an unregulated healthcare provider
- E. Bring a notice of sanction under the *Board of Directors Code of Conduct* to the Board for resolution
- F. Report the incident to the place of employment of the accused where appropriate.
- G. Commence disciplinary action if the accused is another employee of the College

Note:** In most foreseeable cases, abusive behaviour toward staff committed by a registrant of the College, would likely constitute ***conduct unbecoming the profession (i.e., conduct outside the practice of counselling therapy (i.e., in a personal or private capacity) that tends to bring discredit upon the counselling therapy profession).

SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Support for staff who have encountered abusive behaviour is available informally through colleagues, the EDR or any member of the Board (particularly the Chair or Vic-Chair). More formally, the staff member may seek assistance through the College's Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

PURPOSE

- To establish expectations regarding workplace behaviour and respectful treatment of staff
- To inform staff, registrants and the public of the College's zero tolerance approach to abusive behaviour toward staff

Acknowledgment: This policy was adapted in significant part from the Zero Tolerance Policy published by the Care Inspectorate (2016).