



Abusive Behaviour Toward Staff

Introduction

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.

POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.0** This policy establishes 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 staff. More specifically, the Regulator commits to:
 - 1.1** ensuring all staff are educated on how to identify abusive behaviour
 - 1.2** helping staff identify situations that pose an increased risk of abusive behaviour
 - 1.3** reducing staff vulnerability to abusive behaviour (i.e., environmental control)
 - 1.4** informing staff of controls in place to prevent and manage abusive behaviour
 - 1.5** 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
 - 1.6** empowering all staff to exercise their agency in helping to maintain a work environment free from abusive behaviour

- 1.7 pursuing robust action against all persons responsible for abusive behaviour toward staff

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 2.0 The Regulator has a duty to care for all of its staff whether working on-site or virtually.

- 2.1 We believe that all those who correspond with the Regulator, including those expressing concerns, dissatisfaction or complaints, have the right to be heard, understood and respected. We believe our staff share these same rights.

- 2.2 We value our employees and volunteers, and any form of abusive behaviour directed toward them will not be tolerated.

- 2.3 Staff are required to treat each other and everyone to whom they provide service in accordance with the values of:

- 2.3.1 Fairness: acting fairly, transparently and treating people equally

- 2.3.2 Respect: being respectful in engaging with others

- 2.3.3 Person-centredness: putting people at the centre of their work activities

- 2.3.4 Integrity: being impartial and acting to uphold the legislative mandate of the Regulator

- 2.3.5 Efficiency: striving to provide the best possible quality and public value from their work

- 2.4 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

- 3.0 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.

- 3.1 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:

- 3.1.1 **Violence** can be physical, or non-physical and include threats, abusive behavior and language (verbal and written), escalating agitation, yelling and intimidating body language.
- 3.1.2 **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.
- 3.1.3 **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.
- 3.1.4 **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
- 3.1.5 **Socially unacceptable language** in reference to a staff member's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, culture, or body.
- 3.1.6 **Sexual behaviour** -- used to threaten, intimidate or cause discomfiture.

PROCESS

- 4.0 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).
 - 4.1 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.
 - 4.2 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.
 - 4.2.1 If necessary, this may include calling 911 for emergency assistance.
 - 4.3 All employees have the legal right to report any incident in which they have been subject to abusive behaviour to the police.

4.3.1 They also have the right to expect the Regulator to support them in this decision and to assist them throughout the process as required.

4.4 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 or Vice-Chair if the incident involves the EDR).

4.5 It is the responsibility of the Executive Director & Registrar to respond to all incidents of abusive behavior toward staff.

4.6 The Executive Director & Registrar may initiate any or all of the following actions:

4.6.1 Investigate or cause an investigation to take place to obtain details of the incident.

4.6.2 Report the incident to appropriate organizations (e.g., police, employer of the person(s) alleged to have committed the abuse, etc.)

4.6.3 Advise the responsible party of the accusation, why their behaviour was unacceptable, the impact their behaviour has had, and discuss steps for moving forward.

4.6.4 File a formal complaint*

(i) against any registrant of the Regulator

(ii) to the appropriate Regulator if the accused is a regulated health professional,

(iii) to the person's employer if they are an not a regulated healthcare provider

4.6.5 Bring a request for sanction under the Board of Directors Code of Conduct to the Board for resolution if the accused is a member of the Board.

4.6.6 Report the incident to the place of employment of the accused where appropriate.

4.6.7 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, 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 STAFF SUPPORT

5.0 Support for staff who have encountered abusive behaviour is available informally through colleagues, and formally the Executive Director & Registrar, or the Board Chair or Vice-Chair.

5.1 None of the forgoing is intended to diminish or limit the right of affected staff to seek independent legal advice.

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

END

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