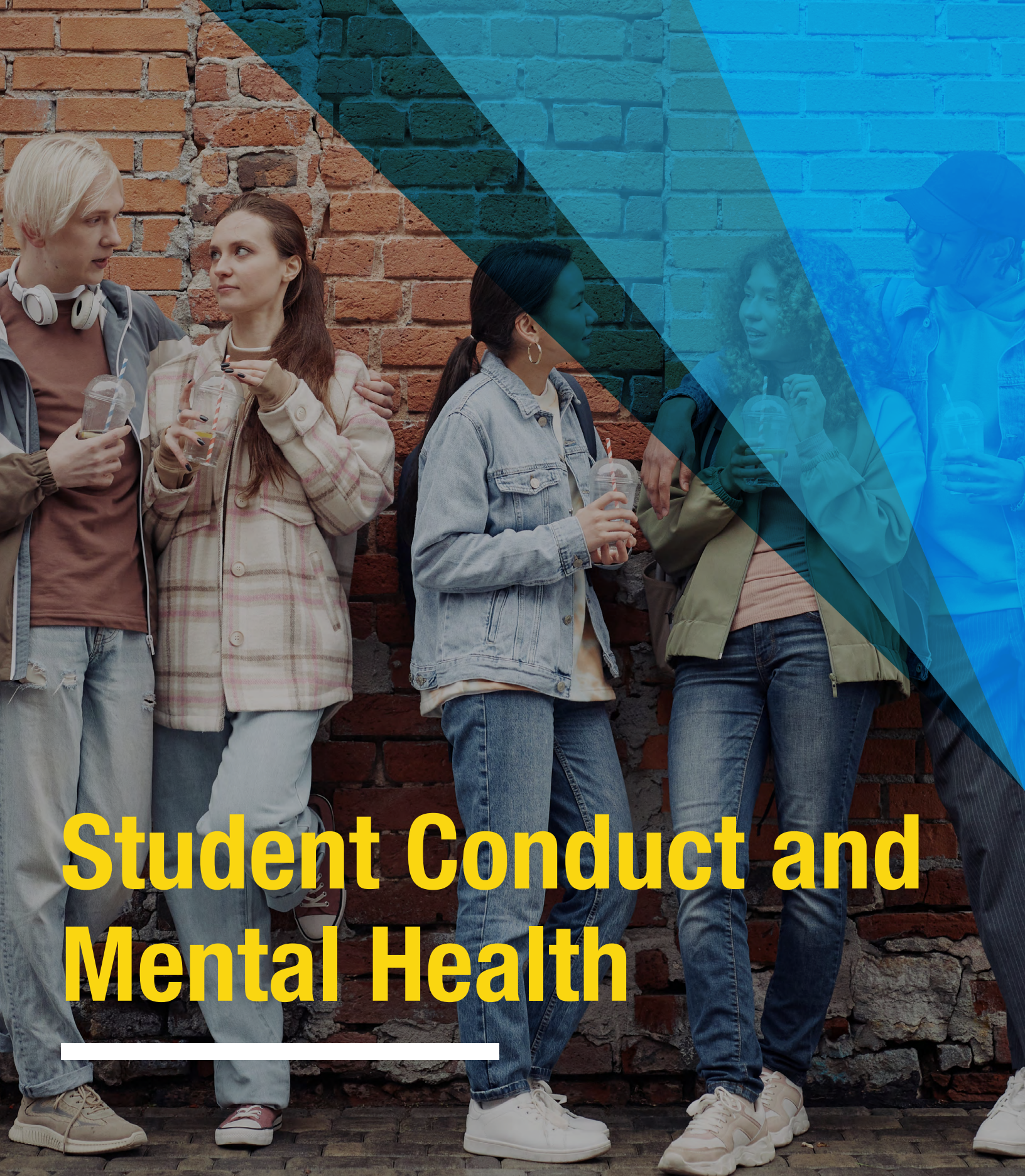

Student Conduct and Mental Health

CENTRE FOR INNOVATION IN CAMPUS MENTAL HEALTH

Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario

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About this Toolkit

Purpose Statement

The Student Conduct and Mental Health Toolkit is a guide for everyone in the campus community to understand how to effectively support post-secondary students facing behavioural disruptions, which often signal underlying mental health conditions. In recent years, student conduct has evolved to reflect a growing awareness of the complex relationship between conduct issues and mental health. This toolkit acknowledges these changes and aims to provide the campus community, including student conduct practitioners, case managers, faculty, administrative staff, counselling services, health services, student leaders, student services, and other student support services, with a clear understanding of student conduct. It allows them to provide support, make referrals, and collaborate with other campus departments, integrating restorative justice practices and focusing on the importance of multi-disciplinary teams and an integrated holistic approach to supporting students.

This toolkit focuses specifically on non-academic misconduct, as academic misconduct is addressed through separate procedures and managed by different staff within institutions.

This toolkit does not hope to create experts in this complex field, but instead seeks to improve and influence current processes, ensuring the campus community can better support students.

Please note, as with all our toolkits, this is a living document. As we continue to learn about this subject, more will be added to reflect emerging and promising practices as they relate to student conduct and mental health.

How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is intended for campus staff, faculty, and administrators who would like to know more about student conduct and mental health. We recommend using this toolkit in a way that makes sense to the reader's needs. We have designed this document in such a way that you can jump between sections, skip sections, or read the entire document from start to finish. This toolkit will include recommendations on actions to take related to supporting students. There is a complete list of all the recommendations at the end of this toolkit as well. You are welcome to print and/or download the full toolkit or any section you need.

If you are interested in campus spotlights, you will find them throughout the toolkit. If you have any questions or notice that we are missing a program from your post-secondary institution that could be featured in one of the spotlights, you can email the project lead, Julie Porrot, at **jporrot@campusmentalhealth.ca** or **info@campusmentalhealth.ca**.

Positionality Statement

This toolkit was created in collaboration with professionals from post-secondary institutions across Ontario who specialize in student conduct and are actively engaged in communities of practice dedicated to enhancing student support. While the lead on this project, Julie Porrot, does not come from a student conduct background, she brings experience in coordinating cross-institutional initiatives and a commitment to inclusive, student-centred approaches to post-secondary support. The internal contributor on this project, Selena Norman, is the campus-community lead at Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CICMH) and aided in reviewing and revising the content. This toolkit is grounded in an anti-oppressive and trauma-informed lens, ensuring that its guidance reflects principles of equity, care and responsiveness to diverse student experiences.

Authors and Acknowledgements

This toolkit would not have been possible without the knowledge and contributions from our collaborators.

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Introduction

What is Student Conduct?

Post-secondary institutions are committed to fostering student growth and development both inside and outside the classroom. A key part of this mission involves student conduct, which supports a safe, respectful and inclusive environment through formal policies and a Student Code of Conduct that guides the behaviour of the campus community.

According to the Association for Student Conduct Administration (ASCA) (2023), student conduct involves "the development and enforcement of standards of conduct and resolution of conflict for students [as] an educational endeavour that fosters students' personal and social development" (p. 1).

ASCA is an organization with its headquarters in the United States that serves members internationally, including Canada, and provides guidance designed to support student conduct professionals across the world.

Student conduct typically encompasses both academic and non-academic misconduct, which are generally addressed through separate processes.

➤ ***What is the Student Code of Conduct?***

The Student Code of Conduct is a set of principles and rules established by a post-secondary institution to outline the standards of behaviour and responsibilities expected of students. It serves to promote a respectful, safe, and inclusive learning environment by defining acceptable conduct and the consequences of misconduct. These codes can also be understood as guidelines that encourage both individual and shared responsibilities, fostering a sense of community on campus.

Note: Terminology varies across institutions, some refer to these guidelines as Codes of Conduct, others as Policies, Procedures, or Rights and Responsibilities documents. Regardless of the name, they all generally serve to outline expected student behaviour and the processes for addressing conduct matters.

Click **here** to view the full list of post-secondary institutions and their student Codes of Conduct. When you are done, simply return here to continue with the toolkit.

Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct refers to violations of an institution's academic integrity policy (which is founded on honesty, fairness, and mutual trust) that students are expected to uphold and respect in the learning environment (Gallant, 2008). These policies protect the value of academic credentials and ensure that students are evaluated based on their own work.

COMMON VIOLATIONS	DEFINITIONS	SCENARIO EXAMPLES
PLAGIARISM	Presenting someone else's work or ideas as your own without proper attribution	Liam wrote his essay by copying parts of articles he found online, only changing a few words. He didn't cite the sources.
CHEATING	Using unauthorized information, materials, devices or sources	Liam used a calculator that had answers stored in its memory during a math exam where devices were not allowed.
UNAUTHORIZED COLLABORATION	Working with others when not permitted	Liam and his roommate completed their online quiz together, even though the professor clearly asked for individual work.
BRIBERY OR INTIMIDATION	Offering incentives or using pressure/threats to gain academic advantage	Liam offered to buy his friend a concert ticket of her favourite artist if she wrote his lab report for him.
AIDING OR ABETTING	Assisting someone else to engage in academic misconduct	Liam asked to see his classmate's multiple-choice test so he could copy answers, insisting it "wouldn't affect" the classmate.

Non-Academic Misconduct

Non-academic misconduct involves behaviours that fall outside the academic context and violate institutional policies related to student behaviour. These may include violations of a student code policy, sexual violence policy or harassment and discrimination policy, for example.

COMMON VIOLATIONS	DEFINITIONS	SCENARIO EXAMPLES
SUBSTANCE USE VIOLATIONS	Use or possession of prohibited substances on campus or in residence	Violet and her floormates, who are under the age of 19, decided to pre-drink and vape in their residence's common room, even though alcohol and smoking/vaping are not allowed in shared spaces.
MISUSE OF PROPERTY	Theft, vandalism, or damage of campus facilities	Violet and her friend started collecting mugs from the cafeteria by taking one each week, even though removing them is considered theft.
ESCALATED INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT	Threats, intimidation, verbal or physical disagreements	After a heated argument about noise, Violet's roommate threatened to throw out all of Violet's clothes if she woke her up again, escalating the conflict.
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE	Sexual harassment, assault, or gender-based discrimination	At a party, Violet was intoxicated. Her boyfriend continued to touch her inappropriately even after she clearly said "no" multiple times.
DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR	In classrooms, residences, or other spaces on campus	Violet regularly plays loud music late at night in her room, disturbing her floormates who are trying to sleep or study.

This toolkit focuses on non-academic misconduct, as academic misconduct is addressed through distinct procedures and managed by separate staff within institutions.

Purpose of the Student Conduct Process

The goal of a student conduct process is to provide accountability for students when their actions impact the campus community. The approach aligns with a restorative framework that supports learning and personal growth (Schrage & Giacomini, 2020).

This process is not solely punitive, it is designed to be (Waryold & Lancaster, 2020):

- Informative
- Educational
- Developmental
- Thought-provoking

Student conduct professionals engage students in meaningful conversations that include:

- Exploring the perspectives of both the complainant and the respondent to gain a fuller understanding of the incident
- Exploring their values and decision-making
- Reflecting on the purpose of community standards and the consequences of violations
- Identifying steps to make things right

Overview of the Conduct Process

Scenario example: Student threatens professor during office hours

Incident Occurs

"*Student becomes angry over a grade and says to the professor, 'If you don't fix this, you'll regret it.'.*"

Student Conduct Meeting or Conversation

"*The professor reports the incident to the Student Conduct Office. Student is invited to a conduct meeting to discuss the reported behaviour.*"

Dialogue & Reflection

What happened? Who was affected? What could be done differently?

"*Student explains the situation to gather context and reflects on what went wrong.*"

Accountability & Learning

"*Student realizes their words were inappropriate, regardless of intent. They acknowledge it was unacceptable.*"

Outcome

"*Required reflection paper and emotional regulation workshop are assigned for accountability and learning.*"

Students participate in the conduct process in various roles, as respondents to allegations, as complainants who report violations, or witnesses. Regardless of a student's part in the conduct process, it can be stressful, even under the best circumstances.

Current Landscape Within Post-Secondary

A Brief Historical Context (Young, 2020):

A pivotal moment in the evolution of student conduct and mental health practices occurred on April 16, 2007, when a student opened fire at Virginia Tech in the United States, killing 32 students and faculty members. In the aftermath, post-secondary institutions, particularly in the United States, began to re-evaluate how they identify and respond to students of concern. The tragedy exposed critical gaps in communication, support systems, and coordinated responses, particularly for students exhibiting early signs of distress. Over time, this catalyzed a shift in post-secondary institutions toward more integrated, preventive approaches, recognizing student behaviour and mental health not as separate concerns, but as interconnected.

While Canada's context differs, particularly regarding access to firearms and campus safety protocols, the Virginia Tech incident nonetheless influenced international conversations around student support and risk assessment. As a result, roles like case managers and Behavioural Intervention Teams (BITs) have been developed across many campuses to address student more holistically, aiming to ensure that students receive support before behaviours escalate.

In Ontario, this shift was further underscored by the 2023 incident at the University of Waterloo, where two students and an instructor were stabbed in a gender studies class (CBC News, 2023). While such tragic events are rare in Canada, it raised concerns about campus safety and highlighted the need for more comprehensive approaches to student welfare. In its aftermath, many faculty and staff across Canadian institutions began reaching out to student conduct offices seeking support.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges to post-secondary institutions, intensifying issues related to student behaviour. Prolonged isolation, disrupted routines, and uncertainty led to a surge in mental health struggles among students (Savage et al., 2020), which, in turn, have had noticeable effects on campus life.

Specific behavioural trends have emerged, both during and after the return to in-person learning. Online teaching environments saw increases in disruptive behaviours such as background noise, disengagement, absenteeism, and distractibility (Baysal & Ocak, 2021). As students returned to

campus, many struggled with emotional regulation and social interactions, resulting in higher instances of interpersonal conflict, difficulty following community standards, increased swearing, and shorter tempers (Oxley et al., 2023). The pandemic also introduced new financial and academic stressors, further impacting students' ability to manage their responsibilities and overall well-being on campus (Ihm et al., 2021). These shifts are evident in the day-to-day campus experience, from residence life and classroom engagement to increased demands on student support and conduct offices.

*For more information on emotional regulation, check out **CICMH's infosheet.***

It is important to note that the majority of student conduct cases do not directly involve mental health concerns, nor are they typically related to students already on a BIT's radar. **Most student conduct cases are related to behaviour management and disciplinary matters rather than underlying mental health issues**. However, as campuses continue to evolve, there is an increasing recognition that behaviour issues may sometimes signal distress or unmet mental health needs (Stewart et al., 2016), even if not all cases are driven by mental health concerns.

The post-secondary environment is experiencing a significant shift in how student behaviour and mental health are understood and addressed. Behavioural disruptions are increasingly recognized as complex, and campus communities are adopting more compassionate, responsive, and coordinated approaches to address student conduct, while distinguishing between conduct issues and mental health concerns.

Institutions across Canada are seeing more complex student needs, increased demand for mental health services, and heightened awareness of systemic barriers impacting student wellness and behaviour (Canadian Association of College & University Student Services [CACUSS] & Canadian Mental Health Association [CMHA], 2013). There is a growing emphasis on trauma-informed practices, risk assessment and mitigation, and harm reduction strategies (Ritsma, 2020). At the same time, post-secondary institutions are navigating resource limitations, calls for transparency, and the need to balance individual support with community safety (CACUSS & CMHA, 2013; Thaivalappil et al., 2023).

*For practical guidance, see our **CICMH Trauma-Informed Practice & Care Toolkit***

Student conduct systems have evolved beyond rule enforcement toward approaches centered on education, support, and restoration. This shift is supported by the integration of BITs, case management strategies, and cross-campus collaboration among student affairs, academic faculties, and health and wellness services. In this dynamic landscape, this toolkit serves as a bridge between understanding and action, equipping campuses with the knowledge needed to navigate complexity with confidence and care.

*For practical guidance, see our **CICMH Harm Reduction Toolkit***

Campus Spotlights:

- Seneca College's BIT Policy brings together staff from **counselling, student conduct, accessibility learning services, student conduct, resilience life, and security services** to support students exhibiting concerning behaviours, including violence, self-directed harm, and mental health challenges. The team works collaboratively to assess and manage risks, offering timely support and interventions for concerns related to adjustment problems, misconduct and mental disorder.

- Queen's University publishes detailed **yearly reports on non-academic misconduct**, offering insights into trends in student behaviour. In the 2023–2024 report, 95% of incidents occurred in residence, with the top four misconduct categories being disruptive behaviour (e.g., failure to comply, alcohol/cannabis use), property-related issues (e.g., theft, damage), fire and life safety violations (e.g., pulling fire alarms, setting fires), and interpersonal misconduct (e.g., harassment, sexual violence). The report also revealed that 85% of violations were committed by male students, and 72% by first-year students. Most outcomes/sanctions were educational (e.g., workshops, reflection seminars), followed by corrective (e.g., no-contact orders, loss of privileges), and restorative measures (e.g., community service, apologies). This transparent reporting supports more informed and responsive conduct practices on campus.

- The University of Toronto publishes **annual statistics on non-academic discipline**, highlighting trends in only formal case resolutions following the Code. In the 2022–2023 report, common offenses included those against persons, unauthorized use of university facilities or services, unauthorized entry, property-related violations, and unauthorized possession or use of firearms or ammunition. The report also notes that the majority of cases are resolved within six months from the date of the offense to the case's conclusion.

The following general recommendations lay the foundation for strategies which are explored throughout the toolkit to guide faculty and staff in applying key conduct values across their interactions with students.

Recommendations:

Adopt a student-centered approach

Faculty and staff should adopt a student-centered approach by recognizing the diverse and unique needs of all students involved in campus interactions, whether they are involved in a formal conduct process or not. This means fostering a supportive and productive environment (Karasova & Nehyba, 2023).

- *For example, a professor notices that a student is disengaged in class and chooses to reach out privately to check-in and offer support, making a referral to campus resources if needed, rather than immediately penalizing the student for lack of participation.*

Emphasize education over punishment and prioritize restorative practices

Faculty and staff should consider educational approaches and restorative practices in their interactions with students. While formal conduct processes may be necessary in some cases, non-punitive methods like reflection, mediation, and repair plans help students learn from their actions and create opportunities for healing and growth (Karp & Sacks, 2014).

- *For example, after a student caused disruption in residence, they are asked to write an apology letter to their floormates and meet with a residence staff, instead of only receiving a fine.*

Integrate trauma-informed and anti-oppressive practices

All members of the campus community should recognize how common trauma is and integrate trauma-informed and anti-oppressive practices into their work with students. Understanding the impact of trauma ensures that students are not re-traumatized by campus procedures, policies, or interpersonal interactions (Schroeder et al., 2024).

*You can learn more from CICMH's **Trauma-Informed Practice & Care Toolkit** and our two-part **Anti-Oppressive Practices Toolkit**.*

- *For example, a conduct practitioner allows a student to bring a support person to a meeting to create a space where the student feels safe.*

Balance student accountability with compassion, empathy and care

Faculty and staff should hold students accountable for their actions while demonstrating compassion, empathy, and care. This balance is important for creating an environment where students can take responsibility for their actions, while also feeling supported in their personal growth (Karp & Sacks, 2014).

- *For example, a professor addresses a classroom disruption by having a private discussion with the student to understand the pressure they are experiencing, while still upholding institutional policies, and if needed, referring them to the BIT for support.*

Importance of Integrating Mental Health in Student Conduct

In today's campus climate and with current student cohorts, student conduct work has grown increasingly complex (McNaughton-Cassill, 2013). Student conduct offices are not only managing higher case volumes but are also supporting students experiencing mental health challenges alongside behavioural concerns (Bauer, 2022; Mandracchia & Pendleton, 2015). This complexity calls for intentional collaboration between student conduct professionals and those working in mental health and accessibility services, recognizing that accountability is an essential component of holistic care for students.

The **2020 National Association for Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment (NABITA) Whitepaper**, "*The Intersection of BIT and Conduct*", outlines the need to integrate accountability processes into the overall support provided to students exhibiting high risk behaviours:

One of the most common mistakes a team makes is skipping standard disciplinary actions for BIT cases thinking they are being thoughtful and supportive by avoiding having the student go through the conduct process. Unfortunately, this can create inconsistent standards across the educational community, and the team loses the opportunity to reset expectations and document patterns of concerning behaviors. (p. 2)

A holistic and supportive approach to student conduct can lead to more meaningful and lasting behavioural change in students. As described in the 2020 NABITA Whitepaper:

When we hold all students accountable for their behavior, including those with mental health issues, we are able to clearly demonstrate to the student which behaviors are acceptable, and which are not. In this way, the conduct process becomes a mechanism for behavior change and a valuable tool in fostering student development and success. (p. 11)

Restorative vs. Punitive Approaches

As the field of student conduct has evolved, there has been a notable shift away from punitive models toward educational and restorative approaches (Karp & Conrad, 2005). The conduct process is no longer something that happens to students, but instead, students are engaged as active participants in their own growth through accountability, reflection, and understanding the impact of their actions.

It is essential to recognize that restorative justice practices are rooted in Indigenous traditions both globally and in Canada (Karp 2013; Leung 1999). Implementing restorative justice practices on campus must be approached with cultural sensitivity and respect. Facilitators should receive training in restorative techniques, and institutions must engage with local Indigenous communities to ensure practices are applied ethically and appropriately.

Many institutional policies were built on framework that reflect colonial ideologies, often neglecting the realities of Indigenous peoples. To explore how these structures have created trauma, see the section below on "How Policy has Created Trauma and its Roots in History".

Restorative justice is not a trend or a buzzword, it is a culturally grounded approach that has been used for generations as a means of accountability and community healing (Hewitt, 2016). In the post-secondary context, it must be implemented with a deep understanding of its origins, with a commitment to honoring those roots and confronting the enduring legacy of colonialism. According to a Department of Justice Canada report, decolonization and reconciliation signal a shift from ongoing colonialism towards a nation-to-nation relationship based on recognition, respect, and cooperation (Chartrand & Horn, 2016). The report also notes that colonialism has been profoundly destructive to Indigenous kinship practices, and that because Indigenous-Canada relations remain governed by colonial structures, Indigenous communities often cannot fully exercise their historic legal traditions. By embracing restorative justice in a manner that honors Indigenous law and community, campus professionals can support pathways toward resisting, healing, and genuine reconciliation. For more on the impact of colonialism within the post-secondary setting, and strategies for engaging in anti-oppressive practice, readers are encouraged to consult CICMH's **Anti-Oppressive Practice Toolkit**.

The current landscape of student conduct is increasingly shaped by restorative principles and approaches. Waryold and Lancaster (2020) note that "Student conduct practitioners often live in the 'intent versus impact' world as they work with individuals and groups to recognize one's intent may be quite different from the impact that occurred" (p. 24). Take for example Bill, a first-year student who made a discriminatory comment during a group project that unintentionally offended a classmate. While Bill did not mean to hurt anyone, the comment had a real impact. The consequences of Bill's actions still matter, and student conduct processes aim to bridge that gap by fostering understanding, responsibility, and growth. While the public may still associate the conduct process with adversarial-style hearings and punitive measures such as fines, student conduct professionals have made intentional efforts to move beyond this outdated perception. At the same time, there is often pressure, particularly from those submitting conduct claims, for more punitive responses. Restorative or educational approaches can sometimes be misunderstood as lenient or ineffective. However, restorative justice requires courage, creativity, and in some cases, may include sanctions (for example, no-contact orders or loss of privileges) to support safety and trust in the process. These measures do not negate the restorative nature of the approach, but instead, they can complement it, especially when designed to protect the safety of those harmed while enabling accountability and healing. The focus has shifted toward recognizing the harm caused by certain behaviours and working collaboratively with students to develop meaningful outcomes. This approach is grounded in research and best practices, which demonstrate that it is more effective at fostering accountability and resolving non-academic misconduct.

Table 1

Restorative vs. Punitive Approaches

	RESTORATIVE APPROACH	PUNITIVE APPROACH
CHARACTERISTICS	• Collaborative process • Involves all impacted parties, including victims, offenders, and community members • Centers repairing harm and fostering accountability • Encourages personal growth and reintegration	• Administrator-led quasi-judicial process • Excludes most of the impacted parties, harmed victims, and the community • Centers rules and punishment • Encourages compliance to policy
FOCUS	• Focus is on the harm caused by the behaviour and the affected parties	• Focus is on the offense and the offender • Rule enforcement and institutional compliance
OUTCOMES	• Reflection on and acknowledgement of harm • Outcomes are generated through dialogue • Supports reintegration into the campus community	• Suspension, expulsion, or loss of privileges • May fail to address root causes of behaviour
EXAMPLE ***STUDENT IN RESIDENCE STEALS ANOTHER STUDENT'S PROPERTY.***	• Student would meet with the harmed student and a facilitator to acknowledge the harm caused, take responsibility, and agree on steps to make things right	• Student would undergo a quasi-judicial hearing with a focus on determining whether a policy was violated and imposing consequences, with little involvement of the harmed student

Note. Karp 2013; Karp & Sacks 2014; Schrage & Giacomini, 2020; Sullivan & Witenstein, 2022; Zehr, 2002

Definition of 'quasi-judicial':
A quasi-judicial hearing is a formal process, similar to a court proceeding, where administrators (not an official judge) decide whether a student violated policies and determine appropriate consequences. The focus is on fact-finding and discipline, rather than restoring harm (Legal Information Institute (LII), n.d.)

➤ If you would like to see examples of **how to interact with students and make referrals in accordance with restorative justice**, see the conversations below. These scenario-based examples were written by a student conduct professional to illustrate trauma-informed, restorative responses in real-life contexts.

Purpose: These scripted role plays are designed to help faculty and staff understand how to navigate situations where mental health, student behaviour, and conduct intersect.

SCENARIO 1: Bullying and Suicidality Claims

➤ **Important Note on Suicide and Mental Health**
Any mention of suicide should be taken seriously. This scenario is not meant to dismiss suicidal thoughts but to help faculty/staff respond with care while upholding accountability. Faculty/staff may consult with mental health services or CARE teams when there is a safety concern, following confidentiality guidelines.

Summary: *A student has been reported for bullying a classmate via online harassment. When confronted about the behaviour, the student becomes highly emotional and states, "If you report me, I might as well kill myself." The staff member is unsure whether this is a genuine mental health crisis or a manipulative tactic to avoid accountability.*

Student: "If you report me, I might as well kill myself."

Staff: "That sounds really heavy, can you tell me what's making you feel this way?"

Student: "I just can't have the university finding out about this. If I have a Student Conduct violation on my record, I will never get into law school. I don't have a back-up plan."

Staff: "Alright, I hear that you're worried about how this could affect your future. It is part of my responsibilities to report situations like this to the Student Conduct Office. But I think it might help if we reach out to our CARE team. They can explain the impact of a conduct process, connect you with a counsellor, and help process academic consideration requests. Can we reach out to them together?"

If the student refuses support or does not want to engage: contact the Student Conduct Office or the CARE Team if there is any indication of risk to life, as this becomes a safety concern. You are permitted to consult with these teams, respecting confidentiality guidelines.

SCENARIO 2: Substance Use

Summary: *An academic advisor meets with a student who appears visibly agitated and smells strongly of alcohol on their breath during a scheduled appointment. The student becomes verbally aggressive, swearing at the advisor when asked if everything is okay. When the advisor expresses concern, the student breaks down expressing fear that their parents will find out about their drinking or that they will be kicked out of the institution. The student expresses anxiety and says they can't handle this on top of school stress.*

Advisor: "Before we move on, I'm getting the feeling that there may be something else going with you and I'm concerned you might have been drinking before this meeting. Are you okay?"

Student: "Oh F*** off! Can you just do your job and get this s*** over with?"

Advisor: "I can't continue this appointment if you aren't in the right headspace to make decisions or if you're swearing at me, but I do care about how you're doing. I want to make sure you're safe and supported."

This moment is an example of how staff can maintain clear boundaries while still expressing care. Refer to the ***CICMH Boundaries Infosheet*** *for more information.*

Student: "Don't tell anyone! If you tell people and my parents find out, I'll be kicked out. I just had a drink to calm down, I was nervous."

Advisor: "I hear you, it sounds like you're under a lot of pressure. I want you to know that what you share with me is kept confidential unless there's a serious, foreseeable, and imminent risk to your safety or someone else's. I want to make sure you're connected with people who can best support you. I can help with academic planning, but right now it seems like there are other things you might need help with first. Does that sound fair? I think connecting you with our CARE team would be a good next step, they can support you while we also work on your academics."

Student: "I don't know if that will help… but okay."

Advisor: "I'll send an email to the CARE team and you so they can reach out. Let's plan to meet next week to continue this conversation and make sure you're on track academically."

Student: "Thanks. I'm sorry for getting mad."

Advisor: "I appreciate that. It's hard to be sworn at and I hope you're in a better place when we meet again."

SCENARIO 3: Accommodation Dispute Framed as Discrimination

Summary: *A student with a documented disability is upset because a professor did not grant them an extension. The student tells a staff member they feel the institution is discriminating against them.*

Student: "This place sucks. How is it legal that the professor denied my extension request when it is in my Letter of Accommodation? I can't believe I am being discriminated against."

Staff: "That's tough that you didn't get your accommodation! It must feel so unfair, maybe even discriminatory."

Student: "I just don't know where to start even if I wanted to complain! I sent an email to my Accessibility Advisor, but I don't know where to go from there. And then there's the fact that I failed the assignment."

Staff: "There is this office on campus that may be able to discuss your options and help connect you with all the campus partners necessary to look into this matter. Would you feel comfortable if we called them together?"

SCENARIO 4: Faculty Concern About Student's Behaviour

Summary: *A faculty member contacts the student conduct office about a student in their class who "mumbles to themselves, seems agitated, and never makes eye contact." The faculty member feels uncomfortable and believes the student might be dangerous.*

Faculty: "I have some concerns about a student in my class. I'm starting to worry that this student may pose a risk to the other students and myself."

Student Conduct Office: "Tell me more about what you are seeing in class."

Faculty: "The student is often mumbling to themselves and seems restless and agitated in their movements. The student never makes eye contact with me even when participating in discussion or asking a question."

Student Conduct Office: "How is their participation in class and in assignments? Are they using offensive language? Yelling at other students or yourself? Any concerns with the content of their assignments?"

Faculty: "When they participate, it is relevant to the topic. It's not so much yelling, profanity, or threats. I can see that the other students are uncomfortable and nervous. I'm nervous. You never know what might happen and I don't want to ignore what I am seeing."

Student Conduct Office: "Thank you for bringing me your concerns. While the behaviour you described doesn't violate the Code of Conduct, I don't want to ignore your intuition that this student may need some more support. Let's make a referral to our CARE team."

SCENARIO 5: Classroom Disruption

Summary: *A student regularly interrupts class with loud and angry comments. They challenge professors, speak over peers, and have caused several classmates to complain. When spoken to, the student claims they are just passionate. There's concern this behaviour may be linked to a mental health issue.*

Professor: "I'd like to discuss what happened in class today. You were loud and interrupted several of your classmates during discussion."

Student: "I really care about this topic. It's not my fault that everyone else is too stupid to understand how important it is."

Professor: "I'm happy to hear that you are passionate about the topic. It's my job to make sure that everyone has a chance to participate in discussions to support their learning. It can be hard for someone to feel comfortable in discussion when they feel like they are going to be interrupted or called stupid."

Student: "They need to get over it. It's not my problem if they are too scared."

Professor: "In my class, I expect everyone, including you, to listen when others are talking, to avoid interrupting, and avoid insults in discussions. Next class, I am going to reset these expectations for the whole class. If these expectations are violated, I will be reporting it to the Student Conduct Office."

Student: "I will try but sometimes I don't realize I am doing it until it is too late. I'm just really passionate and people have always made me feel like a problem for it."

Professor: "It sounds like you have gotten similar feedback before. Have you ever worked with someone to make a plan around these situations?"

Student: "No. Is there someone that would talk to me about this? I don't think I need counselling."

Professor: "There is an office on campus that would be willing to plan out some strategies for these scenarios. If you are interested, I will email them with my discussion expectations and ask them to reach out to you to strategize around these expectations."

➤ For more guidance, see **CICMH's "How to Support Students Who Are Behaving Disruptively in Class" infosheet** in the **Mental Health Crisis Response on Campus Toolkit**.

Click **here** to access printable reflection prompts related to these scenarios, with space to write your responses and reflect on how to respond with care and compassion in similar situations.

Campus Spotlights

- **Dalhousie University** updated their Code of Conduct in 2021 to include three intervention streams to manage reports of non-academic misconduct, based on impact and risk to the community. These include: a case management approach (no formal policy violation applied), a non-investigative formal code process, and a formal investigative code process, with each stream reflecting increasing levels of safety risk and impact.

- **University of Alberta** Residence Services takes a restorative approach to addressing violations of the Residence Community Standards Policy and House Rules. When appropriate and with full voluntary participation, they may have restorative meetings (facilitated conversations focused on repairing harm and rebuilding trust), restorative conferences (bringing together those harmed, those who caused harm, facilitators, community members, and support people), or community resolutions (informal discussions to identify harm and solve the problem collaboratively) depending on the context and the willingness of those involved.

How Policy has Created Trauma and its Roots in History

Policies are never truly neutral. They are shaped by historical, social, cultural, and political forces, which have too often been rooted in colonialism, racism, ableism, and systemic exclusion (El-Lahib, 2015; Karmiris, 2021). In post-secondary institutions, this legacy of harmful frameworks continues to play out in policies that disproportionately impact Indigenous, Black, equity-deserving, 2SLGBTQIA+, neurodivergent students, and students with disabilities (Hernández & Harris, 2022; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2020).

These systems have often been constructed within Eurocentric and colonial ideologies (Bagshaw et al., 2022). As such, students from equity-deserving groups are disproportionately affected by these frameworks and are often over-represented in reporting data (Eaton, 2022). Rather than recognizing expressions of identity, culture, or trauma, student conduct processes often frame these behaviours as deviant.

Styres (2020) describes how Indigenous students face both direct and subtle forms of racism within post-secondary institutions. Instances include being labeled as disruptive when voicing Indigenous perspectives or facing punitive measures for advocating Indigenous rights, reflecting systemic biases in disciplinary practices (Styres, 2020). One student explained that “if you’re a good student and don’t say anything, you’ll be successful. But if you stand up for your rights then you’re penalized in a lot of ways” (p. 165).

*For those interested in exploring anti-oppressive practices, be sure to check out CICMH’s **Part 1** and **Part 2** Toolkit, which offers practical strategies and resources for applying anti-oppressive practices on campus.*

Transforming student conduct policies requires rethinking their foundations to build more inclusive and equitable educational environments. Restorative and trauma-informed approaches offer pathways that prioritize repairing harm, restoring relationships, and strengthening communities over punishment (Eaton, 2022). By addressing systemic inequities and creating policies that are more reflective of diverse student identities, institutions can build policies that foster belonging, safety, accountability, and justice for all.

The following reflections highlight the importance of understanding how these policies are rooted in systemic inequities and how their application continues to affect students today:

- **Historical policies have sustained trauma and exclusion**
  From residential schools to policies of forced assimilation, Canadian institutions and educational systems have long contributed to the displacement and dehumanization of Indigenous peoples (Bombay et al., 2015). These policies were not isolated errors or historical missteps, but deliberate systemic tools of colonization (Chartrand & Horn, 2016). Their impacts continue through intergenerational trauma, institutional mistrust, and the ongoing marginalization of Indigenous students (Ontario Human Rights Commission [OHRC], 2022; Wilk et al., 2017).

- **Student conduct policies often reflect dominant norms**
  Many conduct systems were built around narrow definitions of "appropriate" behaviour, often grounded in white, Western, able-bodied, cisnormative, and middle-class standards (Bagshaw et al., 2022; Ekpe & Roach, 2023). Expressions of identity and behaviours that fall outside these norms are more likely to be viewed as disruptive or problematic, rather than expressions of cultural difference, survival, or distress. This dynamic results in equity-deserving students facing heightened surveillance and disproportionate disciplined action (Hinojosa, 2016).

  *For more on how students may struggle to navigate these unfamiliar expectations, see our **Learning Shock infosheet**.*

- **The impact of colonialism is not in the past; it remains ongoing**
  Colonial systems are structured around hierarchy, control, and compliance, values that continue to influence institutional practices today. In student conduct processes, these influences can manifest through an emphasis on rule enforcement, control, and punishment over relational accountability, connection, and repair (Macfarlane, 2014). A trauma-informed approach calls for a critical examination of how such systems operate and for whom they are designed to serve or exclude.

- **Policy can support healing, but only when reimagined**
  When grounded in equity, dignity, and historical awareness, policies can be a powerful tool that supports safety, clarity, and fairness (OHRC, 2022). This requires involving students and communities with lived experience in policy creation, addressing systemic inequities directly, and being willing to adapt practices that cause harm (Rietbergen-McCracken, 2020). Restorative approaches and centering human connection over bureaucracy must be prioritized over punitive measures (Karp & Sacks, 2014).

- **Integrating policy with care is not enough, transformation is essential**
  Beyond compassionate interpretation, true transformation requires a fundamental rethinking of the policies themselves. Critical questions must be asked: *What is the policy trying to protect? Whose safety is prioritized? How is harm defined, and who has the authority to decide?* These inquiries are not just theoretical questions; they shape whether students feel seen, heard, and safe on campus (Johnny & Inn, 2025).

The following recommendations are designed to help faculty and staff recognize how policies are roots in colonialism and systemic trauma, and to inspire reflection on how you can contribute to creating a more restorative campus environment in your role.

Recommendations:

Confront historical and ongoing harm

Acknowledge the colonial and systemic inequities embedded in traditional student conduct systems. Recognize how policies and processes have disproportionately impacted equity-deserving communities.

- *For example, research and data have shown that Black students are often overrepresented in student misconduct cases, meaning they are more likely to be reported (Eaton, 2022).*
    - How do you identify and confront patterns of institutional bias in your work?
    - What steps are you taking to support equity-deserving communities in moments of conflict?
    - What actions can you take within your role to ensure fairness and inclusion?
    - Are you engaging in continuous learning about anti-racism?

Make conduct policies fair and inclusive

Review and revise conduct policies to eliminate bias, incorporate trauma-informed and restorative practices. Shift away from punishment as the default response and prioritize healing.

- *For example, Zara, a second-year international student is reported for being "aggressive" during a class discussion. Navigating both language and cultural barriers, her communication style was misinterpreted. Rather than proceeding with formal discipline, a restorative circle is offered, where Zara and her classmates share how the conversation felt.*
    - Do you have the ability to influence or review student-related policies? If not, what are some practical ways you can incorporate trauma-informed and restorative practices into your interactions with students?
    - When a student causes harm or concern, do you always turn to formal discipline? What are other approaches that you could try instead?

Center equity-deserving student voices

Students with lived experience should help shape the development and review of conduct policies to ensure they are inclusive and fair. While students should not be involved in peer-to-peer adjudication, they can be trained, mentored, supported, and compensated, to serve as peer mediators. In this role, they can assist with early conflict resolution, de-escalation, and prevention efforts, contributing to a safer and more connected campus environment.

- *For example, at the University of Toronto, the Grad Conflict Resolution Centre once ran a **G2G Peer Advisors program**, where trained graduate students served as trained peer conflict coaches. They supported fellow students in navigating conflict before they escalate, by facilitating emotionally charged discussions and offering tools.*

    - Are there opportunities on your campus to learn more about conflict resolution? Have you explored available trainings or workshops?

    - As a student leader, how can you contribute to creating a safer, more connected campus community?

    - *[Tip: Check out the **More Feet on the Ground** training for ways to recognize, respond and refer your peers.]*

Redefine safety and accountability

Expand definitions of safety and harm to reflect diverse realities and ensure fairness in all disciplinary practices. Embrace definitions that reflect cultural and psychological safety and ensure accountability measures consider context and power dynamics.

- *For example, Tina, a trans student, reports being continuously misgendered by their roommate. At first, the residence assistant sees it as a simple miscommunication. However, through a trauma-informed lens, the harm is acknowledged as real and ongoing. A restorative conference is organized bringing together those involved to acknowledge the impact, rebuild trust and ensure both students receive support.*

    - What does safety mean to you?

    - How do you define harm in your role and what are some harms that might go unnoticed?

    - What does accountability look like in a situation like this? Is it about punishment, education, or something else?

Discrimination and harm can also occur toward faculty/staff, especially those from equity-deserving groups. Institutions need to acknowledge and address this harm through appropriate support and accountability.

- *For example, a faculty member who is a person of colour receives a complaint from a white student who questions their teaching competence due to their accent. Rather than dismissing the comment as ignorance, the faculty member brings the concern forward. The Conduct Office arranges a facilitated conversation and refers the student to an anti-racism learning module, while ensuring the faculty member receives support.*

    - What supports exist for staff facing harm?

Campus Spotlights

- **York University** introduced its **Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (DEDI) Strategy** (2023–2028), which acknowledges the impact of colonial structures and integrates decolonization efforts across the institution. The strategy clearly defines its core principles, including decolonization, connects them to broader equity goals, while also recognizing the various forms of discrimination and oppression present in higher education. It builds upon and enhances existing frameworks, such as the **Indigenous Framework** and the **Framework and Action Plan on Black Inclusion**.

- The **Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism (EDI-R)** at the **University of Waterloo** is advancing the implementation of 88 recommendations from the President's Anti-Racism Taskforce (PART), underscoring the university's commitment to addressing and dismantling systemic racism. These efforts involve integrating equity, anti-racism, and anti-oppression principles into institutional systems, decision-making processes, policies, and practices. To support this work, the university has developed tools such as a **Consultation Guide** and an **Evaluation Guide** to help policymakers embed these principles throughout all stages of policy development and review.

Best Practices in Student Conduct – Holistic Approach

Student conduct processes offer an opportunity for education, accountability, harm repair, and support. Addressing student conduct from a holistic approach requires acknowledgment of the oppressive and traumatic history of policy enforcement and recognition of the broader context of each students' experience, including their mental health, lived identities, and systemic challenges. This section outlines some best practices that center empathy, equity, and care, to minimize the risk of re-traumatization.

Understanding Student Behaviour and Mental Health

Issues of student misconduct rarely exist in isolation, they often manifest at the intersection of experiences such as, academic pressures, mental health struggles, housing insecurity, financial stress, racism, and oppression (Limone & Toto, 2022). To truly support students, those addressing misconduct must maintain a curious and empathetic approach, considering the whole student in their response. This means taking a trauma-informed approach that emphasizes understanding the root causes of behaviour rather than simply reacting to its surface-level manifestations (Ritsma, 2020).

A trauma-informed approach requires asking questions such as:

- What is this behaviour trying to communicate?
- What are the conditions that may have led to this moment?
- What needs does this behaviour reveal?
- How can we respond in a way that encourages accountability while offering opportunities for healing and support?

By taking the time to understand the social context of each student's whole experience, staff and faculty can maintain curiosity and respond in ways that encourage accountability while also offering space for healing. This process requires collaboration across campus departments to create a full picture of what may be informing the students' behaviour. Only when there is context provided can there truly be a commitment to equitable responses to student conduct that center care and restoration.

➤ Common Mental Health Conditions Impacting Student Behaviour

Many mental health challenges can manifest in student behaviour, affecting academic performance and interpersonal relations. Below is a list of common mental health concerns, their symptoms, and how they may affect behaviour:

1. **Anxiety or Excessive Worry** (Killu et al., 2016)
   - **Symptoms:** Excessive worry, restlessness, irritability
   - **Impact on behaviour:** may present as avoidance (e.g., missing classes or assignments), difficulty with social interactions, concentration, memory and attention issues

2. **Low Mood or Persistent Sadness** (Hysenbegasi et al., 2005)
   - **Symptoms**: depressed mood, diminished interest in most activities, low energy, feelings of worthlessness
   - **Impact on behaviour:** withdrawal from academic or social activities, decreased quality of work, sleep disturbances, appetite changes

3. **Difficulty Regulating Emotions** (Uludag, 2013)
   - **Symptoms:** frequent aggressive outbursts (verbal or physical aggression), angry mood
   - **Impact on behaviour:** disruptions in class, antisocial tendencies, difficulty managing emotions, lower academic scores

4. **Stress or Trauma Responses** (Mental Health America [MHA], 2021)
   - **Symptoms:** difficulty managing emotions, difficulty concentrating, feelings of low self-worth, hypervigilance/hyperawareness
   - **Impact on behaviour:** outbursts of anger and aggressive response, classroom disruption, isolation, substance use, excessive worry, unwanted or repetitive contact, heightened reactivity

5. **Challenges with Attention and Organization** (Plamondon & Martinussen, 2019)
   - **Symptoms:** inattention, difficulty completing tasks or following instructions
   - **Impact on behaviour:** difficulty with class participation/engagement and homework completion

Note: This is a brief list of common mental health concerns and how they might manifest in student behaviour. Understanding these symptoms can help staff and faculty better interpret student actions and provide more effective, compassionate support. Recognizing the overlap between mental health and conduct issues is crucial to fostering a holistic educational environment.

For a deeper, practical understanding, we encourage you to participate in our **More Feet on the Ground** free online training course, designed to equip any campus professional or student leader looking to learn how to recognize, respond, and refer students experiencing mental health issues on campus.

- **Racial Trauma & Oppression Impacting Student Behaviour**
  Research repeatedly shows that equity-deserving communities experience mental health challenges at higher rates due to their experiences of systemic oppression, racism, and exclusion. Additionally, these populations are less likely to seek professional help for their mental health struggles due to a lack of representation (Mental Health Commission of Canada [MHCC], 2021). This is important to consider in student conduct because it sheds light on what equity-deserving students are often carrying, and how such mental weight may impact their conduct. Symptoms of racial trauma often look very similar to those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and would impact the behaviour of students in similar ways (Flores et al., 2010).

Integrating Mental Health into the Conduct Process

Moving toward a more holistic, trauma-informed approach to student conduct means considering mental health at every stage of the student conduct process; from the initial contact to the closing of the conduct case (Bauer, 2022). All faculty and staff involved in the conduct process must be equipped to respond with curiosity, compassion, and support. Student conduct professionals and decision makers must have at minimum, some training in identifying the basic signs of mental health challenges, as well as an understanding of how to operate from a trauma-informed and anti-oppressive framework (Bauer, 2022; Ritsma, 2020).

When addressing student conduct, it is important to recognize that no single response is appropriate for all types of offenses. It truly is a case-by-case process. Depending on the nature and severity of the offense, conduct offices may employ a range of responses, from punitive measures to restorative or educational alternatives. In some incidents when violence and/or sexual/gender-based violence is involved, there might be a need for more punitive measures to prioritize the safety of complainants/survivors. That said, even in these situations, restorative justice approaches can sometimes be part of the process and include appropriate sanctions such as no-contact orders or loss of privileges. These measures can be interim or long-term and are often used alongside restorative outcomes. In conduct cases that involve non-violent offenses, such as vandalism, theft or sabotaging research materials, restorative and educational approaches might be more effective. Offering alternatives to punishments such as reflection assignments, mediated conversations, and community repair plans is important, as it allows institutions to hold students accountable while being supportive and compassionate (Karp & Sacks, 2014).

Collaboration is also critical for the integration of mental health in the conduct process as it offers the opportunity to recognize trends and patterns across departments, allowing for the creation of preventative measures that reduce occurrences of student misconduct, promote better student health, and connect students to the resources they require for wrap around support such as, counselling, accessibility services, Indigenous/Black student supports etc. (Lyon et al., 2016).

Many mental health conditions can lead to behaviours that disrupt classroom activities, such as difficulty concentrating, emotional outbursts, impulsivity, and social withdrawal. These behaviours might be misinterpreted as conduct issues that require punitive solutions, rather than being understood as symptoms of underlying mental health challenges. It is essential to approach these situations with a focus on proper referral and support early on, rather than simply resorting to punitive discipline, before the issue becomes too complicated. While students should still be held accountable and are expected to follow institutional policies, staff and faculty should recognize the intersections between mental health and behaviour and stay curious about the context in which these issues arise.

For more information on how to effectively support students, please refer to our **Mental Health Crisis Response on Campus Toolkit** and when you are done, simply return here to continue with the toolkit.

Creating an Inclusive and Supportive Environment

Creating an inclusive and supportive environment with student conduct processes is essential to fostering trust and promoting positive outcomes for all students. Collaboration across departments improves consistency in messaging and ensures transparency throughout the conduct process. When students understand the expectations and see consistency in how policies are enforced, they are more likely to trust the institution and feel supported (Medina & Rufín, 2015). This is particularly important for students who have experienced systemic racism, oppression, and other trauma within systems. Consistent messaging across departments can help to break down barriers and foster an environment where students feel their challenges, particularly related to mental health, are understood and respected (Harris et al., 2022).

Building trust with students requires creating a classroom and campus culture that prioritizes inclusivity and understanding. When mental health is openly discussed, it normalizes students' experiences, encourages them to disclose any challenges they may face, and engage fully with their educational experience (Arria et al., 2011). Faculty and staff can take specific actions that both support students' well-being and contribute to a culturally safe campus:

- Include mental health resources in course syllabi, making sure students have easy access to services
- Train faculty/staff to make appropriate referrals and ensure they are well equipped
- Set clear expectations and timelines by being transparent about course requirements, deadlines, and support structures to promote success
- Foster open communication about mental health by creating an environment where students feel comfortable without fear of judgment

At the same time, respecting students' privacy and confidentiality remains a cornerstone of fostering a safe and supportive environment even when working collaboratively (Moss, 2017). By ensuring that sensitive information remains private, staff and faculty create an environment where students feel safe to open up about their needs without fear of judgment. This is a common issue where staff often ask questions and students share personal information, but when confidentiality is not maintained, it can damage trust and discourage future disclosure.

To create a more supportive environment, institutions should also be proactive in addressing how cultural factors intersect with mental health, particularly for international students. This includes fostering culturally safe spaces and ensuring that support services are accessible and welcoming to students from diverse backgrounds. Click **here** to learn more about how shifting paradigms can create a culturally safe environment to support the mental health and wellbeing of international students.

Accessibility and Accommodation as a Process in Policy

Accessibility should be a central and visible aspect of both institutional and conduct policy, intertwined with the concept of equity. It is essential that accessibility is embedded in all processes to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities, supportive measures, and accommodations for conduct processes (Bauer, 2022; Davis, 2022).

Some key practices to support accessibility in conduct processes includes providing accessible physical/digital spaces, building in breaks, and encouraging support persons (Bohler, 2018). Another critical practice is ensuring use of plain language in written communications. This approach benefits not only students with learning disabilities or cognitive impairments but also helps overcome other barriers, such as language differences and cultural misunderstandings. When policies, emails, websites, and face-to-face interactions are communicated clearly, they become more understandable for all students. This allows students to more meaningfully engage in these processes (World Wide Web Consortium [W3C] Working Group, 2021).

Collaboration with the campus accessibility department is key to making accommodations effective. Faculty and staff from both departments should collaborate to identify and remove barriers early, ensuring accommodations are provided in a timely, proactive manner. Accommodations should not be viewed as a one-off task but as an ongoing, flexible process, adapting to students' evolving needs.

For more information on how best to support post-secondary students with disabilities, check out **CICMH's Accessibility & Accommodations Toolkit**. When you are done, simply return here to continue with the toolkit.

For more information on integrating accessibility into student conduct and fostering an inclusive environment, please refer to the **Accessibility as Equity in Student Conduct module**. This free and short module was created by student conduct professionals from Queen's University and St. Lawrence College, who also contributed as writers to this toolkit and co-chair the Canadian Association of College & University Student Services (CACUSS) Student Conduct Community of Practice.

Campus Spotlights

- **Niagara College**'s **Accessibility Hub** provides a range of resources, including articles, checklists, and videos, designed to support faculty and staff in adopting accessibility-first approaches to teaching and communication. Developed through a collaborative, cross-institutional effort involving staff, faculty, alumni, and students with lived experience, the Hub reflects a strong commitment to inclusive practice. Among its featured resources are training materials on topics such as **Understanding and Supporting Neurodiversity, Accessibility and Social Media, Accessible Meetings and Presentations**, and more.

- **Loyalist College's Accommodation of Students at Risk policy** outlines the institution's responsibility to accommodate, assist, and support students experiencing challenges in either Residence or Academic settings. The policy affirms that the college will take all reasonable steps to help students navigate and overcome these difficulties. Reports indicating that a student may be at risk are reviewed by the Risk Assessment Review Committee, which evaluates the situation and determines appropriate interventions. When necessary, students may be required to participate in a risk-reducing intervention as prescribed by the committee.

The following recommendations are designed to guide faculty and staff in responding to student conduct concerns with compassion and collaboration.

Recommendations:

Integrate mental health throughout

Consider mental health at every stage of the conduct process and train faculty/staff to recognize and respond to distress. Normalize conversations about stress, burnout, and mental health in your classroom, residence, or office. Identify the signs of distress and know where to refer students for help.

- Tip: A simple check-in like "how are you managing everything right now?" can open the door to connection and support.

    - *Keep in mind that some students may default to saying "I'm fine", especially if they are not used to being asked or don't yet feel safe opening up. You may need to gently ask follow-up questions to help them feel supported.*

- Check out the **More Feet on the Ground** training to identify some of the mental health concerns students on your campus may be living with.

Foster cross-campus collaboration

Coordinate with departments (e.g., counselling, accessibility, equity, security services) to provide wrap-around holistic support. Building relationships across departments helps ensure students get the appropriate care. You are not expected to manage student conflict on your own.

- Ask yourself: “Who else should be a part of this conversation?”

Ensure transparency and trust

Communicate clearly and consistently to build trust, especially with students who may have experienced systemic harm in the past. Be upfront about what is happening, what comes next, and what supports are available.

- Tip: Avoid language that is vague in written and oral communication and use plain terms.

Center accessibility

Proactively offer accommodations and flexible approaches. Make accessibility a visible, standard part of conduct policy and practice.

- Ask your student: “Is there anything you need to fully participate in this process?”

Ensure staff are trained on confidentiality and privacy

Provide training and resources so faculty and staff understand the boundaries and parameters of confidentiality according to their professional roles.

Student Conduct and You: A Guide for Faculty and Staff

Faculty and staff are often among the first to notice when a student is struggling. Changes in attendance, engagement, demeanor, or academic performance, often referred to as early indicators, can be signs of underlying distress or emerging mental health concerns (Chu et al., 2023). Because of their frequent and sustained interactions with students, faculty are in a unique position to identify these early warning signs, initiate supportive responses, and follow up with students (Kalkbrenner et al., 2021).

In this section, we hope to provide you with insight into the work of your institutional partners and strategies for facilitating accessible environments that intentionally support the mental health of your students.

What Resources do you Have in your Campus Community?

Student Conduct Office
Student Conduct Offices have many names across institutions. Faculty and staff looking for more information about their institution's office may search using key words such as, "Rights and Responsibilities", "Student Conduct", or "Accountability" to find out more about their policies and student conduct colleagues. Student Conduct professionals review allegations of conduct policy violations, meet with students, make decisions based on the policy, and resolve non-academic misconduct matters.

Behavioural Intervention Teams
A behavioral intervention team, or BIT, is typically an interdepartmental team that reviews reports of concerning or worrisome student behaviour, ranging from early warning signs and disruptive behaviour to more serious instances that may present a risk to the individual or broader campus community. These teams assess the nature and context of these behaviours, evaluate risk, and coordinate interventions and supports to help students navigate challenges and remain connected to their academic and personal goals.

While team names vary across institutions (e.g., Assessment and Care Teams, Care Teams, or Student Support and Intervention Teams), the goal is the same: to identify, assess, and respond to students in need of support, regardless of where their behaviour falls on the spectrum from concern to crisis.

➤ Click **here** to view a list of Ontario post-secondary institutions and whether they have a BIT or CARE team. Please note: this list may be incomplete, as such teams can be difficult to identify due to varying names and structures across institutions.

Campus Spotlight

- The **Campus Conflict Resolution Services** (CCRS) at **Durham College** offers free and confidential support to help students resolve conflicts with peers, classmates, and teams. Services include mediation, group work contracts, and communication coaching, provided by trained mediators.

Early Intervention

Faculty and staff play an important role in facilitating inclusive and accessible environments for students. A significant part of maintaining these environments is emotional regulation (Calandri et al., 2025).

Recognizing and responding to concerning behaviour, especially when it is disruptive or emotionally charged, can be challenging. Faculty and staff may be caught off guard, feel unprepared, or worry about saying the wrong thing. In such moments, emotional regulation is a critical skill.

Emotional regulation does not mean suppressing feelings; it means recognizing emotional responses, understanding their impact, and choosing how to respond in a way that supports both the student and one's own well-being (Calandri et al., 2025). Faculty and staff may experience frustration, fear, or helplessness when a student is distressed, disruptive, or disengaged (Riba, 2025). In those moments, strategies such as pausing before responding, grounding techniques (like deep breathing or brief sensory resets), and using calm, empathetic language can support a more constructive and compassionate outcome.

For more information on Emotional Regulation, check out CICMH's **infosheet**.

It is also important to acknowledge the emotional toll of this work. Repeated exposure to student trauma, distress, or high-risk disclosures can lead to vicarious trauma or secondary trauma, the emotional residue from witnessing or hearing about another person's trauma (Baillie, 2022). This experience is often referred to as empathic strain, which captures the emotional exhaustion, sense of helplessness, or changes in one's worldview that faculty and staff may experience. Although faculty and staff in student-facing roles may not consider themselves "first responders," they often carry the emotional weight of being a trusted adult or point of contact for struggling students.

Institutions have a responsibility to provide training and systems that foster emotional regulation, awareness of vicarious trauma, and peer support. This might include regular debriefing opportunities, access to counselling or Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services, and a culture that acknowledges the emotional labour of student support.

By developing emotional regulation skills and recognizing the impact of secondary trauma, faculty and staff not only sustain their own wellbeing but also contribute to a safer, more compassionate, and more responsive campus environment (Baillie, 2022; Calandri et al., 2025).

For more information on secondary trauma, check out **CICMH's podcast episode with Dr. Kyle Baillie**.

Campus Spotlight

- **Trent University – Student Support Certificate:** series of 10 workshops designed for faculty/staff at Trent University, aimed at building capacity to support students more effectively. The training covers key areas such as conflict resolution, religious diversity, Indigenous perspectives, disability support, and more, with the goal of fostering a safer, more inclusive and supportive campus environment.
    - CICMH has a **video** overview to introduce the program.
    - For additional resources, please refer to CICMH's **Mental health and the learning environment Toolkit**, which complements this training to help faculty and teaching staff take steps within the classroom in a collective effort to support student mental health.

Reporting Student Concerns

Even when faculty and staff are able use emotional regulation skills to deescalate situations, when they recognize the early signs of concerning behaviour it is important they know who to share this information with at their institutions, including both BITs and Student Conduct Offices. All too often, there is a well-intentioned attempt to make behavioural exceptions for students who are navigating significant challenges, mental health or otherwise.

Students attending institutions are able to uphold institutional policies and adhere to behavioural expectations when provided with the necessary support, including accommodations tailored to their individual needs (NABITA, 2020). It is important to note that not all students who experience mental health concerns are formally diagnosed with a disability, and faculty/staff should avoid making assumptions about a student's needs. Instead, students can be referred to your Student Conduct Office or BIT, where they will be connected with the necessary resources to support the formal accommodation plan for their growth and development. Reports also provide your Student Conduct Office or BIT with the opportunity to set clear expectations, which can act as an important foundation for any progressive processes (NABITA, 2020). Accountability processes are part of holistic care.

You can play a vital part in dismantling the negative reputation that student conduct processes have yet to shake. Reach out to your institution's Student Conduct Office or BIT. Attend any information session they may provide and look for opportunities to work collaboratively. Your personal understanding of your institution's processes and resources will allow you to make warm referrals to these resources and demystify these processes for students, allowing them more space for meaningful engagement.

Importance of Follow-up

Follow-up is a crucial and often overlooked part of supporting students through conduct and mental health challenges. A thoughtful and well-timed follow-up can reinforce positive behaviour change, connect students to resources, and continue care beyond the resolution of the initial issue. Following a trauma-informed approach, follow-up procedures must be available and tailored to meet student needs to support lasting change and access to appropriate services (Avery et al., 2020).

Effective follow-ups are intentional. They may include scheduled check-ins, supportive emails, or collaboration with other departments to ensure continuity of care. Importantly, follow-ups are not only about the student, but they also provide valuable feedback for staff and systems (Reinke et al., 2008). They help evaluate whether interventions were appropriate, additional support is needed, and if institutional responses are aligned with their intended outcomes. If you are unsure about how to appropriately follow up, it is a good practice to collaborate with the Student Conduct Office or BIT to determine the best approach.

➤ Click **here** to view an email template that can be adapted for follow-up communications.

In an integrated and coordinated approach, follow-ups also serve to strengthen the network of care. When conducted by multidisciplinary teams, follow-ups can bridge gaps between conduct processes, academic accommodations, wellness supports, and community referrals (Waryold & Lancaster, 2020). The collaborative stepped care model shows students that their experience is not siloed but part of a connected and caring response (University of British Columbia [UBC], 2024)

Ultimately, follow-ups support student success, improve institutional practices, and help identify emerging trends or concerns. Embedding this step into campus conduct and mental health processes reflects a commitment to sustained, student-centered care.

Evaluation

Importance of Evaluation

Evaluation is not just about showing that something works, it is about learning *how* to make it work better (Waryold & Lancaster, 2020). In student conduct and mental health support, evaluation plays a critical role in ensuring our processes are responsive, equitable, and grounded in the lived experiences of the students they are meant to support (Lee et al., 2023).

Too often, evaluation is an afterthought, left until the end, or seen as something extra. However, in trauma-informed care, evaluation needs to be part of the process from the beginning with ongoing feedback (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014). Listening, learning, and reflection must be built in, not bolted on.

The 'WHY' of Evaluation

In student conduct and mental health work, evaluation is essential for ensuring that systems are effective. Understanding why it is important is as crucial as how to do it, as it provides a foundation for learning and continuous improvement (Waryold & Lancaster, 2020). The following points outline key reasons why evaluation should be embedded into all aspects of this work:

- **Student voices are essential to shaping what comes next**
  Students involved in conduct processes contribute not only personal experiences of harm or conflict, but also important perspectives on what supported their wellbeing and what barriers they faced. When feedback is actively gathered from students, it becomes possible to strengthen systems that are often experienced as opaque, punitive, or impersonal (Morrill, 2021).
- **Evaluation helps maintain alignment with purpose**
  Policies and procedures are only as effective and meaningful as the outcomes they produce (Annet, 2024). Key questions include: *Are students learning, growing and developing insights and skills? Are staff adequately equipped and supported? Is harm being reduced and connection being fostered?* Regular reflection on these questions helps ensure our systems reflect the purpose of this toolkit: to support and not punish students navigating complex behavioural and mental health challenges.

- **What gets measured gets attention—but what matters should guide what we measure**
  Traditional metrics such as the number of incidents or rates of policy compliance capture only part of the picture. Evaluating qualitative factors, such as sense of belonging, restoration of trust, understanding of impact, and student satisfaction with the process provides a fuller view of success (Fenizia & Parrello, 2025). These deeper measures better reflect the goals of trauma-informed and restorative approaches.

- **Evaluation supports accountability and encourages adaptation**
  Regular input and feedback loops are not about blame, they help identify areas for growth and ensure responsibility and responsiveness (Nash & Winstone, 2017). Mechanisms such as anonymous surveys, reflective debriefs, community consultations, or regular check-ins with staff, faculty, and students about how processes work, can help create a culture where improvement is expected and welcomed.

- **Evaluation makes space for follow-up and closure**
  In both conduct and care processes, follow-up is not simply a procedural administrative task, it is a vital component of healing and integration (Waryold & Lancaster, 2020). Follow-up offers students (and staff) the opportunity to reflect, reconnect, and continue building on what was learned. Effective evaluation helps track when and how follow-up is happening, and whether it is meaningful.

The goal is not perfection, but continuous progress. The most effective student conduct and mental health systems are those that listen, evolve, and stay connected to the individuals they serve. When carried out with purpose and humility, evaluation becomes a vital tool for sustaining that commitment and driving meaningful improvement.

For more information about Evaluation, please click here to check out CICMH's **Evaluation Toolkit**.

Campus Resources

- **University Ombudsperson:** neutral and confidential support for resolving academic, administrative, or conduct concerns.
- **Mental Health and Wellness Support Services**: point of contact for students expressing stress, anxiety, depression or other mental health challenges.
- **Crisis Intervention Services**: for students in acute distress or experiencing a crisis on or off campus (crisis team, services, call lines).

*For more information on how to move from a siloed-departmental approach to mental health crisis response to a whole-campus approach, check out **CICMH's Mental Health Crisis Response on Campus Toolkit***

- **Peer Support Programs:** informal, non-clinical support provided by trained student peers, usually run through student unions and/or wellness offices.
- **Accessibility Services:** for referring students who disclose learning, mental health, or physical disabilities and may need accommodations for coursework or conduct processes.
- **EDIAA Offices:** support for students experiencing discrimination, racism, marginalization, or other equity-related barriers (for example, Human Rights, Indigenous Student Services, 2SLGBTQIA+ resources, Black Student Success Offices).
- **Sexual Violence Prevention Office:** support for survivors and respondents involved in incidents of sexual violence.
- **Campus Security:** provides safety and emergency response on campus, and assists with threats, violence, or urgent safety concerns involving students or staff.
- **Student Conduct Office and BIT:** for reporting disruptive, concerning, or harmful student behaviour.
- **Culturally Specific Supports:** Clubs, associations, and gathering spaces for students of colour, international students, and Indigenous students can provide culturally safe peer support, mentorship, and community connection (for example, African Student Association, Indigenous Elders on campus, Asian cultural clubs, 2SLGBTQIA+ student groups).

*For more information, see CICMH's **infosheet** – "Shifting Paradigms: Taking a Whole-Campus Approach to Move from Cultural Competency toward Cultural Safety in Supporting International Student Mental Health and Wellbeing."*

Campus Resources Contact Table

(For your institution to fill out and keep handy for referral and coordination.)

RESOURCE/ SERVICE	MAIN CONTACT PERSON & ROLE	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL	HOURS OF OPERATION	ADDITIONAL NOTES
University Ombudsperson					
Mental Health and Wellness Support Services					
Crisis Intervention Services					
Accessibility Services					
EDIAA Offices					
Sexual Violence Prevention Office					
Campus Security					
Student Conduct Office					

Additional Resources and Book Recommendations

- Courage to Act: A Starter Kit for Student Conduct Offices — Courage to Act
- Assessing Threats on Campus: A Toolkit for Student Conduct Professionals - ASCA
- Reframing Campus Conflict: Student Conduct Practice through a Social Justice Lens
- Reframing Campus Conflict/Student Conduct Practice Set
- The Little Book of Restorative Justice for Colleges and Universities, Second Edition: Repairing Harm and Rebuilding Trust in Response to Student Misconduct
- SafeTALK Suicide Alertness Training
- NABITA Threat Assessment Tools
- The Secondary Trauma in Student Affairs Professionals Scale (STSAP) Information Brief
- Hof & Associates BIT/Care Chair Network – free monthly networking meeting (Note: this organization also offers policy development services, workshop and trainings, coaching, grant writing proposals, and more with associated fees. This information is provided for your awareness only and is not endorsed or in partnership with CICMH).

Conclusion: A Summary of Recommendations

Adopt a student-centered approach
Faculty and staff should adopt a student-centered approach by recognizing the diverse and unique needs of all students involved in campus interactions, whether they are involved in a formal conduct process or not. This means fostering a supportive and productive environment (Karasova & Nehyba, 2023).

Emphasize education over punishment and prioritize restorative practices
Faculty and staff should consider educational approaches and restorative practices in their interactions with students. While formal conduct processes may be necessary in some cases, non-punitive methods like reflection, mediation, and repair plans help students learn from their actions and create opportunities for healing and growth (Karp & Sacks, 2014).

Integrate trauma-informed and anti-oppressive practices
All members of the campus community should recognize how common trauma is and integrate trauma-informed and anti-oppressive practices into their work with students. Understanding the impact of trauma ensures that students are not re-traumatized by campus procedures, policies, or interpersonal interactions (Schroeder et al., 2024).
*You can learn more from **CICMH's** **Trauma-Informed Practice & Care Toolkit** and our two-part **Anti-Oppressive Practices Toolkit.***

Balance student accountability with compassion, empathy, and care
Faculty and staff should hold students accountable for their actions while demonstrating compassion, empathy, and care. This balance is important for creating an environment where students can take responsibility for their actions, while also feeling supported in their personal growth (Karp & Sacks, 2014).

Confront historical and ongoing harm
Acknowledge the colonial and systemic inequities embedded in traditional student conduct systems. Recognize how policies and processes have disproportionately impacted equity-deserving communities.

Make conduct policies fair and inclusive
Review and revise conduct policies to eliminate bias, incorporate trauma-informed and restorative practices. Shift away from punishment as the default response and prioritize healing.

Center equity-deserving student voices
Students with lived experience should help shape the development and review of conduct policies to ensure they are inclusive and fair. While students should **not** be involved in peer-to-peer adjudication, they can be trained, mentored, and supported as peer mediators, who are compensated, to assist with early conflict resolution, de-escalation, and prevention efforts, helping build a safer, more connected campus environment. To assist with early conflict resolution, de-escalation, and prevention efforts, helping build a safer, more connected campus environment.

Redefine safety and accountability
Expand definitions of safety and harm to reflect diverse realities and ensure fairness in all disciplinary practices. Embrace definitions that reflect cultural and psychological safety and ensure accountability measures consider context and power dynamics.

Integrate mental health throughout
Consider mental health at every stage of the conduct process and train staff to recognize and respond to distress. Normalize conversations about stress, burnout, and mental health in your classroom, residence, or office. Identify the signs of distress and know where to refer students for help.
*Check out the **More Feet on the Ground** training to identify some of the mental health concerns students on your campus may be living with.*

Foster cross-campus collaboration
Coordinate with departments (e.g., counselling, accessibility, equity, security services) to provide wrap-around holistic support. Building relationships across departments helps ensure students get the appropriate care. You are not expected to manage student conflict on your own.

Ensure transparency and trust
Communicate clearly and consistently to build trust, especially with students who may have experienced systemic harm in the past. Be upfront about what is happening, what comes next, and what supports are available.

Center accessibility
Proactively offer accommodations and flexible approaches. Make accessibility a visible, standard part of conduct policy and practice.

Ensure staff are trained on confidentiality and privacy
Provide training and resources so faculty and staff understand the boundaries and parameters of confidentiality according to their professional roles.

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Appendix 1

Ontario Post-Secondary Institutions Codes of Conduct

COLLEGE NAME	CODE OF CONDUCT/POLICY
Algonquin College	Student Conduct Policy
Cambrian College	Code of Conduct Policy
Canadore College	Policies and Procedure
Centennial College	Student Code of Conduct Policy
Collège Boréal	Santé et sécurité
Collège La Cité	Règles de conduite
Conestoga College	Students Rights and Responsibilities Policy
Confederation College	Student Code of Conduct
Durham College	Student Conduct Policy
Fanshawe College	Student Code of Conduct
Fleming College	Students Rights & Responsibilities Policy
George Brown College	Code of Non-Academic Student Behaviour
Georgian College	Student Code of Conduct
Humber College	Code of Student Conduct
Lambton College	Students Rights & Responsibilities & Discipline Policy
Loyalist College	Student Code of Conduct
Mohawk College	Student Behaviour Policy
Niagara College	Student Code of Conduct
Northern College	Student Rights and Responsibilities
Royal Military College	Professional Conduct
Sault College	Student Code of Conduct
Seneca College	Student Code of Conduct Policy
Sheridan College	Student Code of Conduct
St. Lawrence College	Student Code of Conduct
St. Clair College	Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities

UNIVERSITY NAME	CODE OF CONDUCT/POLICY
Algoma University	Code of Student Conduct (Non-Academic)
Brock University	Student Code of Conduct
Carleton University	Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy
University of Guelph	Student Rights & Responsibilities Policy
Lakehead University	Student Code of Conduct – Non-Academic
McMaster University	Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities
Nipissing University	Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities
OCAD University	Non-Academic Misconduct Policy
Ontario Tech University	Student Conduct Policy
Queen's University	Student Code of Conduct
Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU)	Student Code of Non-academic Conduct
Trent University	Student Conduct Policy
University of Ottawa	Student Rights and Responsible Conduct
University of Toronto	Code of Student Conduct
Université de Hearst	Politiques, procedures et directives
Université de l'Ontario français	Code de conduite du corps étudiant
Western University	Code of Student Conduct
Wilfrid Laurier University	Non-Academic Student Code of Conduct
Windsor University	Policy on Student Code of Conduct
York University	Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities

Appendix 2

Ontario Post-Secondary Institutions BIT or CARE Team

INSTITUTION NAME	BEHAVIOURAL INTERVENTION TEAM / CARE TEAM	NOTE
Algonquin College	The Care Team	
Cambrian College	**N/A**	Part of a Community Threat Assessment Protocol
Canadore College	Assessment and Care Team	
Centennial College	Case Management Care Team	
Collège Boréal	Comité d'évaluation des menaces et des risques de violence (CÉMRV)	
Collège La Cité	**N/A**	
Conestoga College	Care Team	
Confederation College	Threat Assessment Team	
Durham College	Emergency management Response Team	
Fanshawe College	Situational Threat Assessment Team (STAT)	
Fleming College	Behaviour Assessment Management Team exists, no mention online, meets ad-hoc only for high level threats	
George Brown College	**N/A**	Behavioural Intervention managed by the Student Conduct Office
Georgian College	Conflict Resolution and Investigations (CRI) team	
Humber College	The Care Team Care Coordinators	
Lambton College	High Risk Student Intervention Team	
Loyalist College	**N/A**	
Mohawk College	**N/A**	
Niagara College	**N/A**	
Northern College	Behaviour Intervention Team (BIT)	
Royal Military College	**N/A**	
Sault College	**N/A**	Has a Violence Threat Risk Assessment Team
Seneca College	Behavioural Intervention Team (BIT)	
Sheridan College	Student at Risk and Intervention Team (SARIT)	
St. Lawrence College	Behavioural Intervention Team (BIT)	
St. Clair College	Campus Care Team	

Appendix 2 (cont'd)

Ontario Post-Secondary Institutions BIT or CARE Team

Institution Name	Behavioural Intervention Team / CARE Team	Note
Algoma University	**N/A**	Table - Steps to Take When you Encounter Concerning Behaviour on Campus
Brock University	CARE and Connect Team / CARE Case Management Team	
Carleton University	Student Care and Support Team Student at Risk Evaluation Team (SARET)	
University of Guelph	Student At-Risk Team (SART)	
Lakehead University	Care & Response Team (CRT) / Student Safety Intervention Team (SSIT)	
McMaster University	Violence Risk Assessment Team Student Case Management	
Nipissing University	Safe Campus Evaluation Assessment Team	
OCAD University	Triage Team / Urgent Student Support Team	
Ontario Tech University	Student Threat Assessment Team	
Queen's University	Assessment & Care Team (ACT)	
Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU)	Student Care Team / Student Case Management Team	
Trent University	Safety Assessment Team	
University of Ottawa	Student Support Team	
University of Toronto	Student Crisis Response/Student Progress & Support Community Safety Office	
Université de Hearst	**N/A**	
Université de l'Ontario français	**N/A**	
Western University	Student Support & Complex Case Management Team	
Wilfrid Laurier University	Student Care & Support Team	
Windsor University	Assessment and Care Team (ACT)	
York University	Office of Student Community Relations (OSCR)	

Appendix 3

Follow-up Email Template

This email template offers a practical example to guide your follow-up communications after a meeting or intervention with a student. It provides a supportive way to acknowledge progress, check in on any ongoing concerns, and remind students of available resources while maintaining a supportive, professional and respectful tone, and encouraging continued engagement.

Hi [INSERT Student Name],

I wanted to follow up on our discussion from [INSERT DATE of last discussion] and check in. When we last spoke, we discussed [list a couple of items, including any concerns or challenges they faced]. Since then, I have noticed positive improvements in [list their successes] and thought it was important to acknowledge this. How do you think things have been going? Are there any additional resources or supports that would help?

Please know, I am dedicated to your success as a student and want to ensure that you have the resources you need to achieve your academic goals. If you have any further questions about [INSERT Relevant Support Area], feel free to contact me at [INSERT contact details].

If relevant, I also want to reiterate the other resources available to you on campus, so that you have easy access in your inbox:

- LIST INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTS, MAX 3 for relevance]

[INSERT Salutation]

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