



Addressing Concerning Behaviour: Tips + Conversation Starters

All members of the college community are expected to intervene in a respectful and caring manner when they are concerned that an individual's behavior could be a risk to their safety or that of others; or possibly that their behaviour is an indication that they could be struggling with personal issues. In these situations, it is important to not make assumptions about the possible cause of the behaviour, or the underlying issue – but instead to address the behaviour specifically, and in a manner that is both caring and respectful. These can be tough conversations to start; so review these suggestions, and practice the conversation starters.

Note that in situations where an individual's behavior could pose a risk to their safety or those of others in the academic setting or workplace, the faculty member or supervisor has the right to limit the individual's participation until such time as a safe participation can be restored.

Tips for tough conversations

- **Identify and focus on the behavior**, not on what is triggering the behavior.
- **Describe the impact of the behaviour** on the student or employee's ability to participate in the learning or working environment.
- You may be the first to recognize that something is wrong, find a **private confidential space** to have a conversation with the student or employee. Do not have these conversations in front of other students or employees.
- **Express your concern** in specific and non-judgemental terms: *"I've been noticing... (specific things you have observed) ... and I am concerned because..."*
- **Speak in a calm voice**, if the individual resists or becomes more distressed, continue to speak in a calm voice until they calm down and can hear what you are saying.
- **Use "I" statements:** "I am worried about you because..."
- **Be prepared with resources.** Know [what's available to you](#) in order to support others.

Example: I have been noticing that you seem distracted. I have seen you drop a number of items in the lab today; and I am worried because this is not something I have seen you do this before. I'm concerned that you could unintentionally harm yourself or another student. Is there something you need to talk to me about? Is there some way I can support you with whatever is going on?

Conversation Starters

Here are some suggestions on how to start these conversations. Practice saying them out loud, and use phrases that are comfortable for you.

- *You don't seem to be yourself today. Is there something you need to talk about or something I can help you with?*
- *You seem very quiet and distracted today and that is not like you. Is there something going on that you would like to talk about?*
- *I am worried about you because I have observed (state behaviors that concern you) ...*

What if the individual refuses to talk to me, or says that there is nothing wrong?

- Reiterate your concern, and focus on the behaviour and its impact.

Example: “I understand you may not want to tell me what is going on, but I need to make sure you are alright and that you are safe in the lab. If you are not comfortable speaking with me, I would like to suggest that there are resources here at the college to support you and I can provide those to you. I need to know that you can return to the lab safely, and ensure that this behavior does not repeat itself for your safety and for the safety of others. Please let me know how I can assist you with this.

What if the individual is yelling and/or not allowing me to maintain personal space?

- Ask them to step back or move back yourself
- Assertively address the behaviour.
- If the student or employee continues to be agitated and unable to calm down, you may need to contact [Public Safety & Security](#) for assistance.

Example: “I cannot have a conversation with you when you are this upset, you need to back up and lower your voice so we can problem solve this situation together, I am here to help.”

Making a Referral

After the individual has shared with you what’s going on for them, and that they would like some help, be sure to:

- Validate their feelings and re-affirm that you understand they are experiencing difficulty.
- Offer a specific resource, with contact information. If you are comfortable, offer to accompany the student to the resource.
- If you are concerned that the student is in imminent risk do not leave them alone, ask someone to call for assistance via Public Safety & Security or Counselling if appropriate.

Example: It sounds like you have been going through a lot lately, it might help to have someone to talk to- referral to Counselling and how to access counselling or take the student up to the Counselling office.

Resources

We encourage all employees to register for the [Foundations of Flourishing workshop series](#). The workshops were developed as part of the Healthy Campus Initiative and will provide you with a more in-depth resource for supporting students who require assistance.

The downloadable guide to [Giving a Great Service Referral](#) provides you with information about all of the services available to support students at the College.

The [Code of Student Behavior & Community Standards Policy](#) addresses behavior in class and outlines how faculty can intervene. Faculty have the right to intervene if the student behavior is unsafe or disrupting the teaching and learning environment. Refer to the Code of Student Behavior & Community Standards to guide you on how to intervene.

Employee confidential support can be accessed through [Warren Shepell](#), Tel: 1 800 387-4765