



Administrators' Preview

Changing Lenses, Changing Practices
Tools to assist and strengthen college practices



This tool is one part of: ***Web-based tools to support effective learning and teaching for survivors of violence***



A project of the School of Work and College Preparation, Centre for Preparatory and Liberal Studies, George Brown College, in partnership with Spiral Community Resource Group.

Canada

This project is funded by the Government of Canada's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

2011

Why Violence and Learning?

The impact of violence on learning haunts many students in all educational settings. Some potential students may not even get into programs because of the effects of past and present experiences with violence on the self and on their belief in their capacity to learn. When all personnel in colleges and programs pay attention to this issue, we can make it possible for such students to succeed in our programs. In the process we provide more options for educators and front-line workers, at the same time making their work more satisfying, and diminishing the aggravation so often caused by the students who frustrate every hope. Although the support of counsellors who understand and address the impact of violence on learning is an important element of this approach, the teachers and other front line staff must also play a part if students are to be able to negotiate the educational system and succeed in the classroom.

Three tools to tackle violence and learning

Researchers and developers have created three on-line tools to increase understanding of the issue of learning and violence and to promote change in educational settings. The tools are available at:

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/changing.htm>

Who are they for?

1. **The college tool**, *Changing Lenses, Changing Practices*, is a reflective tool for college educators, support staff, and administrators to explore the issues surrounding violence, to develop ways to help students, and to find resources to draw upon.
2. **The community-based guide**, *Creating a Culture of Care and Safe Learning*, is a reflective guide with similar aims, for community-based literacy practitioners.

3. **The student kit**, *Helping Myself Learn*, is an interactive kit with animations, activities, and resources for adult students in literacy, upgrading and essential skills classes.

What is in them?

The college tool

The sections of this tool address various aspects of the college experience:

- Getting into college
- Staying in a program
- Learning in the classroom
- Getting around the college
- Moving on to further education and work
- Training and professional development for college staff.

Within each section you will find information about how violence impacts that particular aspect of college experience, reflective questions, suggested actions you can take to enhance your practice, staff and student stories, and resource links.

The community-based reflection guide

The community-based tool addresses the following key aspects of working in community-based programs with survivors of any kind of violence:

- Understanding the impacts of violence on learning and teaching
- Discussing the importance of social justice, equity and advocacy, and a caring supportive environment
- Building on these foundational values in day-to-day teaching and learning
- Exploring the implications for organizational processes and structures.

Within each section, the tool looks at how the themes are related to learning and violence and provides some questions for reflecting on practice, shared thoughts from practitioners and learners, and links to more resources.

The student kit

The student kit has five units that each include:

- An animated scenario—a plain language story, usually taking place in a classroom setting, that illustrates a common challenge to learning

- Activities and strategies that explore the issues raised in the scenario with words, pictures, movement and music for students with differing learning styles and literacy levels
- Resources that include background information and guides that show students how to study
- Key points that give students some solid practical actions they can use to ensure they can succeed
- A “coffee cup” icon that leads to a variety of ways students can support themselves when they feel discouraged and unable to learn.

Within each unit, students explore the issue presented from many different angles. Students may use the kit individually, in small groups, or whole classes, and they have a support they can access day or night.

Who created the tools?

The School of Work and College Preparation at George Brown College (GBC), Parkdale Project Read (community literacy group) and Spiral Community Resource Group are the three lead partners in this project funded by the Government of Canada's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills. These tools were created by a diverse team of faculty, counsellors, researchers and designers from the three groups, with a depth of experience in different roles within colleges and outside.

As well as their own experience of learning, teaching, and working on the front lines in many different settings, this tool builds on many years of research and innovative practice to address the impacts of violence on learning, as well as on data specifically gathered for this project. To provide more detailed knowledge of college practices and their impact on students' college experience, the team interviewed and held focus groups for college students, potential students, faculty, counsellors, front-line workers, administrators, and staff from other agencies.

Putting the tools to use

Do you have to be a counsellor to use these tools?

No. The ideas, strategies and activities focus on making a safe learning environment and helping students develop skills and learn tactics for staying focused on learning. These tools do not ask teachers to do the work of

Web-based tools to support effective learning and teaching for survivors of violence

counsellors. The questions for reflection in the college tool ask faculty and other frontline staff to support learning in ways that are appropriate for their role. All members of the college staff can play a part in supporting students who have experienced violence to succeed in your college.

How will the tools help my staff?

Violence often affects what happens in our colleges. It is almost certain that more than a few people in your college—students and staff—have been hurt, abused, harassed or mistreated at some time in their lives. Perhaps they don't talk about experiences of violence, maybe haven't even viewed them as violence, and haven't thought consciously about how they affect learning, teaching, and engaging with others, but the impacts of violence don't disappear, although they may be ignored. This tool was developed to facilitate a conscious review of how various aspects of the way an institution functions might affect students and potential students who have experienced violence in their lives, past or present. Working with this tool will open up more possibilities for success—which makes everyone feel better about their work.

How will the tools help our student body?

As a result of working with the student kit, students have the opportunity to become more successful learners, understand more about how their past experiences get in their way, move away from judging themselves and others, and become better group members. Retention increases with confidence and support and students can continue to work with the strategies as they move into post-secondary. Using a tool like the student kit can help survivors of violence feel more comfortable in their learning environments and encourage them to let their guard down, thus opening themselves up to learning.

How could faculty use the student kit?

Faculty can use the student kit in a variety of ways. The creators of the kit developed activities to accommodate every learning style and preference. The layout of the student kit features a "Teacher's Room" where teachers can find support and background material for the activities in the student kit. They can use ideas from the kit in their classroom planning, or can use the website itself in class. The animations and many of the activities lend themselves to either individual reflection, or small or large-group interaction.

How can the issues and tools be introduced?

Including the topic of learning and violence in professional development for faculty, support-staff, counsellors and administration will help raise consciousness around these issues and develop an environment of understanding and support for students who experience barriers to learning due to the effects of violence.

Administrators can introduce the tools to staff through interactive workshops, provide opportunities for staff to reflect on the success of new strategies, and support faculty as they develop inclusive and equitable curriculum that takes all learners' needs into consideration. Asking staff across the different disciplines to share their perspectives and experiences of students who get stuck due to violence can make it clear to everyone that the issue is pervasive.

Specifically, there is an agenda and facilitator's guide to a three-hour introduction to the tools and a follow up session to get instructors actively using the college tool. They can be found on the introductory screen of the college tool. There are many more useful training resources, including a short video (less than two minutes) to raise awareness of the issue. These can all be found along with the tools at:

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/changing.htm>.