

Guide to Important Considerations:

► Mental Health and Addictions/Well-being

The Guiding principles of the *Provincial School Code of Conduct Policy* are responsibility, equity, restorative and relationship building, and clarity and consistency. Section 1 of the *Guide for Responding to Unacceptable Behaviours* is based on the guiding principles of the *Provincial School Code of Conduct Policy* in five key areas¹:

- Trauma
- Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Practice
- Age and Stage of Development
- Impact of Suspension on Well-being and Achievement
- Mental Health and Addictions/Well-being

Understanding the potential impact of contributing factors when a student exhibits unacceptable behaviour(s) helps determine appropriate responses and the development of individualized interventions and supports.

There is a wealth of knowledge, resources and expertise within our system to build a shared understanding of the importance of these considerations. These abbreviated guide sheets are intended to build upon the **Important Considerations** outlined in the **Guide to Responding to Unacceptable Behaviours**. The considerations help us broaden our understanding and enhance our learning as we apply the Code of Conduct. In addition to the abbreviated guide sheets, administrators may also refer to the *Three Braids* professional learning resources, which are part of a multifaceted approach to increase understanding, skills, and competencies related to anti-racism and anti-discrimination. These resources focus on the dynamics of racism and discrimination, intersectionality, human rights legislation and its implications, and how to recognize and respond to acts of racism and discrimination in a culturally responsive way.

The Teaching Support Team (TST) can strengthen the school's capacity to support student well-being and achievement by assisting teachers in developing strategies to meet the needs of their students. The Student Planning Team (SPT) can support the identified well-being and achievement of individual students. The TST/SPT can review the important consideration when supporting students.

When Considering Unacceptable Behaviour:

- Interpret behaviours in light of any of the multiple intersecting considerations for all students and families, including their age and stage, trauma, mental health/addictions, disabilities or their diverse cultural or linguistic identities.
- Use student documentation to identify support needs and adjust expectations.

¹ *Guide for Responding to Unacceptable Behaviour* (pages 1–2).

Mental Health/Addictions and Well-being

Emotional Regulation: Emotional regulation is the ability to manage stress and emotional responses—a skill developed over time through observation, teaching, and practice. Students demonstrate varying levels of regulation based on age, developmental stage, and individual experiences. While many students will develop this skill at a pace similar to their peers, others may have interruptions or a decline in their skill development for a number of reasons including impacted mental health, well-being, and/or addictions. Emotional dysregulation may lead to an expression of unacceptable behaviour(s).

Mental Health: Mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders can impact executive function—the mental skills needed to manage everyday tasks, thoughts, emotions, and impulses. When a student’s executive function is impacted, their emotions and impulses may become difficult to control, which can often lead to emotional dysregulation.

Well-being: Other stressors such as lack of sleep, poor nutrition, grief and loss, and chronic stress can also have a negative impact on executive functioning which can result in emotional dysregulation.

Addiction: Substance use (e.g., drugs or alcohol) can alter a student’s brain chemistry, affecting key neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin, which each play crucial roles in mood and emotional regulation. Behavioural addictions (e.g., gambling, gaming, shopping, social media) can alter brain chemistry and impact a student’s ability to regulate their emotions.

Most people use substances—or participate in certain activities to excess—as a way of coping with negative emotions (e.g., stress and mental health). As a result, many students who are living with an addiction have likely also experienced interruptions in their executive functioning.

How to Help	<p>Consider the root cause of any challenges in this area</p> <p>Align expectations with the student’s current ability to regulate their emotions</p> <p>Seek opportunities to provide strategies and navigate to appropriate services in order to support the student in managing any stressors, mental health needs, or addictions.</p> <p>Encourage ongoing staff development in recognizing and understanding mental health, addiction, or well-being challenges and the impact on student behaviour.</p> <p>Support classroom-based mental health lessons and mindfulness activities to build emotional regulation, reduce stress, and teach coping strategies.</p> <p>Build strong, trusting relationships with students and families.</p> <p>Review the <i>Important Considerations–Trauma</i> as mental health challenges can have roots in trauma.</p>
--------------------	--