

# **Incivility, Bullying and Workplace Violence Position Statement**

## **Purpose**

The National College of Midwifery is committed to creating and sustaining a culture of respect between students and preceptors. This document is meant to act as a guide for both students and preceptors to increase awareness and clarify responsibilities as they relate to creating safe and healthy working relationships.

## **Background**

Studies have shown that incivility, bullying and workplace violence within midwifery preceptor student relationships are common problems. NCM sees this type of harmful behavior as a threat to the individual educational experience as well as to the midwifery profession as a whole. While patient safety is of utmost importance, it also must be balanced with preceptor and student safety. All are integral to quality and safe care. NCM believes that all branches of the profession must proactively work towards creating a cultural change in which harmful actions are in no way considered an acceptable norm. Those who experience or witness incivility, bullying and workplace violence without acknowledging it, confronting it and reporting it are indirectly promoting it. In this way, NCM realizes the importance of creating a system for students and preceptor to recognize and address these issues.

## **Identifying Harmful Actions**

The first step in taking actions to eliminate bullying is to define harmful actions.

By distinguishing the various forms of harmful behavior, as a profession we can focus our collective wisdom and experience to create a culture of respect, safety, and effective communication. Below are outlined various types of harmful actions.

## **Incivility**

can take the form of:

- rude and discourteous actions
- gossiping or spreading rumors
- name calling
- using a condescending tone
- expressing public criticism

## **Bullying**

is repeated, unwanted harmful actions intended to:

- humiliate
- offend
- cause distress
- undermine
- degrade

Actions may include, but are not limited to:

- hostile remarks
- verbal attacks
- threats
- taunts
- intimidation

- withholding of support (McNamara, 2012)

Such actions occur with greater frequency and intensity than do those actions described as incivility. Bullying actions represent serious safety and health issues, and they can cause lasting physical and psychological difficulties for targets (Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, Safety and Health Assessment and Research for Prevention Program, 2011).

Bullying often involves an abuse or misuse of power, creates feelings of defenselessness and injustice in the target, and undermines an individual's inherent right to dignity. Bullying may be directed from the top down (preceptor against student), from the bottom up (student against preceptor), or horizontally (student against student). Top-down bullying from organizational leaders allows bullying to become an accepted and condoned workplace norm (Deans, 2004a; Royal College of Nursing, 2002; Vessey, DeMarco, & DiFazio, 2011).

Bullying and other harmful actions can be "surrounded by a 'culture of silence,' fears of retaliation, and the perception that 'nothing' will change".

### ***Mobbing***

is a collective form of bullying and as an expression of aggression aimed at ostracizing, marginalizing, or expelling an individual from a group (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Harper, 2013). As Griffin and Clark (2014) state, workplace mobbing occurs when "more than one person commits egregious acts to control, harm, and eliminate a targeted individual". Mobbing is linked to physical, psychological, social, and emotional damage, and it can have devastating consequences as the targeted individuals fight to keep their job and career (DiRosa et al, 2009; Hutchinson, Vickers, Jackson, & Wilkes, 2006; Monteleone et al., 2009; Vessey, DeMarco, Gaffney, & Budin, 2009). In some cases, targets of workplace mobbing may be exceptional individuals. For example, Westhues (2004) suggested that mobbing among faculty members in academic workplaces may be related to envy of excellence and to jealousy associated with the achievements of others. Mobbing may thus occur in such workplaces in an attempt to maintain group mediocrity and compliance with the status quo, so that the high performer is targeted to keep that person in line with prevailing workplace norms.

### ***Workplace Violence***

consists of physically and psychologically damaging actions that occur in the workplace or while on duty (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health [NIOSH], 2002). Examples of workplace violence include:

- direct physical assaults (with or without weapons)
- written or verbal threats
- physical or verbal harassment
- homicide

(Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 2015). Relationships marred by incivility and bullying can contribute to unhealthy work environments that ultimately have a negative impact on the quality and safety of care delivered (American Association of Critical-Care Nurses, 2005).

### ***Potential Ramifications***

Potential ramifications of incivility, bullying and workplace violence include:

- decreased job satisfaction
- reduced organizational commitment
- decreased personal health (psychological stress, anxiety, irritability, depression)
- decreased productivity
- impacted clinical judgment
- increased risk of clinical errors

## **Solutions**

NCM endorses the Nonviolent Communication (NVC) model and encourages students and preceptors who are finding it difficult to maintain civil relationship to engage in study and implementation of the model to the best of their ability. The NVC model relies on both empathic listening and honest expression of observations, feelings, needs and requests. The following text is taken from the NVC website, which also can be used by students and preceptors who are interested in accessing more useful resources about this helpful method of communication:

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is sometimes referred to as compassionate communication. Its purpose is to:

1. Create human connections that empower compassionate giving and receiving
2. Create governmental and corporate structures that support compassionate giving and receiving.

NVC involves both communication skills that foster compassionate relating and consciousness of the interdependence of our well being and using power with others to work together to meet the needs of all concerned. This approach to communication emphasizes compassion as the motivation for action rather than fear, guilt, shame, blame, coercion, threat or justification for punishment. In other words, it is about getting what you want for reasons you will not regret later. NVC is NOT about getting people to do what we want. It is about creating a quality of connection that gets everyone's needs met through compassionate giving.

The process of NVC encourages us to focus on what we and others are observing separate from our interpretations and judgments, to connect our thoughts and feelings to underlying human needs/values (e.g. protection, support, love), and to be clear about what we would like towards meeting those needs. These skills give the ability to translate from a language of criticism, blame, and demand into a language of human needs -- a language of life that consciously connects us to the universal qualities "alive in us" that sustain and enrich our well being, and focuses our attention on what actions we could take to manifest these qualities.

Nonviolent Communication skills will assist you in dealing with major blocks to communication such as demands, diagnoses and blaming. In CNVC trainings you will learn to express yourself honestly without attacking. This will help minimize the likelihood of facing defensive reactions in others. The skills will help you make clear requests. They will help you receive critical and hostile messages without taking them personally, giving in, or losing self-esteem. These skills are useful with family, friends, students, subordinates, supervisors, co-workers and clients, as well as with your own internal dialogues.

## **Nonviolent Communication Skills**

NVC offers practical, concrete skills for manifesting the purpose of creating connections of compassionate giving and receiving based in a consciousness of interdependence and power with others. These skills include:

1. Differentiating observation from evaluation, being able to carefully observe what is happening free of evaluation, and to specify behaviors and conditions that are affecting us;
2. Differentiating feeling from thinking, being able to identify and express internal feeling states in a way that does not imply judgment, criticism, or blame/punishment;
3. Connecting with the universal human needs/values (e.g. sustenance, trust, understanding) in us that are being met or not met in relation to what is happening and how we are feeling; and
4. Requesting what we would like in a way that clearly and specifically states what we do want (rather than what we don't want), and that is truly a request and not a demand (i.e. attempting to motivate, however subtly, out of fear, guilt, shame, obligation, etc. rather than out of willingness and compassionate giving).

These skills emphasize personal responsibility for our actions and the choices we make when we respond to others, as well as how to contribute to relationships based in cooperation and collaboration.

With NVC we learn to hear our own deeper needs and those of others, and to identify and clearly articulate what “is alive in us”. When we focus on clarifying what is being observed, felt, needed, and wanted, rather than on diagnosing and judging, we discover the depth of our own compassion. Through its emphasis on deep listening—to ourselves as well as others—NVC fosters respect, attentiveness and empathy, and engenders a mutual desire to give from the heart. The form is simple, yet powerfully transformative.

Founded on consciousness, language, communication skills, and use of power that enable us to remain human, even under trying conditions, Nonviolent Communication contains nothing new: all that has been integrated into NVC has been known for centuries. The intent is to remind us about what we already know—about how we humans were meant to relate to one another—and to assist us in living in a way that concretely manifests this knowledge.

The use of NVC does not require that the persons with whom we are communicating be literate in NVC or even motivated to relate to us compassionately. If we stay with the principles of NVC, with the sole intention to give and receive compassionately, and do everything we can to let others know this is our only motive, they will join us in the process and eventually we will be able to respond compassionately to one another. While this may not happen quickly, it is our experience that compassion inevitably blossoms when we stay true to the principles and process of Nonviolent Communication. NVC is a clear and effective [model](#) for communicating in a way that is cooperative, conscious, and compassionate. (c) 2005 by Center for Nonviolent Communication  
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### **How the National College of Midwifery Can Help**

While NCM encourages students and preceptors to practice nonviolent communication and to explore their own methods of resolution in the case of personal conflicts that arise out of harmful actions, it is also important to NCM that all students and preceptors feel confident they will have access to guidance and support if needed. For this reason, NCM staff offers [mediation](#) and maintains a [formal grievance policy](#). All communications are kept confidential and individuals will not be discriminated against as a consequence of making a complaint.

If you have any questions about this position statement or about NCM's grievance policy, please contact NCM directly. This position statement is based on the 2015 American Nurses Association Position Statement on Incivility, Bullying and Workplace Violence.