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Transcription Charlie Gaffney

Introduction: A video in which Charlie Gaffney, an instructor at the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design, talks about his experiences in accommodating students with substance abuse.

How did you accommodate a student with a disability in your class?

I guess the first thing is to identify what type of problem a student has in terms of substance abuse and it's not always an easy thing to do, so the best method for accommodating a student is to maybe talk to them personally, one-on-one to meet with them, to also give them guidance towards the school counsellor so that they can meet and interact with one another. Maybe there's methods that a counsellor can help with.

How was the experience from your perspective?

It can be an extremely scary situation. It's something that needs to be taken care of right away. An example—I had a student in the past who was carving and it was just after lunch time. The student was extremely high, came back and started carving again, and passed out with a very sharp tool in their hand. As an instructor, it was brought to your attention and you see it happen. You don't think it could happen in your class but you can't watch your students 24/7 and as a reaction, obviously I had to take the tool out of the student's hand very carefully, with support, with another older student in the class who also identified it, gave me a hand. I sent the student home for the rest of the day and spoke to that person about the use of marijuana. It seems to be such a popular choice of drugs these days that now it's changed because now they're apparently smoking marijuana without papers and there's no smell, it's more of a vapour and it's really hard to detect. So it's a very scary thing as an instructor.

What would you say to a colleague who will have a student with a disability in his or her class?

I think the first thing is to have an open discussion and concerns with staff. If it's a broader forum where we can have everyone together to discuss this along with a counsellor or even drug and addiction specialists coming into the college or whatever postsecondary institution. I think that would be a key to inform our students and staff about drug addiction, how to handle it, how to identify it. Even under a PD would be great, under professional development. But if it's again an individual thing, then working with that person one-on-one and giving them some strategies, and some of those strategies might be again to talk to the student one-on-one. Maybe talk to a friend of the concerned student, to talk to a counsellor, maybe even invite the counsellor into the classroom, would be another great opportunity and just to see how the dynamics are working within the class if there is a student that is focused on that may have a significant need that needs to be addressed.