

AT-RISK GATEKEEPER TRAINING

 Southern Alberta Institute of Technology



Figure 16. Screenshot of the student version of gatekeeper training.¹ © 2010 [Kognito Interactive](#).

THEMES



THE PROMISING PRACTICE

At-Risk gatekeeper training is an external mental health training program created by [Kognito](#) that teaches users how to appropriately identify and engage in difficult conversations, and then refer a student with a mental health concern to on-campus counselling resources. It consists of an online simulation and can be used by the entire campus population at any time with an institutional licence. Employees are presented

with slightly different training than students. For employees (staff and faculty), there is a training session that teaches boundaries and how to have difficult conversations. This is followed by an interactive simulation in which the user is coached on how to engage in difficult conversations with three emotionally responsive student avatars. For students, the training is the same, however, the simulation section coaches the user on how to have difficult conversations with four emotionally responsive “friend” avatars. During the simulations for both employees and students, users are coached to select the most appropriate responses to the avatar based on the context of the conversation. If the user chooses to respond in a manner that is not sensitive or in keeping with the teachings, the training explains why that response is not the most appropriate. At the end of the training, the simulation is summarized and a reference sheet is provided that gives an overview of the training, a summary of key mental health takeaways, and an institution-specific list of appropriate mental health and community resources.

The employee version of gatekeeper training is meant to be 30 to 40 minutes in length, and is followed by a 25-question survey. The student version of the training is approximately 30 minutes long. Each user that completes the training is able to print a certificate of completion.

RATIONALE

The necessity for gatekeeper training at SAIT was realized when employees began to

inquire about the availability of additional mental health training on campus. At the time, SAIT was hosting other forms of mental health training for employees, however, these trainings did not give the opportunity to apply the concepts through role play. There was an understanding of the benefit of being able to practise and apply teachings in regards to uptake of those learned skills. During an attempt by SAIT to develop such a training, they came across gatekeeper training, which had all the identified components.

Additionally, SAIT’s National College Health Assessment (NCHA) 2019 results showed there were fewer students aware of counselling services on campus than there were students that were interested in counselling. One of the top five concerns highlighted was that students wanted more information on how to help others. This indicated to SAIT that there were more students experiencing mental health concerns

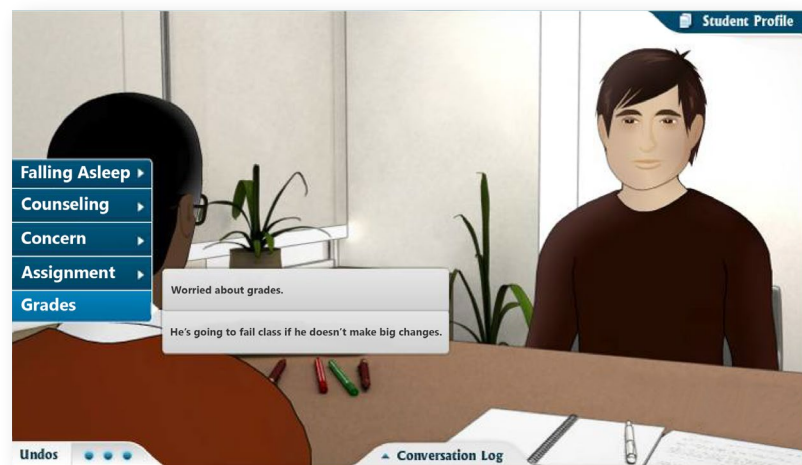


Figure 17. Screenshot of the instructor/staff version of gatekeeper training.² © 2010 Kognito Interactive.

than were visiting counselling, and that there was a need to train students and instructors on how to approach and refer students.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the online training is to help students, staff, and faculty to identify students with a mental health concern, be more confident when engaging those students in difficult discussions, and refer those students appropriately to resources.

GOALS

- 1 To equip students, staff, and faculty with the tools to identify, approach, and refer students/peers with mental health concerns.
- 2 To provide a standard model of training on how to talk about mental health with students and how to refer them to resources as appropriate.
- 3 To provide a tool that empowers and improves the confidence of staff and faculty to speak with students about mental health.

IMPLEMENTATION

Gatekeeper training has been offered at SAIT for approximately eight years to date. The licence for the training includes access to the

simulation training, a pre- and post-training survey, as well as a guide for implementing the training on any campus. Upon purchase of the licence, SAIT made the tool available online and facilitated a series of in-person faculty trainings. Participants were impressed, resulting in uptake of the training that was promoted by the then Dean of Information and Communications Technology. Since that time, monthly gatekeeper training sessions have been held in computer labs across campus in addition to being available online 24/7.

The in-person training is tailored to staff and faculty or students and includes an overview of mental health and the mental health continuum. Following the brief presentation, participants log into and complete the gatekeeper online simulation, followed by a brief group discussion. In terms of communications, the online simulation is available on the SAIT employee intranet, and the student version is accessed through the sait.ca website. Additionally, the training has been made mandatory for some departments (e.g., Learner Services). SAIT is exploring the potential to make the training a mandatory part of new employee onboarding. A student version of the gatekeeper training was purchased prior to the start of the 2018 academic year. SAIT hopes to continue to market it to the student population for usage beyond peer leader groups on campus.

EVALUATION

Evaluation of gatekeeper training is primarily done through the pre- and post-training surveys built into the gatekeeper program.

The questions asked in these surveys align well with the types of information required by the Post-Secondary Student Mental Health Grant Reports. Kognito sends each user a follow-up email 60 days after a user has completed the training, but there is an attrition rate for completion of the surveys of about 50 per cent. However, users are able to re-access the training at any time after an initial completion. SAIT has seen that some employees choose to re-familiarize themselves with the training at the beginning of the fall semester. Historically, the employee surveys have seen users report high confidence in talking to students in the pre-survey. However, now that the value of the tool has been acknowledged, there is a larger gap between pre- and post-scores, showing that the training has increased confidence of users to have difficult conversations with students. The employee training and survey now has a completion rate of 70 per cent.

Kognito also shares a monthly engagement summary, which condenses and collates all the survey responses specific to SAIT, including captured qualitative feedback. For example, a report from March 2020 shows that 81.3 per cent of employee users (n=48) would rate their ability to recognize when a student's behaviour is a sign of psychological distress as high or very high. The same report shares that as a result of the training, 74.5 per cent of student participants (n=47) can recognize when a fellow student is experiencing signs of psychological distress. For both employees and students, the recommendation rate for this tool exceeds 95 per cent. Between 2018 and 2020, 68 employees and 56 students have completed gatekeeper training.

In terms of the monthly group gatekeeper trainings, SAIT also conducts their own pre- and post-training evaluation in order to capture information on whether the training was useful and on the quality of the presenter. All training is conducted online, but SAIT uses the monthly group training to gather its own feedback that is not captured in the Kognito evaluations.

SUCCESSSES

SAIT is proud to have implemented training that has increased the confidence of students, faculty, and staff to identify students of concern, engage in conversations with these students, and know how to refer these students to counselling services. The training has been praised by staff and faculty for setting boundaries and helping with the recognition of when to involve a counsellor. At the same time, the training helps ease worries that staff or faculty may have regarding how to have difficult conversations without assuming a counselling role. Finally, SAIT has also praised the coaching component of the training as it allows the user to apply the teachings. This has overall contributed to a more mentally aware campus environment and community.

NOTED CHALLENGES

One of the initial challenges of the training was gathering buy-in from various stakeholders. Gatekeeper training comprises a 30- to 40-minute training session, followed by a 25-question survey. Such a large time commitment has proven to be challenging for faculty given multiple demands. With competing departmental commitments, it took longer than anticipated to get more consistent

uptake of gatekeeper training among staff and faculty. However, more managers have begun to see the value of the training and have made it mandatory for their groups.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

With the recent securing of the At-Risk gatekeeper licence for students, there has been an uptake of the training for campus student leaders (e.g., Outreach and Wellness Leaders, SAIT Residence Advisors, and Peer Support Workers). SAIT hopes to encourage increased use of the training to the larger student population. ●

References

1, 2 Kognito Interactive. (2010). *At-risk gatekeeper training simulations* [Photograph]. New York, NY.