D·PREP
SAFETY DIVISION

# TAKING CARE OF HYGIENE & SHARED SPACES

## WHAT IT IS

Addressing odor and hygiene concerns is a student-support intervention that sits at the intersection of learning, dignity, equity, and well-being. Persistent or strong odors can disrupt learning and work environments, but they are often indicators of underlying issues such as medical conditions, mental health challenges, housing insecurity, financial stress, cultural transitions, or executive functioning difficulties. When handled with privacy, compassion, and clear referral pathways, these conversations shift the focus from embarrassment or punishment to support, connection, and student success.

## WHO TO USE IT WITH

This approach is appropriate when a student's odor or hygiene concerns are persistent, noticeable, or disruptive and may be connected to deeper challenges. It is especially appropriate when staff feel uncertain, out of their depth, or concerned that the issue reflects more than a simple hygiene lapse, signaling the need for CARE/BIT involvement.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Have you noticed this yourself, or has anyone mentioned it to you before?
2. Is anything going on with your health, housing, work, or stress level that's making it harder to manage laundry or self-care right now?
3. What's been feeling hardest for you lately, day-to-day?
4. Would you be open to connecting with campus support services to help with this?

## TEACHING INSIGHT

Handled well, these situations become opportunities to reduce stigma, strengthen trust, and connect students with the supports they need to remain engaged and successful.

- Focus on behavior and impact, not judgment. Describe observable concerns and how they affect shared spaces, rather than labeling the student.
- Assume complexity. Odor is often a visible signal of invisible challenges—medical, mental health, financial, cultural, or cognitive.
- Use CARE/BIT early. Persistent odor combined with self-neglect, withdrawal, fatigue, missed classes, or disorganization warrants referral, even when the cause is unclear.
- Protect dignity and privacy. Conversations should be private, respectful, and framed around care and success, not compliance alone.
- Shift from individual burden to coordinated support. CARE/BIT teams allow faculty and staff to report observable behavior while enabling a multidisciplinary, student-centered response that may include health services, counseling, housing support, disability services, or community resources.