Mental Health During College: How to Help Yourself or a Friend





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WHAT TO DO TO PREPARE YOURSELF FOR COLLEGE

Adapting to life at college can be challenging, and having go-to skills can help keep you from becoming overwhelmed. Knowing what to do, and where and who to turn to, can be calming during difficult moments.

• • • • • TIPS FOR MANAGING STRESS

- Practice mindfulness: Learning how to be present in the moment and to be nonjudgmental towards yourself and others can be incredibly helpful in cultivating a healthy mindset. Taking some deep breaths, a quick moment to assess your surroundings, or acknowledging how you're feeling at the present moment are all ways to be mindful.
- 2. Establish good self-care: If you come up with a plan before you arrive at school, you'll be more likely to follow through with it. Start with basics like getting enough sleep, eating healthy, exercising regularly, and limiting alcohol. Sleep actually helps you retain more information when you study. Lack of sleep impacts your learning and can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and depression.
- 3. Learn to set your own goals and rewards: Working all day, every day, will likely result in burnout. Having too much unstructured time can also generate stress. Set aside regular weekly times for studying and note-taking, and set specific goals for yourself during those periods. If you achieve those goals, reward yourself with something fun or relaxing. You earned it!

- 4. **Plan ahead:** Spend time thinking about what organizational and study skills have worked for you in the past, what has not worked for you in the past, and what you might be able to improve on. Make a plan for how to cope when you're feeling overwhelmed that will allow you to focus on what's most important.
- 5. **Keep in mind that procrastination is most often a result of anxiety and stress,** so if you find yourself putting tasks off, think about why, and identify ways to break the challenges up into more manageable pieces. The momentary relief we feel when procrastinating is what makes the cycle the most vicious. Find a friend or someone else to hold you accountable for getting your work done.
- 6. **Get accustomed to campus:** Set aside time before classes begin to get to know your campus. Many schools have the option to attend a pre-orientation program, where you'll have the opportunity to get to know the campus and the surrounding areas. Print out a copy of your schedule and a map of the classroom buildings and do a mock "walk-through" before the first day of classes so you feel confident that you know where you're going.

THERAPY, MEDICATION MANAGEMENT, AND OTHER SUPPORTS

You may find yourself with a lot of questions regarding how to continue your current methods of treatment while away at school. While this may feel nerve-wracking, there are ways to ensure that you can successfully continue on your current plan or create a new one that works for you.

- 1. Schedule check-ins with your therapist(s) back home: Talk to your therapist(s) in anticipation of heading off to school and see what they would suggest regarding keeping in touch. You may be able to keep your regular appointments by phone call or video chat.
- 2. Find a therapist nearby: Look online or ask a trusted adult, like an advisor or professor, to help locate clinicians in your area if you prefer to see someone face-to-face.
- 3. Seek support from the campus health center: Your campus health center will most likely have a variety of accessible mental health services for students. Making sense of the campus health center and preparing for a visit can feel overwhelming, but know they are there to support you however may work best for you. Learning to advocate for your needs and articulate what works best for you will be incredibly important as you embark on this transition into college life.
- 4. Organize your medication: Get a weekly pill organizer, make a daily alarm on your phone, and place the container in a place you can't forget.
- 5. Locate other supports: If you have been used to academic and testing accommodations in high school, you are likely still entitled to receive those supports in college. Meeting regularly with your academic advisor is also key in helping you to think about summer jobs and other future goals.

HOW TO SUPPORT A FRIEND

- 1. Initiate open, non-judgmental conversations about how they're feeling. Asking "do you just want to vent or do you want my advice?" can provide a lot of relief.
- 2. Make a "bucket list" of fun activities you can do together to relax and regroup when needed.
- 3. If a friend is seriously struggling, encourage them to talk to their parents, a professor, their advisor, or another trusted adult to get connected to professional help, and express confidence that therapy and/or medication can make a big difference.

HOW TO FIND TREATMENT

Professionals can be found by talking to parents or other people you trust, using Psychology Today or through an insurance provider. WebMD provides a helpful guide on how to start your search and what to look for.

RESOURCES •

HOW TO ADDRESS A CRISIS SITUATION

- 1. Call 911 immediately if you're concerned that you or a friend are unsafe, may be in danger of self-harm, or may be suicidal or overdosing. Tell responders as many details as possible so they can be prepared when they arrive.
- 2. Free, 24-hour, anonymous hotlines:
 - · Crisis Text Line: text UROK to 741741
 - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255

EXPERT INFORMATION

- Child Mind Institute
- National Alliance for Mental Health (NAMI)
- WebMD
- Jed Foundation

COMMUNITIES

- **Project UROK**
- **Born This Way Foundation**
- To Write Love On Her Arms
- The Mighty

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Share your health story to inspire others, email projecturok@childmind.org