



The College Mental Health Crisis

It has been well documented that there is a positive relationship between students' emotional health and their persistence to college completion.¹ According to the annual Healthy Minds Study, students with mental health challenges are twice as likely to leave without graduating. Poor mental health hinders students' academic success and untreated mental health issues may lead to lower GPAs, discontinuous enrollment, and too often, lapses in enrollment.² 70% of college presidents recently identified student mental health as a pressing concern.³

Today on college campuses, loneliness and isolation among students is the norm. Exacerbated by social media, many students have this ill conceived idea that everyone else is having more fun and living a better life than they are. Unfortunately, an increasing number of college students are now experiencing emotional health issues⁴—to the point that it has become a public health concern.⁵ In fact, more than one third of college students worldwide experience a mental health crisis during their first year.⁶ Sadly, many students who experience attrition-triggering emotional challenges do not utilize campus counseling centers, often because of lingering social stigmas or self-imposed stigmas associated with seeking help.⁵ Nationally, just over 11% of students sought out mental health services that were available to them.⁷

The foregoing findings highlight the need to augment traditional “passive programming,” which relies on students making individual, self-initiated contact with personal counselors with a more intrusive, campus-initiated educational approach. This proactive method brings mental health education directly to students, particularly those who may lack the assertiveness or cultural proclivity to seek it out on their own. The good news is that supporting student mental health improves academic performance, persistence, and graduation rates. Investing in student mental health is a wise academic and economic decision for an institution.²



The Potential Of Positive Psychology, Mindfulness, and Self-Compassion To Address the College Mental Health Crisis

More than a decade of research has shown that teaching resilience and Positive Psychology principles to youth can reduce and prevent symptoms of depression and anxiety, lower stress, promote well-being, and improve grades—by enhancing students’ abilities to focus attention and dismiss distracting thoughts.⁸

There is also growing evidence to support the effectiveness of Mindfulness-based interventions for managing stress, maintaining mental health, and promoting subjective well-being,⁹ particularly among emerging adults.¹⁰ Mindfulness practices have been found to facilitate the adjustment of first-year college students,¹¹ even after controlling for factors such as self-efficacy and social support.¹² In addition, Mindfulness has been found to be an effective way to combat binge drinking and excessive alcohol consumption.¹¹ For example, mindful students engage in less problematic drinking and are more aware of their drinking behavior and its consequences.¹³ These findings strongly suggest that Mindfulness practices can be powerful tools for facilitating students’ transition to college, and their persistence through degree completion.

Furthermore, research suggests that Self-Compassion can be an effective practice to help students respond in healthy ways to the challenges of the college years. Studies have shown that those with higher Self-Compassion have significantly lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress.¹⁴ It has also been found that students with higher Self-Compassion are more motivated to achieve and are more resilient.¹⁵

In conclusion, Positive Psychology, Mindfulness, and Self-Compassion all cultivate well-being and flourishing through a strengths and skills-based approach. This approach is useful in ameliorating psychological stress, anxiety, and symptoms of depression.



Supporting Research: The Current Mental Health Crisis For College Campuses & College Students

- Compared to prior generations, college students today are 50 percent more likely to report feeling overwhelmed and stressed.¹⁶
- More than half of college students experience emotional stress (ACHA-NCHA, 2017) and the emotional distress rates of college students have trended upward over the course of the past four years.¹⁷
- A 2017 survey by the American College Health Association revealed that about 61 percent of college students had experienced "overwhelming anxiety" within the previous year, up from 51 percent in 2011.¹⁸
- According to the National College Health Assessment, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of students suffering from depression has increased dramatically nationwide— from 32.6 percent in 2013 to 40.2 percent in 2017.¹⁹
- Boston University's School of Public Health reports that 30 percent of students struggling with depression drop out, one-fifth of whom might have stayed in school with the proper treatment and intervention.²⁰
- Anxiety and depression rates have been rising, with three out of every four college students reporting at least one stressful life event within the past year. Twenty percent said they experienced greater than five stressful life events within that same time frame.²¹
- According to the American Psychological Association, more than a third of students worldwide experience a mental health crisis during their first-year of college.²²
- The number of students seeking mental health services treatment far exceeds the resources of most counseling centers.²⁰
- According to the American Psychological Association, one-quarter of Gen Zers report that they don't do enough to manage their stress, and nearly three-quarters (73%) indicate they could have benefited from more emotional support in the last 12 months.²⁰
- According to a recent national report from the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors, students typically have to wait almost seven business days for their first appointment with a college counselor; on some campuses, the wait can be more than two months.²⁰



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