Guide for Penn faculty:
Supporting Student Mental Health During COVID-19

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
in collaboration with the Center for Teaching & Learning (CTL)

Adapted From
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What is going on right now?
The COVID pandemic has created a great deal of change and uncertainty for all of us. Many people are experiencing a range of emotional discomfort such as sadness, anxiety, frustration, fear, loneliness, and grief.

Students, in particular, are feeling a great deal of stress. This is normal.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Stressors for students</th>
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<td>Layers of loss (graduation, jobs, time with friends)</td>
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<td>Complicated family dynamics</td>
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<td>Family or friend illness or death due to COVID</td>
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<td>Difficulty maintaining self-care</td>
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<td>Mental health conditions and/or a history of trauma</td>
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<td>Social isolation &amp; loneliness</td>
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<td>Space or technology issues interfering with learning</td>
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<td>Difficulty navigating the virtual learning environment</td>
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<td>Digital overload (e.g., being in all virtual classes, meetings, internships, etc.)</td>
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Stress may be exacerbated by 
Culture & context

- Financial concerns for students and their families/FGLI concerns
- International students dealing with issues around visas, jobs, isolation, etc.
- Students who do not feel safe at home
- Students of color facing issues around racism and inequality
- Students with disabilities living & learning remotely
- LGBTQ+ students who may not be open to their families about their identities
How do I support students in the virtual classroom?
GENERAL TIPS

- Humanize yourself—we are all going through this together
- Assume the best in our students; students can care about their academics AND struggle at the same time
- Balance rigor and support (some need more support than rigor)
- Focus on faculty-student rapport and student connectedness
- Provide predictability and flexibility
- Email/schedule virtual meetings to check in with students

Build flexibility into your syllabus

- Have policies dedicated to:
  - Submitting late work
  - Missing some class and small assignments without penalties
  - Having technical glitches/limitations

- Encourage students to:
  - Interact more (helps you discover issues before they get more serious)
  - Have choices about what they need to miss

*Acknowledging this ahead of time sends a message that it is normal to run into issues and can help students feel more organized/empowered*
How do I support students' well-being?
Tips from CAPS

I CARE Training:

- Identify warning signs
- Check in with care
- Explore options

Learn more: I CARE Training

Reiff et al. (2018)
Identify Warning signs

- **Sudden Changes in Behavior:**
  - Shifts in mood or anxiety levels
  - Suddenly isolating from others
  - Struggling with an upsetting life event or trauma

- **Patterns of Behavior:**
  - Difficulty with motivation, energy, or sleep
  - Deterioration of work or participation
  - Multiple absences
  - Concern expressed by others

- **Your Instinct**
  - If you sense that a student may be struggling, trust your instinct!
  - Check in with care.

I CARE Training
CHECK IN

➢ Check in via email, phone, or virtual meetings to show support

➢ Share what you are noticing:
  ▪ “I noticed that you haven’t been to the Canvas site for a few days and I just wanted to check in and see how you were doing.”

➢ Ask open-ended questions/prompts with curiosity:
  ▪ “How are you coping these days?”
  ▪ “Tell me more about that…”

➢ Summarize with care:
  ▪ “It sounds like this has been a particularly tough time for you.”
After hearing how the student is doing...

Explore options for the problem
- Can I give you some advice/suggestions?
- Have you thought of ways to cope with this?
- Have you considered talking to someone about this?

Help connect the student to additional resources
Remember: You’re not expected to be a counselor... but you can provide a caring presence in a student’s life.
What resources can help me?
Referring to CAPS

> Show students that you care, but discuss your limitations:
  - "I can support you with this, but I think that a clinician at CAPS can be most helpful to you in addressing this problem."

> Be specific about why you are referring a student:
  - "CAPS has clinicians who are really good at helping students address stress related to the pandemic. I can provide you with information about their virtual services."

I CARE Training
How to Access CAPS

Call Us:
215-898-7021 (24/7); press #1 to speak to a clinician
(Faculty can consult with us 24/7)

Come In:
Clinicians are currently at Student Health (3535 Market St.)
9:30 AM-1:30 PM Monday-Friday (must call ahead)

See CAPS website for up-to-date business hours and location
(CAPS will eventually resume services at 3624 Market St.)
Who to Contact In A Crisis?

Mental Health Crisis

- Call CAPS: 215-898-7021 (24/7)
- Press #1 to speak to a clinician

Life-Threatening Crisis

- Call the Penn Police: 215-573-3333 (511 from campus phone)
- Call 911
Health & Wellness Resources

COUNSELING & PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (CAPS)
- Teletherapy, drop in (must call ahead), & virtual programming
- Call 215-898-7021 (24/7); Learn more here.

ALCOHOL & OTHER DRUGS (AOD)
- Virtual education, prevention, and brief interventions
- Call 215-573-3525; Learn more here.

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICE (SHS)
- Telehealth & in-person (as needed)
- Call 215-573-3535 (24/7); Learn more here.

CAMPUS HEALTH
- Disease surveillance and prevention, virtual health education and promotion, and policies. Learn more here.
Let us know if this was helpful

Please take 2 minutes to complete our survey.
Access the survey by:
> Clicking on: Faculty Feedback Survey
or scanning the QR code
REFERENCES


Newhouse, K. (2020, April 6). *Four core priorities for trauma-informed distance learning.* KQED. https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/55679/four-core-priorities-for-trauma-informed-distance-learning?fbclid=IwAR0twb3bivH6wVOyKcwScch6NxdUpmWbmEMR_CXbp5nw3-yX0dBHQxONeQ


Thanks!

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Any questions? Email CAPS at caps@pobox.upenn.edu