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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Wellness at Penn
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.
### Stressors for Students

- Layers of loss (graduation, jobs, time with friends)
- Complicated family dynamics
- Family or friend illness or death due to COVID
- Difficulty maintaining self-care
- Mental health conditions and/or a history of trauma
- Social isolation & loneliness
- Space or technology issues interfering with learning
- Difficulty navigating the virtual learning environment
- Digital overload (e.g., being in all virtual classes, meetings, internships, etc.)
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**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Have policies dedicated to:</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Submitting late work</td>
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<td>- Missing some class and small assignments without penalties</td>
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<td>- Having technical glitches/limitations</td>
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<th>Encourage students to:</th>
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<td>- Interact more (helps you discover issues before they get more serious)</td>
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<td>- Have choices about what they need to miss</td>
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*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 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.”
Explore

▶ 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."
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:
3624 Market St., 1st Floor West
*Must call ahead
*Check CAPS website for updates on hours & policies
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
> 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


Newhouse, K. (2020, April 6). *Four core priorities for trauma-informed distance learning.* KQED. https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/55619/four-core-priorities-for-trauma-informed-distance-learning?fbclid=IwAR0twb3bvH6wVHOyKcuScch6NxdUpmWbMEMR_CXbpbnw3-yX0dBHQoNeQ


Thanks!

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