Teaching & Supporting Mental Health during the Pandemic

Student Counseling
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 a common and reasonable response to the current situation.
Stressors for students

- Layers of loss (graduation, jobs, time with friends)
- Isolation & loneliness
- Complicated family dynamics
- Family or friend illness or death due to COVID
- Difficulty maintaining self-care
- Mental/physical health conditions
- Anxiety related to social situations
- Difficulty adjusting to changing norms and policies
- Worries about being academically underprepared for the coursework
- Domestic and international news incidents
- Creating boundaries with others
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, family worries, etc.
- Students of color facing issues around racism and inequality
- Students with disabilities & chronic illness concerned about risk & lack of treatment

Student concerns may vary based on mental health and trauma history, aspects of one’s identity, and if a student has experienced discrimination that may impact their sense of belonging in the classroom.
How do I support students as we return to the physical classroom?
Humanize yourself (with boundaries) by sharing how you are feeling and giving your students opportunities to share, too

Recognize that there will be varying levels of student comfort indoors and when working in groups

Assume the best in our students; students can care about their academics AND struggle at the same time

Focus on teacher-student rapport and student connectedness

Provide predictability alongside flexibility

Send emails and/or schedule meetings to check in with students

Glazier (2016), Imad (2020), Imad (2021), Newhouse (2020)
Safety Considerations

> Share information with your students about mask-wearing in your syllabus and discuss it during the first class meeting.
> At the beginning of every class session, briefly remind your students of the masking policy.
> Emphasize the importance of everyone's health and safety, including staying home when sick.
> Consider setting up study groups that meet on Zoom – to help students connect with and support each other.
> Consider co-creating classroom norms with your class around in-class behavior, including physical spacing and interacting.
BUILD FLEXIBILITY INTO YOUR SYLLABUS

Have policies dedicated to:
- Staying home when sick
- Submitting late work
- Missing some class and small assignments without penalties
- Having to isolate or quarantine
- Having technical glitches/limitations

Encourage students to:
- Interact early and often (helps you discover issues before they get more serious)
- Make choices about what they need to miss
- Share about concerns with you
Normalize Asking for Help

> When we proactively acknowledge that it is not uncommon to miss class or need help, it sends a message that it is normal to run into issues and can help students feel more organized and empowered to reach out for help.

> To do this, you might consider:
  - Sharing with your students about a time when you asked for help or were offered help by a professor.
  - Sharing about how valuable you think it is to speak to a mental health professional.
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

- **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. Lead with curiosity and care for the student.

Learn More: Helping Others
Signs of Crisis

- They demonstrate suicidal/homicidal thoughts, statements, or attempts
- You've seen signs of self-harm (cutting, burning)
- You notice they have extreme anxiety or panic (difficulty breathing)
- You notice a loss of contact with reality (seeing/hearing things that are not there)

Learn More: Warning Signs for Suicide
Check in via email, phone, in-person, or virtual meetings to show support.

Share what you are noticing:
- "I noticed that you haven’t been to class 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."

Learn More: Helping Others
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?
  - What are some things you’ve already tried?
  - Have you considered talking to someone about this?
- Help connect the student to additional resources

I CARE Training
Learn More: Helping Others
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 Student Counseling

> Show students that you care, but discuss your limitations:
  > “I can support you with this, but I think that a clinician at the Student Counseling can be most helpful to you in addressing this problem.”

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

I CARE Training
Learn More: Helping Others
How to Access Student Counseling

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

Come In:
3624 Market St., 1st Floor West; can drop-in and meet with a clinician during regular business hours
*Check the website for hours/updates

Let's Talk: no-appointment, drop-in service on campus
WHO TO CONTACT IN A CRISIS?

Mental Health Crisis
> Student Counseling: 215-898-7021 (24/7)
> Press #1 to speak to a clinician

Life-Threatening Crisis
> Penn Police: 215-573-3333 (511 from campus phone)
> Call 911

I CARE Training
Learn More: Get Help Now
Helping yourself & others

> Encourage students to watch *I SHARE: Connection, Healing & Hope* to hear Penn students discuss the power of sharing and how they got support. Go to Wellness at Penn watch the video.

> Learn more here: Caring for Yourself & Others: Stress, Distress, Crisis
Resources for COVID-19

- Website: coronavirus.upenn.edu
- Email: coronavirus@upenn.edu
- Social Media: @COVIDPenn (Instagram & Twitter)

Learn More: Mental Health & COVID-19
Let us know if this was helpful

Please take 2 minutes to complete our survey.

Access the survey by:

> Clicking on: 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=IwAR0twb3bivH6wVHQykKcw5cch6NxdUpmlWbmEHR_CXbp8nw3-yX0d8MQxONe0


Thanks!

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