

How to support student mental health



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Agenda

- Introduction to Mental Health
- Mental Health in College Students
- Mental Health Promotion and Prevention
- Understanding Stigma
- Causes of Mental Illness
- **Deep Dive into Mental Health Issues**
 - Stress
 - Anxiety Disorders
 - Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
 - Depression
- How to Support Student Mental Health



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What is Mental Health?

Mental health is described by WHO as:-

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A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (WHO 2001)



Mental Health: The Ability to Love and to Work

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Navigating Mental Health Challenges in Students

Young people naturally experience changing moods and emotions as part of their development

Protective Factors for Mental Well-being:

- Openly discussing worries
- Ensuring adequate sleep
- Maintaining proper nutrition
- Getting enough rest
- Sharing emotions with others

These factors help young people cope with challenges, turning difficulties into experiences that build resilience and self-confidence.

Signs of Concern: If a young person struggles to function and loses interest in daily activities, it is a cause for concern.

Warning signs include:

- Abandoning hobbies
- Skipping school
- Isolating from friends



Challenges Faced by Students

- Challenges Faced by Secondary School Students
 - High pressures in academic performance
 - Complex social dynamics
 - Transition into adulthood
- Importance of Proactive Support
 - Providing tools and support for academic and personal growth
 - Helping students navigate modern complexities
- Role of Teachers and Support Staff
 - Taking proactive steps to assist students
 - Ensuring students thrive in less supervised environments



Brain Development Completes at Age 25

1. Growth and Pruning:

- During adolescence, the brain experiences substantial growth and synaptic pruning, which helps refine neural connections and improve efficiency.

2. Prefrontal Cortex Development:

- The prefrontal cortex, responsible for decision-making, impulse control, and complex planning, continues to mature until around age 25. This area is essential for regulating emotions and making thoughtful decisions.

3. Myelination:

- Myelination, the process of insulating nerve fibers to enhance signal transmission, continues until around age 25. This improves the speed and clarity of neural communication.

4. Executive Functions:

- Skills such as risk assessment, logical thinking, and emotional regulation are refined during this period. These functions are critical for academic and personal success.

5. Brain Plasticity:

- Even after reaching full maturity, the brain retains plasticity, allowing it to adapt and reorganize throughout life.



Promotion and Prevention Strategies

- Creating Supportive Living Conditions
 - Actions to create environments that support mental health
 - Encouraging adoption and maintenance of healthy lifestyles
- Increasing Chances of Better Mental Health
 - Implementing a range of actions
 - Focusing on prevention and promotion



Things you can
control yourself

HAND OF MENTAL WELLBEING

FOOD AND EATING HABITS

- What did you eat during the day?
- Did you enjoy a healthy snack every now and then?
- Who did you share your mealtimes with?
- Were you able to enjoy your meals at leisure or did you have to hurry?

SLEEP AND REST

- What time did you go to bed?
- Did you get enough sleep?
- Did you sleep well?
- Did you wake up feeling fresh and rested?
- Were you able to take it easy during the day?
- Did you have enough time to relax and rest?

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND EMOTIONS

- Who did you meet today?
- What activities did you do with your family?
- How did you feel during the day?
- Did you share those feelings with someone?
- Did you have time to listen to a friend?
- What made you happy or sad?

EXERCISE AND SHARED ACTIVITIES

- What type of activities did you do during the day?
- Did you have somebody join you?
- What type of exercise do you like best?
- How does exercise make you feel?

HOBBIES AND CREATIVITY

- What kind of fun things did you do?
- Did you do something creative?
- What kind of hobbies make you feel great?
- What do you find beautiful?
- How long did you spend watching TV or using the computer?
- Did you have somebody join you in these activities?



PERSONAL VALUES AND DAILY CHOICES IN VARIOUS SITUATIONS

- What kind of choices did you make that made you feel good?
- What do you value and consider important in your own life?

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The Finnish Association
for Mental Health

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Stigma

- Nature of Stigmas
 - Fixed ideas and judgments about mental illness
 - Fear and avoidance of misunderstood conditions
- Forms of Stigma
 - Attitudes: thoughts and prejudices
 - Behaviors: bullying, avoidance, violence
- Consequences of Stigma
 - Limiting job and housing opportunities
 - Reducing desire to seek treatment and support
 - Fears of not being accepted by family, friends, or community
- Internalized Stigma
- Promoting Compassion

Strategies for Teachers to Prevent Discrimination and Stigmatization:



1. Educate and Raise Awareness:

- Provide students with accurate information about mental health to dispel myths and misconceptions.
- Incorporate mental health education into the curriculum to normalize discussions about mental well-being.

2. Promote an Inclusive Environment:

- Foster a classroom culture of acceptance and respect where all students feel valued.
- Encourage open conversations about mental health and create a safe space for students to share their experiences.

3. Model Compassionate Behavior:

- Use sensitive and respectful language when talking about mental health.
- Demonstrate empathy and understanding towards students with mental health challenges.

4. Support and Accommodate:

- Offer support to students with mental health issues by providing accommodations and understanding their needs.
- Work with school counselors and mental health professionals to ensure students receive the necessary support.

5. Address Bullying and Discrimination:

- Implement and enforce anti-bullying policies that specifically address mental health-related discrimination.
- Take immediate action to address any instances of bullying or exclusion related to mental health.

Types of Mental Health Issues

Variety of Mental Health Issues

- Different types can occur simultaneously
- Can be short bursts or extended episodes
- Can be ongoing, chronic conditions

Types of Mental Illness

- More than 200 types identified
- Focus on a few main types in this presentation

What is Mental Illness?

- Definition of Mental Illness
 - Affects thinking, feeling, mood, or behavior
 - Impairs ability to relate to others and function daily
- Examples of Mental Illness
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
- Distinction Between Poor Mental Health and Mental Illness
 - Poor mental health does not equate to mental illness
 - Possible to have a good well-being despite mental illness



Causes of Mental Illness

- Biological Factors
 - Genes or chemical imbalances in the brain
- Social Isolation
 - Reinforced feelings of loneliness
- Experiences Related to Medical Conditions
 - Cancer or diabetes
- Drug or Alcohol Abuse
- Early Adverse Life Experiences
 - Trauma or history of abuse
 - Child abuse, sexual assault, witnessing violence





1. Stress

- Definition of Stress
 - Natural human response to challenging situations
 - State of mental or emotional strain
- Body's Reaction to Stress
 - Fight-or-flight response
 - Release of hormones like adrenaline and cortisol
- Effects of Stress
 - Beneficial in small amounts
 - Excessive stress can harm physical and mental health
- Importance of Managing Stress
 - Crucial for maintaining overall well-being

Causes of Stress

- Academic Pressure
 - High expectations
 - Pressure to perform well in exams and assignments
- Time Management
 - Balancing studies, part-time jobs, and personal life
 - Poor time management leading to stress
- Social Challenges
 - Navigating relationships with peers and family
 - Conflicts or lack of support adding to stress



Symptoms of Stress

- Physical Symptoms
 - Headaches and stomachaches
 - Sleep disturbances
- Emotional Symptoms
 - Increased irritability
 - Anxiety and feelings of overwhelm
- Behavioral Symptoms
 - Changes in eating habits
 - Procrastination and avoiding social interactions



Coping Strategies for Stress

Healthy Lifestyle

- Encouraging regular exercise
- Maintaining a balanced diet
- Ensuring sufficient sleep

Mindfulness and Relaxation

- Practicing mindfulness
- Engaging in meditation
- Performing deep breathing exercises

Seeking Support

- Talking to friends and family
- Consulting mental health professionals

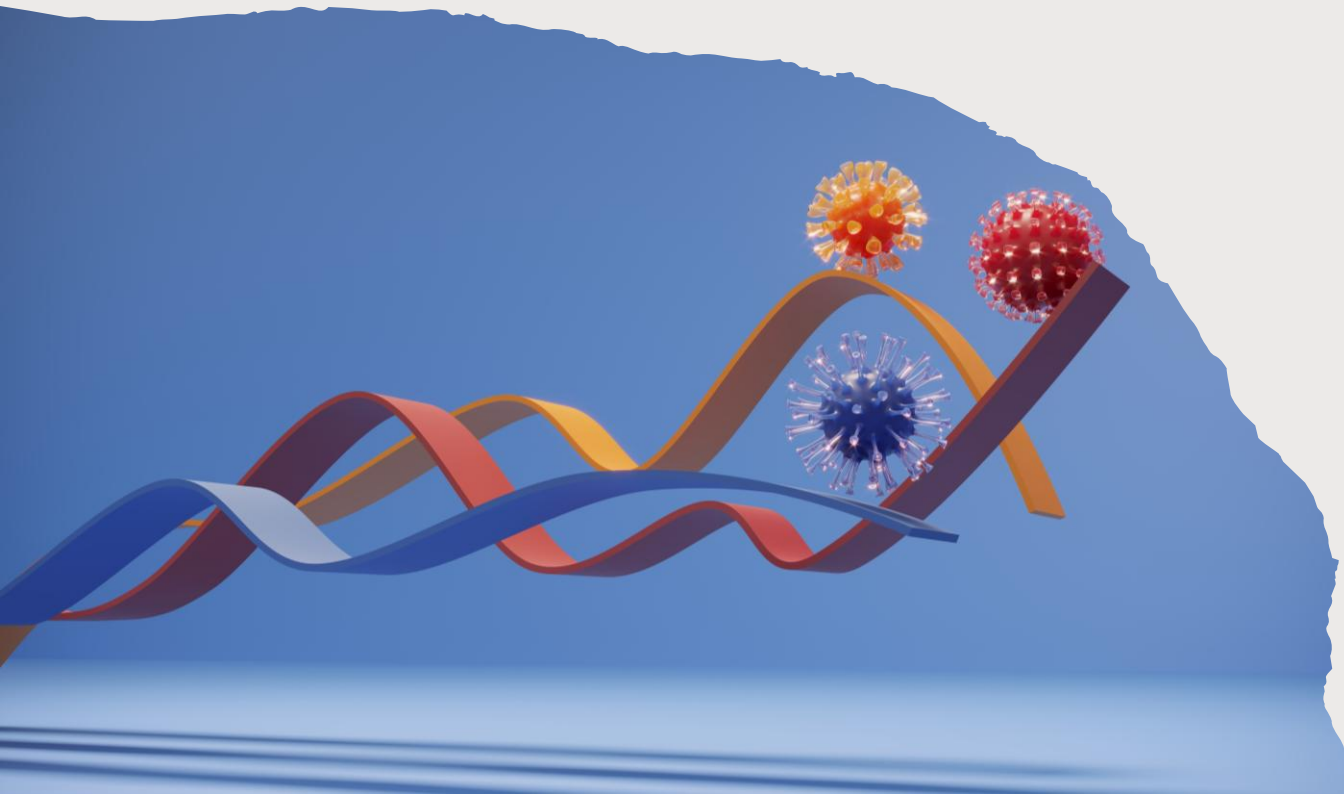
2. Overview of Anxiety Disorders

- Prevalence of Anxiety Disorders
 - Most common psychiatric problem among college students
 - Affects approximately 12 % of students
- Nature of Anxiety
 - common for students to experience anxiety occasionally
 - Mounting or ongoing anxiety can disrupt daily life
- Medical Condition
 - Disrupted daily life indicates a need for treatment
- Causes of Anxiety
 - Combination of genetics, brain chemistry, life experiences, and stress
 - Exact causes not fully understood



Signs of Anxiety

- Persistent Anxious Feelings
 - Interfere with daily life or functioning
- Difficulty Developing Coping Habits
 - After a traumatic event
- Living in Constant Fear
 - Fear of failure
- Extreme Discomfort in Social Settings
 - Difficulty interacting with others
- Trouble Concentrating
 - Seeming to have a blank mind
- Feelings of Guilt or Stress
- Visible Panic Attacks



Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Characteristics:

OCD involves repetitive, unwanted thoughts (obsessions) and irrational urges to perform certain actions (compulsions).

Common Obsessions: Fears of contamination, needing things to be orderly, and intrusive thoughts about harm.

Common Compulsions: Repetitive behaviors like hand-washing, checking, or counting.

Support Strategies:

- Recognize symptoms to identify and support students with OCD.
- Encourage seeking professional help.
- Avoid belittling symptoms.
- Suggest coping strategies that promote comfort.



3. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- Causes of PTSD
 - Traumatic events such as war, natural disasters, abuse, or serious accidents
- Symptoms of PTSD
 - Reliving the traumatic event
 - Sleep problems
 - Panic attacks and paranoia
 - Changes in emotions
- Emotional Impact
 - Irritability and emotional outbursts
 - Feelings of helplessness or numbness



Supporting Students with PTSD

1. **Create a Safe Environment:** Ensure the student feels safe in the classroom. Minimize stress and identify triggers that may cause distress
2. **Open Communication:** Encourage the student to talk about their feelings. Validate their emotions and provide a supportive listening ear
3. **Consistent Routines:** Maintain a predictable classroom routine to help the student feel secure. Inform them in advance about any changes
4. **Professional Help:** Encourage the student to seek help from school counselors or mental health professionals. Offer to assist in making appointments
5. **Relaxation Techniques:** Allow the student to practice relaxation skills, such as deep breathing or mindfulness, during school hours.





4. Depression

- Youth depression is a serious mental health condition that affects how young people think, feel, and behave. It goes beyond occasional sadness and can significantly impact daily life.
- By understanding and addressing youth depression, educators can provide crucial support to students struggling with this condition.



Symptoms and Episodes

- Episodes of Depression
 - Can be a single occurrence or recurrent
 - May last for years if untreated
 - Triggers include stressful events, physical illnesses, trauma, loss, major transitions, and financial stress
 - Can also occur without any clear reason
- Symptoms of Depression
 - Persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness
 - Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
 - Includes mood swings, sleep disturbances, and appetite changes
 - Unexplained physical aches and pains



Supporting Someone with Depression

- Recognizing Depression in Others
 - Look for signs such as loss of interest in activities
 - Skipping classes or social events
 - Extreme emotional reactions
 - Frequent talk about death or suicide
- Supporting Someone with Depression
 - Offer words of encouragement and support
 - Avoid telling them to “cheer up” or to “snap out of it”
 - Encourage them to seek professional help
 - Offer to accompany them to appointments
 - Understand the importance of professional treatment
 - Recognize that each person needs to find effective coping mechanisms

Effective Ways to Support Student Mental Health

1. Inclusive and Supportive Environment
2. Promote Diversity and Mental Health Awareness
3. Encourage Help-Seeking Behavior
4. Promote Work-Life Balance



Effective Ways to Support Student Mental Health

5. Regular Mental Health Check-Ins
6. Integrate Mental Health Education
7. Offer Flexible Learning Options
8. Create Safe Spaces on Campus:
9. Encourage Physical Activity

