



SUPPORTING Minds, SUPPORTING Learners

Addressing Student Mental Health
to Advance Academic Success

Next Steps

Given the impact mental health concerns have on academics—including the likelihood that students will withdraw—colleges should take a more active role in both understanding and addressing students’ mental health and well-being.

Colleges have an opportunity to be the place where students can find the mental health support they need. Colleges that act on this opportunity can improve their students’ chances to thrive in college and beyond. And colleges cannot intervene too soon. The similarities between *CCSSE* and *SENSE* data indicate that many students are starting college while coping with mental health issues. Colleges that want to help more students succeed should assess all students’ mental health at intake and then provide support to those who need it.

Everyone who comes in contact with community college students can play a role in supporting students’ mental health and well-being. Many colleges now focus on developing a culture of caring to build these efforts into the day-to-day work of all faculty and staff.

College employees in all areas and at all levels can:

- ⚙️ Be attuned to students’ mental health needs.
- ⚙️ Connect students with mental health resources.
- ⚙️ Help students believe that they belong at the college and show students that the college cares about their mental health.

College-wide efforts should include having resources that are easy to find and access. They also should make sure students hear about the resources regularly—multiple times from multiple sources, beginning with the students’ earliest interactions with the college.



Presidents and senior leaders can:

- ⚙️ Develop a formal, comprehensive plan for student mental health that addresses prevention, integrates mental health support throughout the college’s existing structures and practices, and involves a range of employees.
- ⚙️ Commit to developing a culture of caring, and make sure each person on campus understands their role in building and maintaining this culture.
- ⚙️ Make sure everyone on campus has access to information about mental health resources.
- ⚙️ Develop systems—and train employees—to recognize and respond to students who may be experiencing anxiety and/or depression. For example, colleges can offer, encourage, or require employees to participate in Mental Health First Aid training.
- ⚙️ Provide professional development so all staff become more comfortable discussing mental health and referring students to support services.
- ⚙️ Place counselors in academic units so students are more aware of them.

Faculty members can:

- ⚙️ Look for changes in a student's behavior, such as missing class, not turning in assignments, or looking unkempt, and recognize that these changes may be indicators that the student is struggling. Offer to connect the student to mental health supports.
- ⚙️ Include information about mental health supports in their syllabi, email signature blocks, and other regular communications with students.
- ⚙️ Invite staff from mental health support programs into their classrooms to briefly present information about resources available to students.

Advisors, counselors, and other staff who interact with students can:

- ⚙️ Create a needs assessment that students complete at the beginning of each academic term. Based on responses, route students to support resources. Send follow-up messages during the academic term to students whose responses indicated a need for mental health assistance.
- ⚙️ Share details about mental health supports as part of routine contacts with students, such as communications about registration, orientation, and billing.
- ⚙️ Coordinate with faculty members to make sure they are aware of mental health resources they can share with students.



“If you see somebody who feels very detached or looks like they’re distancing themselves... talk to them.”

—STUDENT

Trustees can:

- ⚙️ Allocate funds for mental health supports.
- ⚙️ Help the college build partnerships with community mental health providers.
- ⚙️ Raise awareness of students' mental health and well-being—including the high level of support students need—in community leadership circles.
- ⚙️ Position the college as a leader in supporting students' mental health and well-being.

Students Also Can Play an Essential Role

More than two-thirds of young adults tell a friend they are struggling before telling anyone else, so colleges also must bring students into this essential work.

When a college engages students in better understanding mental health and well-being, it signals that leadership places a priority on mental health, and it prepares students to better help themselves and one other. Colleges can:

- ⚙️ Teach students about self-care. The organization [Active Minds](#) offers helpful information about [self-care](#).
- ⚙️ Encourage students to look out for their friends and fellow students. Active Minds offers [warning signs and statements to pay attention to](#) that students can use to recognize that a friend needs help. Colleges should make it clear that the student's job is to alert a specific office at the college, a crisis hotline, or 911—and not to solve someone else's mental health problems.
- ⚙️ Encourage leaders of student government and student organizations to share information about available resources with other students.



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