The College Years:

How Students with Lived Experience Navigate Academics & Mental Health Management
The Learning & Working Center at Transitions RTC is a national effort that aims to improve the supports for youth and young adults, ages 14-30, with serious mental health conditions to successfully complete their schooling and training and move into rewarding work lives. We are located at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, MA, Department of Psychiatry, Systems & Psychosocial Advances Research Center.

Visit us at:

http://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsRTC

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Acknowledgements
Mental Health in Higher Education

• Roughly 1/3 of undergraduates have clinically significant symptoms of mental health problems such as depression and anxiety\(^1\)

• Students with mental health conditions who attend college experience high dropout rates - one of the highest of any disability group.\(^2\)

• Positive mental health is strongly correlated to academic success, retention, and ultimately vocational success, adult resiliency & Return on Investment.\(^3\)
The PASS Model
An Overview
Peer Academic Supports for Success (PASS):
An empirically supported peer coach intervention to help students with MHC succeed academically

PHASE 1
PHASE 2
PHASE 3
PHASE 4
Inspiration for PASS Model

- Qualitative interviews with faculty, ODS/Counseling Staff and students

- Two pre-existing college coaching models:
  1. Wright State University’s Raiders on the Autism Spectrum Excelling (RASE) program for students on the Autism Spectrum
  2. Boston University’s college coaching model for students with mental health conditions
PASS Model: Core Competencies

- Structure
- Technology
- Emotional Agility
- Advocacy
- Resiliency
Making the model “hands on”

**Mental Health**
- Best practices in college MH
- Myth-busting
- Practicing self-care
- Helping a student in distress

**Academic**
- Coaching principles and ethics
- Building Support
- Setting goals and expectations
- Social Supports
- Prep for mid-terms
Peer Coaching Structure

- Upperclassmen at Boston University
- Academically successful and thriving on-campus

Coaches (n=10)

- Undergraduates at Boston University
- Mental health conditions
- Academic impairment

Students (n=14)

- 1x/week in person coaching session
- Up to 4 hours of coaching/week

Coaching Structure
Lessons from Feasibility Open Trial

Modifications to the PASS Intervention
Data Sources

- Peer Coach Supervision Notes
- Monthly peer coach self-assessment
- Student assessments of peer coaches
- Student focus group
- Peer coach focus groups
Peer Coach/Supervisor Reflections

“Coaches feeling stuck with students: Student is doing really well, what do they say or work on”

“I only used it [peer coach manual] during orientation and the first few weeks. After that, I never looked at it again.”
Making Manual Interactive!

Peer Coach Manual being under-utilized

3 ring binder with interactive coaching tools!
Coaching Tools

Coaching Tool - Tapping Technology

There are thousands of useful apps that may assist students in areas of academic, wellness, and emotional agility. Several are listed below, but every day new apps are designed and available that are helpful.

Taking time with your students to explore and try apps that support their success at school is helpful. Going to the Google Store and Apple App Store and typing in keywords related to the need of the student will display many apps. Take the time with your students to understand what apps they use and will be likely to use so you can help them choose useful technology. Many people download apps but never use them. If your student believes an app might be helpful to them, it is a good idea to use the apps together in your terminal. This has been shown to help students use the app more consistently.

Examples of Helpful Phone Apps by Topic

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<tr>
<th>Academics</th>
<th>Wellness</th>
<th>Emotional Resilience</th>
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<tr>
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<td>MindBodyGreen</td>
<td>Emotional Resilience</td>
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<td>OrgApp</td>
<td>MySensors</td>
<td>Emotions and Mindset</td>
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Coaching Tool - Reasonable Accommodations

Students who have mental health conditions may need support to do their best in school and work. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) entitles students with disabilities, like mental health conditions, to get academic help through student accommodations and other legal rights.

Starting a dialogue about reasonable accommodations:

- Assess whether your student knows about accommodations
- Ask if they have discussed accommodations with their professors or the Office of Disability Services
- Also discuss student’s knowledge of reasonable accommodations
- If the student would like, request them with the Office of Disability Services
- Ask professors or the Office of Disability Services

Here is a list of reasonable accommodations to request with your student:

- Alternative formats for assignments
- Extra time to complete assignments without extra time penalties
- Advance notice of assignments
- Alternative technology
- Accessible technology
- Work in progress
- Making a successful transition
- Textbook available on e-reader
- Extended time for test-taking
- Accommodations for note-taking
- Access to materials in alternative formats
- Extra time for tests
- Alternative seating arrangements during examination
- Extra time for tests and quizzes
- Alternative seating arrangements during examinations
- Extra time for tests and quizzes

Coaching Tool - Building Emotional Agility

Emotional agility is a process that enables people to navigate life’s ups and downs with self-acceptance, clear judgment, and an open mind. Emotional agility isn’t about ignoring difficult emotions and thoughts. It’s about facing those emotions and thoughts courageously and compassionately and moving past them to achieve one’s goals and make changes.

Emotional agility is a key factor in students’ lives and their success on campus. Emotional agility drives a student’s relationships, day-to-day health and engagement on campus. You can help students build their capacity to acknowledge their feelings, observe them without judgment, and challenge negative thoughts.

Here are some strategies you can use to help build emotional agility:

- Join your coaching session, how they typically deal with stress and challenges.
- What they believe, how they feel, and what happens to them when under a lot of stress.

Strategies you can use to help build emotional agility:

- Share how you think, and feel to role model how to observe and face feelings and thoughts in a non-judgmental way.
- Reframe negative thoughts as barriers and encourage the student to challenge the thought by asking for evidence to back it up.
- Encourage a student to observe their thoughts and emotions to see them for what they are—just thoughts, just emotions.
Peer Coach Reflections

“It is hard to work on setting goals and coaching when I am not spending face time with the student and working with them.”

“I most worry...about what my role is in her academic life is still unsure”

“Not being able to get in touch with my student”
Setting Expectations

1. Students non-responsive to peer coaches
2. Lack of clarity about peer coach role for both students and peer coaches

Student-Peer Coach Agreement!
Peer-Coach Student Agreement

- document to be reviewed and signed by both student and peer coach at their first coaching session

- establishes mutual expectations and commitment to the peer coaching relationship

Clarity on roles: student and peer coach

Communication expectations

Attendance commitment
Peer Coach Reflections

“I most worry about the student not feeling as though my time with her is effective...”

“How to encourage students to guide the meetings more than having me set the agenda.”
Meeting Agenda

1. Rapport Building
2. Logistics/Housekeeping
3. Discussion of Topic
4. Action Activity
5. Review of Student & Coach Tasks for Next Week
6. Final Thoughts or Concerns
Meeting 1 – Completing Student-Peer Coach Agreement

Meeting 2 – Identifying student’s short and long term goals

Meeting 3 – Strategizing about how to handle triggers/stressful situations

Meeting 4 – Social Outing

Meeting 5 – Mid-term preparation

Template Agendas – Activities
Peer Coach Reflections

“I need to encourage my shy student to be more active in determining what they want from our meetings and from the program overall”

“...how little she spoke. I anticipated the student being immediately excited to discuss what she needed”
Student Workbook Framework

Support: Framing relationship and expectations

Prepare: Peer coaching session activities

Inform: Mapping health to academic timelines

Empower: Agenda prep
Our Key Takeaways

1. Role clarity difficult to achieve – role definitions need lots of attention
2. Students need support in taking ownership over sessions with peer coach
3. Materials that involve a lot of reading and are informational in nature are not utilized, need more interactive materials
Transitions ACR Tip Sheets

- [Tools for School: Accommodations for College Students with Mental Health Challenges](#)

- [Outside-the-Box Accommodations: Real Support for Real Students](#)

- [My Mental Health Rights on Campus](#)
Contact us

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References

