SUPPORTING COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19

Michelle G. Mullen, MS, CRC, CPRP, PhD Candidate
University of Massachusetts Medical School,
Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research
The mission of the Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research is to promote the full participation in socially valued roles of transition-age youth and young adults (ages 14-30) with serious mental health conditions. We use the tools of research and knowledge translation in partnership with this at-risk population to achieve this mission.

Visit us at: https://www.umassmed.edu/HYPE http://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsACR

The contents of this presentation were developed under a grant with funding from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, United States Department of Health and Human Services (NIDILRR grant number A-90DP0063). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). **The contents of this presentation do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.**
Topics for Today’s Discussion

- The changing college environment
- Identifying support needs
- “Creative” ways to remotely support students
- Critical organizational strategies
- Q&A
Supporting Students Remotely

- This webinar is for direct service practitioners who are providing instrumental and emotional support to college students with mental health conditions:
  - Community-based SEd and MH providers
  - Campus-based Accessibility/Disability providers & CAPS

- The focus is to help students organized in this hectic time in order to finish the semester.

- You may be struggling with the same thing…maybe some of these tips and strategies could help some of us who are now working from home.
COVID, College, & Mental Health

- This is an unprecedented time.
- Everyone is in turmoil.
- In times like these, everyone is more vulnerable.
- Students with MHC may be more vulnerable
  - Higher “psychiatric risk”, previous MH history, increased social isolation, increased stress regarding finishing classes
- Increased access to telehealth (depending on state)
- Trying to cope and adjust to new “normal”\(^1\)
Understanding the changing college environment

• Over 200 schools have closed over the last several weeks²

• Displacement of vulnerable student populations
  • Increased risk of financial, food, and housing insecurities

• Reduction in critical resources
  • Libraries, study spaces, dorms, dining commons…friends, professors…computers, high-speed internet

• Reduction in number of in-person supports on and off campus
  • Uncertainty regarding the access of virtual support

• Assumption that every college student can be virtual and responsive to academic needs

• “Panicgogy”- combination of panic + pedagogy³
Some suggestions to help students who are affected by these changes...

• Ask what type of help they need
  • Some of this will be related to school, others will be related to basic needs

• Pour a lot of love on these students

• Normalize that this is hard for everyone

• Affirm their strengths and their supports

• Ask about when they got through previous hard times in the past
  • Identify critical supports, resources, activities, people…
  • Is there a way to get/access these things remotely?

• Suggest ways to stay connected while physically distant from support

• Send some treats…treats go a long way
Identifying Existing Supports for Students

• Does the school the student attends have emergency financial aid?
  • Are they helping to connect lower resourced students to access necessary technology to participate online?

• Are their mental health providers & prescribers transitioning to tele-health?

• Are they currently registered with Disability/Accessibility Services?

• Are they connected to BIT/ campus behavioral health team?

• Are there any additional resources in your community targeting this population that can bridge the gap?
Things to consider…

- What are the “new” expectations of the semester?

- Does the school where the student’s enrolled have a current option to convert classes to Pass/Fail?
  - Explore if P/F of certain classes will hinder future goals
  - Explore how the expectations change as a result of moving to P/F
  - Explore if certain assignments are not completed could they still receive a P (Pass)

- What does registration for OAS/ODS look like now for students?
  - Are there different accommodations/AT that students can now receive that would be helpful from home?
    - And are they needed? Or are all students being accommodated? Are all classes being recorded?
Some more things to consider…

• Is taking Incomplete(s) an option?
• Is a Medical withdrawal necessary?
  • Explore if Satisfactory Academic Progress standing would be affected

• Acting intentionally…develop & connect resources to meet the need:
  • Identify needs (both basic and academic) of each student,
  • Activate your community resources and relationships,
  • Develop robust and targeted resource lists to meet each need,
  • Tailor for each student, and
  • Actively connect each student to critical resources.
Basic Needs to Organizational Strategies: Keeping the Goal In Mind...Finish the Semester
Finishing the Semester: Critical Strategies

1) Reducing Distractions
2) Physical Organization
3) Mental Organization
4) Electronic Organization

We will be posting a resource list of YouTube videos and other resources for you to watch (if you’re interested) and to send to your students to help with develop these strategies/spaces.
1. The Importance of Minimizing Distraction

• In the absence of minimizing distractions, students will spend an inordinate amount of time “doing” work, but getting very little done

• Every subsequent task has less attention than the preceding task (see Attention Residue by Leroy, 2009)…

• It takes us 23 minutes to re-immersse into an activity after being disrupted (Mark et al., 2008)

• Figure out how to reduce internal and external distractions…
  • Setting up a space for success…and what we need to do to maintain it
Distracted People Work Faster, but…

- experienced a higher workload,
- more stress,
- higher frustration,
- more time pressure, and
- effort (Mark et al., 2008).

Students may attribute this difficulty with too much work or their mental health condition, they may just need a little help developing skills and systems…
Minimizing Distractions: Strategies

• Start with a clean work space…close clutter, makes mental clutter

• Be driven by the to-do list…

• Check email infrequently: maximum 3x a day??
  • Turn on “out of office” notification

• Turn off app notifications
  • Identify times in your calendar to check notifications from school (the dating app can wait)

• Silence cell phone during working times
  • Hide it??

• Set up free times where able to freely “roam” youtube/apps/news
2: Physical Organization: Creating Space & Developing Systems

- Managing the transition:
  - School to “home”
  - In-person to on-line
  - Paper to electronic files

- Create a work space
  - Clean surface that does not face something distracting
  - A table is helpful, some people may disagree with me…

- Navigating learning management systems
  - Emails/notifications/announcements in the LMS

- Physical organization creates mental organization
Physical Organization: Setting up a work-study space at home

• Once a firm believer of different tasks may need different spaces
  • …library, coffee shop, friend work-group…
  • We now need to think about creating spaces at home where different types of work can be done.

• Ask students under what circumstances/ places they performed best for certain activities:
  • Where did you [write/think/study/prepare] the best for [each course]?
    • https://coffitivity.com (helpful background noises)

• Ask about barriers to successfully working at home?
  • Who do they live with? What gets in the way when at home? Is it hard to start tasks?
3. Mental Organization: Time and Task Management

Time Management:
• How much time do I have? And how much time will it take?

Task Management:
• What do I have to do? And when do I have to get it done?

Time Management:
• Enter all new assignments into calendar, for each class
• Enter class times…some students are now in different time zones than their classes

• Figuring out what is negotiable and what is not…a *real* life skill
If its not on the calendar... it doesn’t exist!!!
Task Management:

- Create daily and weekly to-do lists
  - What do I have to get done today? When do I have to do it?
  - What do I have to get done by Friday? When do I have to do it?

- Can “live” inside a calendar or be separate…

- Try not to say: “You know what you need to do…[FILL IN THE BLANK]” students will want to kill you…they are already just trying to survive
TO DO:
- CH email final project
- email PRINT ECON ARTICLES
- finalize email to Tony Rothstein
- send materials to lies - responses, SHR, CG Parks, leRoy, Ericsson
- Contact Bridgeway about trial participation
  - call Ryan
  - text Craig Young
- email to Charles grade
- respond to Tony Rothstein
- finalize CB - send to J & S
- send email to Madeline - re: final paper
- send email to Steve Marcus re: 
  - proposal for Johanna
  - proposal for Rinald
- write abstract to Rinald - feasibility HYPE
4. Electronic Organization

- Some students will need zero help here...and can teach us a thing or two...other students will struggle big time.

- Ask about how they set up their files on their computer from their LMS
  - Do they download right away? Does everything get saved to the desktop?
  - Do they have a “tree” system? How are the files by course going to be organized?

- Help to create automatic places where files are stored

- Help to create a standard way of naming files (e.g. last revised date at end of file name)
My preferred App for Class Organization: Notability

- Recording classes
  - Helps to have record while distracted
  - Ability to record classes and sync with written notes
  - Developing cues so a student doesn’t have to listen to the whole class again
    - Such as: stepped away, rewind here, I have no idea what they are talking about, or simply “?”
    - Notability syncs writing with the audio that is being played at that moment
- Allows for import of powerpoint, pdfs, word docs…you can add pages and take notes while listening to the lecture…amazing (in my opinion).
  - Audio, ppt, and notes are then sync’d
- Can develop folders per subject to maintain course organization
- Clearly, there are others, please see our resource list, if you need additional options.
Stay Connected!

**Additional questions or inquiries for our team?**
Contact us directly at HYPE@umassmed.edu

**Sign up for our e-mail newsletter** for our products and announcements!

Text **TRANSITIONSACR** to **22828**

**Visit us at**
UMassMed.edu/HYPE and
UMassMed.edu/TransitionsACR
Question and Answer

Tell us how we can be helpful…now and in the future!

Type your questions or comments into the “Questions” tab.
References: