



Student Mental Wellness

Springing Into The New Semester

As we roll into the year and new semester, returning from holiday breaks and moving back to campus may have some students looking for a much-needed reset. From April to October 2021, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that the proportion of children between the ages of 5 and 11 visiting an emergency department because of a mental health crisis climbed 24 percent compared to that same period in 2019. Among 12- to 17-year-olds, the number increased by 31 percent. Similarly, the Clay Center also found an impending college mental health crisis. Almost half of the college students report having a psychiatric disorder within the past year, and 73% of students report experiencing a mental health crisis. Yet, only 25% of these students seek help or have the resources to do so.

These data illuminate the need to take seriously and prioritize discussions of mental wellness for students. As the transition and uncertainty of online learning and a global pandemic continue to take a toll, we're committed to opening a conversation that encourages students to take their mental health seriously. Below, we've compiled some helpful tips and reminders for mitigating the stress of this present social and cultural moment of instability.

1. Avoid Academic Burnout

When the nature of instruction is so uncertain, students should pause to remember why they went to college to begin with. Renewing your purpose and commitment to education can help you gain the internal motivation to identify the skills and expertise required for your goals more clearly. Starting with your why creates pathways to visualize what's needed within the given day, week, or month to stay focused. Establishing a clear path also helps negate any extra commitments, events, work, or 'extra's' that may clutter your schedule and accelerate burnout. You'll move with more intention while keeping the end goal at the center of your why.

2. Make a Wellness Plan

Perhaps counterintuitively, mental wellness is as much physical as it is mental. As a student, routine is necessary to keep your life in order. Particularly for college students, making sure that you stay hydrated, get adequate sleep, and eat healthy play in an essential role in your ability to bounce back from a setback. A wellness plan, however, is more than the aforementioned. We're all different, which means that our wellness ideas vary socially, emotionally, and behaviorally. To define wellness on your terms, identify what areas seem to pose the most significant struggles now. For example, some students feel better and more focused when getting a good night's sleep. Others may function their best with a consistent workout routine. Determine what makes you feel your best, and then interrogate how that may or may not appear in your everyday life.

3. Identify Resources

Sometimes, when we're in the thick of Crisis or struggling, it's difficult to assess who we can lean on. Part of establishing good mental health habits is preparing for the times when we're not at our best. Think of preparation like a safety net, you may still fall, but it will hurt a lot less if there's a plan to catch you. As we settle into the new year, find some time to brainstorm a community that you know can and will show up for you during hard times. This community will look different for everyone, but don't hesitate to expand beyond your immediate family. The list should include a solid group of core people—counselors, coaches, peers, pets, siblings, cousins may all be able to provide robust support if you need it. Make this list and put it somewhere safe. When you're feeling low, revisit and, most importantly, use it.

4. Plan to Avoid Crisis

Creating a wellness plan and establishing a routine can help avoid last-minute crunches that can undermine and deteriorate physical wellness. By taking time

at the beginning of the semester to map out critical due dates, schedule events, and layout other commitments, students can get a more holistic and prepared picture of what the semester holds. Mapping out commitments, assignments, and other responsibilities helps begin each day and week purposefully. Consider also scheduling out other things too, like blocking off portions of your day for exercise, reading, creativity, gaming, or other things that bring you joy. If you schedule joy into your calendar, you're less likely to skip these essential aspects of holistic wellness.

5. Learn to Say No, and Ask for What You Need

With so much happening in our daily lives, it's easy to feel like you have to do everything. There's mounting pressure for those students preparing for college to do as much as possible to look like an attractive application. Consequently, comparison culture has many of us thinking that we're never doing enough, which leads to behaviors that result in burnout and unnecessary stress. Part of committing to and prioritizing your mental wellness means that we're aware enough of ourselves to recognize when a break or reset is needed. Don't let it spiral out of control if you sense yourself approaching this point. Say no to things that add more stress, don't serve you, or allow toxic attitudes to fester.

Most importantly, give yourself grace. We're all living through immense precarity, and that requires us to approach our lives in innovative ways. Whether you're heading back to campus or back to Zoom school, take time each day to plan, access, and equip yourself with a community that can show up for you when it counts.

