SEEING “GREEN”
An Introduction to Mental Health Needs for Distance Learners
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Learning Objectives
- Identify the mental health needs for general college populations
- Identify the added some challenges related to mental health distance learners experience
- Select appropriate basic strategies for interacting with distressed students
- Identify what to consider when creating a syllabus that will mental health challenges
- Be able to have a general idea how to provide and recommend students to various resources when they are experiencing mental health distress
- **If anything that is discussed evokes a painful reaction or you find it triggering please feel free to mute me or leave the session**

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students
39% of students in college experience a mental health issue
50% of cases of mental health issues begin by the age of 14; 75% begin by the age of 24
2/3 of students with anxiety or depression don't seek treatment
280 people decide not to go through with a suicide attempt for every person who dies by suicide
67% of college students first tell a friend they are feeling suicidal before telling anyone else

Student Mental Health Information and Numbers by Active Minds
Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students
290 people decide not to go through with a suicide attempt for every person who dies by suicide
67% of college students first tell a friend they are feeling suicidal before telling anyone else

Association for University and College Counseling Center Director Survey 2018
- Suicide thoughts
- Eating Disorders
- Addictions Performance Difficulty
- Sleep disturbance

Significant Previous Mental Health Treatment and Adjustment to a New Environment

Possible Challenges for Distance Learners ....
- Are sometimes perceived as not having the need to face to face
- While online student services are available, some may not have access or be able to access them
- It can be harder to monitor the mental health issues of students who are not seeing them face to face
- Reduced student fees
- Students may have to pay for services

Eden’s Story
Eden is an 18 year old African American who identifies as female. She came in reporting she was feeling sad and not really meeting new people. Transitioning to college was hard and she describes herself as "shy." Eden did great in high school and graduated at the top of her class. She is doing an online degree program at the University of Florida and lives off campus.

What could be going on with Eden? Type answers in chat?
Eden’s Story

- First generation
- Questioning her sexuality
- Has experienced symptoms of depression and anxiety since 9th grade but “never said anything” because her family “doesn’t believe in mental health problems and are going to tell her to deal with it and stop whining”
- “Rented an apartment in Gainesville to find friends and feel in but really doesn’t go anywhere and stays home most of the time.”
- Feels really lonely because she is completely isolated
- Has self body image concerns and thinks she is “ugly and unlovable”
- Has a history of practicing Non-Suicidal Self Injury Behavior
- Has thought dying by suicide daily in the last week

What are some other challenges college students experience ……

- Housing insecurity/Homelessness
- Food insecurity
- Immigration status concerns
- Job loss
- Being on the autism spectrum and transitioning to college
- Being a student of color
- LGBQ
- Victims of crimes

Look to differentiate and identify ……

- Atypical behaviors, which may be behaviors that are simply not typical for a particular student.
- Unusual behaviors, which Barr defines as “behavior that is abnormal or unusual, even in the college community; such as paranoia, ongoing magical or fantastical thinking, or actions which interfere with the learning atmosphere.”
- Poor academic performance, which can lead to a downward spiral as emotional issues compromise academic performance, which causes greater distress and anxiety.

So now what do I do with this info?

Generally, Professors are Comfortable Addressing Behaviors that Impact Academic performance
Is Different than

- Content of work becomes negative/dark/odd in tone (atypical)
- Emails are accusatory, manipulative, sexually inappropriate or threatening (unusual behavior)
- Discussions post contents are inaccurate, factual, personal, disruptive, confusing, or show disorientation (atypical behavior)
- Emails are accusatory, manipulative, sexually inappropriate or threatening (atypical behavior)
- Late assignments from beginning of course, Not turning in work at all (academic performance)
- Ongoing display of anxiety about assignments (academic performance)
- Not re-doing work when given an opportunity (academic performance)
- Not turning in work at all (academic performance)

Why professors may not be reaching out?

- Make sure that prior to class starting you communicate approachability (i.e. If at any time you are experiencing difficulties in your personal life that are impacting your learning or academics, I encourage you to reach out to me)
- Validate students who allow themselves to be vulnerable with you and validate their feelings. You do not have to be a professional to do this...
- Making your syllabus mental health friendly

- Consider adding a statement to your syllabus that addresses mental health needs
- Consider adding resources to your syllabus that has information about the resources available to the college students registered for
- Research the resources available in your community that may already be present in the surrounding county or their institution to... (See above Counseling section)
- Consider adding the number to a CARE/Support team for the student affairs at the college and familiarize yourself
- Remember that no one entity should be responsible but rather that it takes a village

What Can You Do?

- Mental health education: Provide links to articles on issues common to college students (e.g. stress, fatigue, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance abuse)
- Crisis services: Proactively display phone numbers for crisis and/or suicide hotlines.
- Self-help services: Provide access to tools for self-evaluation, with accompanying articles on strategies for coping with common mental health issues.
- Students with disabilities: Provide links to the institution’s office for students with disabilities. Students who may have previously undiagnosed disabilities such as attention deficit disorder or learning disabilities. Students with documented diagnoses of mental disorders are entitled to reasonable academic accommodations.
- Counseling services: Provide links to the campus counseling center and clearly state what services are/are not available to distance students. Feedback channel needed to be in place to ensure that students and faculty who make inquiries for services receive a personal response.

More specifics of what you can do

- Make sure that prior to class starting you communicate approachability (i.e. If at any time you are experiencing difficulties in your personal life that are impacting your learning or academics, I encourage you to reach out to me)
- Validate students who allow themselves to be vulnerable with you and validate their feelings. You do not have to be a professional to do this...
- It sounds like you’re going through a really touch time — thank for trusting me

Kognito

- Consider taking the Kognito training for faculty because it gives great insight on how to reach students who are experiencing mental health challenges
THANK YOU!
If you would like resources that you could add to your course, email me at rettinger@ufl.edu