# Post-secondary Students and Mental Health

Within academia and the larger community mental health concerns have increased as more information about mental illness has come to light. It is estimated at least 1 in 5 Canadians1 experience some form of mental health related struggle, either long or short term in their lifetime. Instructors who understand the challenges faced by students with mental health issues are in a better position to support students to reach their academic goals. In addition, the pandemic has put even more students at risk for depression, anxiety, and stress increasing the need for mental health support. Despite the availability of a COVID-19 vaccine, the events over the past year and a half will continue to have an impact on the mental health of post-secondary students.

1 -Council of Ontario Universities-Accessible Campus: Understanding Accessibility

[Types and Aspects of Mental Health](#_What_are_the) | [How to help support students](#_How_to_Help) | [What do students think?](#_What_do_Students) | [Quebec Organizations for support](#_List_of_Quebec) | [Resources](#_Resources_<h2>)

## What are the Most Common Types and Aspects of Mental Health?

One area students face is the stigma of being mentally ill. Understanding enables the academic community to positively respond and accept students by addressing this issue.

### Mental Health Challenges among Post-secondary Students

* Feeling overwhelmed by the demands of post-secondary studies
* Feeling exhausted all the time
* Feeling very lonely
* Feeling very sad
* Feeling things are hopeless
* Feeling so depressed that it is difficult to function
* Feeling so anxious that it is difficult to think
* Seriously considering suicide

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| 🕮 | * [Student Mental Health Framework 2.0: Building a Thriving Community](https://carleton.ca/studentsupport/wp-content/uploads/Student-Mental-Health-Framework-2.0.pdf) Canadian Association of College and University Student Services and Canadian Mental Health Association |

### Aspects of Poor Mental Health that Affect Students’ Academic Performance

* Decreased ability to concentrate and to remember
* Decreased motivation
* Difficulty in handling multiple tasks or deadlines
* Difficulty accepting feedback (comments from professors, a poor grade, etc.)
* Negative impact on relationships with peers and family
* Decreased energy levels
* Lack of sleep

## How to Help and Support Students with Mental Health Issues

Here we outline practices and strategies to help students with mental health issues. Also included are suggestions on how to communicate and interact with students about their respective mental health struggles.

### Practices for Supporting and Helping Students with Mental Health Struggles

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| **Practices** | **How these help** |
| Provide a pass/fail grading option. | Helps alleviate student stress. |
| Provide alternatives to oral presentations in class, including creating a video or website. | Helps alleviate debilitating anxiety associated with oral presentations for some students. |
| Encourage students to ask for help when they need support. | Normalizes help seeking behaviour and helps reduce stigma associated with mental health struggles. |
| Provide the phone number and website of your institution’s counselling services on your course outline. | Normalizes help seeking behaviour and facilitates access. |
| Recognize signs of mental health struggles in students, including frequent absence from class and being completely withdrawn during class. | Facilitates early intervention and helps ensure that students are referred to mental health services that can meet their needs. |
| Show compassion when students tell you they are struggling. | Sometimes all students need is for someone to listen to them. |
| Get to know as many students as possible. | When you pay attention to small details about students’ behaviour and quality of work, it will be easier to identify signs that a student is struggling. |
| Be aware of the mental health resources available to students on campus. | Helps to ensure that you will know what service to refer a student to in case of a mental health emergency. |
| Provide accommodations such as excused absences for treatment, adjustments in test setting, homework deadline extensions, and adjustment in test times. | Accommodations for “students with disabilities” should be available to students with mental health issues. |

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| 🕮 | * [Pandemic taking a toll on mental health of university students](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/pandemic-university-students-mental-health-stress-1.5868705) - Posted by Vernon Ramesar, CBC News. |

### Strategies for Addressing the Sigma Associated with Mental Health Struggles

* Dedicate class time to discussing the prevalence or mental health struggles.
* This helps normalize these struggles for students.
* Dedicate class time to reframing mental health struggles as temporary and treatable conditions.
* Use anonymous polling to ask students about their mental health struggles.
* Provides a safe environment for students to share their mental health struggles with their peers.
* Provide links to testimonials of students with mental health struggles (See profiles below)

### Suggestions for Interacting with Students with Mental Health Struggles

* Do not change how you treat students because you think they may be encountering mental health struggles.
* Be confident and reassuring. Listen carefully and work with the student to help them meet their needs.
* If students appear to be struggling, ask them how you can be most helpful.
* Be aware of the difference between being an instructor and being a therapist (conflict of interest).
* In an acute or crisis situation, seek emergency help for students immediately.
* Discuss the resources available on campus with the student.
* If you are unsure whether to intervene, seek support from the appropriate services on campus.

Supporting students with mental health issues through More Feet on the Ground (MFOTG)

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| /var/folders/ch/mlb4p95n4wbgq6lmpmq_d2rh0000gp/T/com.microsoft.Word/Content.MSO/D1F53C71.tmp | Presenter: Margaret Lumley, Faculty Member at the University of Guelph, discusses how MFOTG is a good tool for faculty members to use to support students struggling with mental health (Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health)   1. [*More Feet on the Ground (MFOTG) user - faculty member 2* (2019, September 5) [Video].](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUc3HLLuAgM) 2. [*More Feet on the Ground - respond (faculty)* (2019, September 6)[Video]](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVY-HsR6prU&t=18s) |

## What do Students Think?

Watch these profiles of students with Mental Health struggles (Council of Ontario Universities)

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| /var/folders/ch/mlb4p95n4wbgq6lmpmq_d2rh0000gp/T/com.microsoft.Word/Content.MSO/D1F53C71.tmp | 1. [Adam, a Trent University student, with depression and schizophrenia.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-g8gb0SVr4) 2. [Heather, a student at Western University, with Asperger’s Syndrome.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vdmPZhTmKI) 3. [Hope, a student at Nipissing University, with bipolar disorder.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQFmUrtTn3I) 4. [Kelsae, a student at Carleton University, with generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and Autism Spectrum Disorder.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXZNCwzimNg) 5. [Melanie, a student at Queen’s University, who experiences anxiety.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viZ1l3PjzME) |

## List of Quebec Mental Health Organizations for Students

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| **Name of Organization** | **Phone Number** | **Website** |
| À deux mains / Head & hands | 514-481-0277 | [https://headandhands.ca](https://headandhands.ca/) |
| AMI-Quebec | 514-486-1448 | <https://amiquebec.org/> |
| Anorexie et boulimie Québec | 1-800-630-0907 | <https://anebquebec.com/en> |
| Hope for Wellness Help Line | 1-855-242-3310 (toll-free) | <https://www.hopeforwellness.ca/> (online) |
| Kids Help Phone (ages 5-29) | 1-800-668-6868 (toll-free)  text CONNECT to 686868 | <https://kidshelpphone.ca/who-we-are/> |
| Le Transit (Montreal Centre/East) | 514-282-7753 | <https://cictransit.com/en/> |
| Suicide Action Montreal (SAM) | (514) -723-4000 (Crisis line)  1-866-277-3553 (Toll Free) | <https://suicideactionmontreal.org/en/> |
| Tracom | 514-483-3033 | <https://www.tracom.ca/home> |
| West Island Crisis Centre (West Island) | 514-684-6160 | <https://www.centredecriseoi.com/en/index.html> |

## Resources

Accessible Campus. (n.d.). *Interacting with persons with mental illness.* <https://accessiblecampus.ca/reference-library/interacting-persons-disabilities/interacting-with-persons-with-mental-health-disabilities/>

Alyssa (2019, October 29). How does mental health actually affect students and academics? *Mentor*. <https://www.ualberta.ca/education/about-us/education-mentor-program/mentor-blog/2019/october/how-does-mental-health-actually-affect-students-and-academics.html>

Max, A., & Waters, W. (2018, January). *Breaking down barriers: Mental health and Canadian post-secondary students.* Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. <https://bp-net.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2018_Breaking-Down-Barriers-Mental-Health-and-Canadian-Post-Secondary-Students_CASA.pdf>

Staff Writers. (2018). *Mental health issues among university students* [UKEssays]. <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/education/student-mental-health-uk-0023.php?vref=1>

Young, M. (2021, January 28). *New study examines students’ mental health and COVID-19.*McMaster University. <https://brighterworld.mcmaster.ca/articles/new-study-examines-students-mental-health-and-covid-19/>

### Video Resources for Faculty

Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health. (2019, September 5). *More Feet on the Ground (MFOTG) user - faculty member 2* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUc3HLLuAgM&t=150s>

Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health. (2019, September 6). *More Feet on the Ground - respond (faculty)*[Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVY-HsR6prU&t=18s>

**How to Reference:** Jorgensen, M., Fichten, C., Ruffolo, O., Harvison, M., & Chiarelli, L. (2021, September 24). Post-secondary students and mental health. Adaptech Research Network, E-Access Concordia.