

A Mental Health Checklist

7 tips for parents

By

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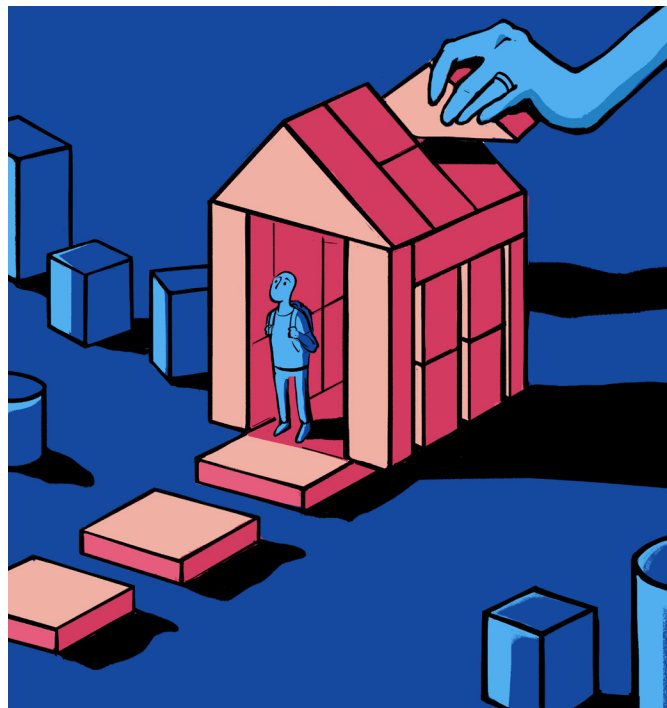
Active Minds National Advisor

Each year, approximately four million students enroll in college for the first time. It's an exciting and challenging experience for both parents and their college-aged children.

Without a doubt, the transition to college can be overwhelming for some students. Coupled with the fact that many mental health issues often emerge during an individual's early twenties, it's important for parents to have a mental health checklist on hand.

What can you as a parent do? Check out these tips on how to empower your student to successfully navigate the unfamiliar waters of college life.

1



Prepare Your Child

It's very likely that your student, or one of their roommates or friends, will encounter a mental health issue while at college. Prepare your student by talking about mental health and letting them know they're not alone. Show them what resources are available if they're ever in a position to help a friend with a mental health issue. By keeping the lines of communication open, you'll help them feel comfortable coming to you with any problem they may experience without fear of being judged.

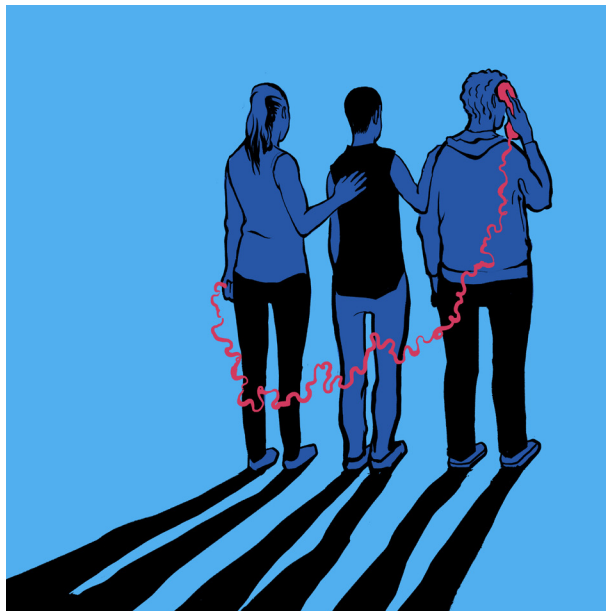
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Have a Plan

All students, but particularly those who have already experienced mental health issues, should have a plan in place in case things get too difficult to handle. If your student is already under the care of a psychiatrist or psychologist, make plans to continue that care with a clinician closer to college. Have regular check-ins to monitor any changes, and make an appointment with the campus mental health center to determine what services are available. Students can pre-register for disability support services to access helpful accommodations. Having a solid plan in place will make it easier for your student to obtain mental health services should they become necessary.

3



Stay in Touch

Make time for regular phone conversations in addition to texting your college-aged child. It's easier to hear in their voice when something is bothering them than it is to read into a text message. Keep an eye out for symptoms of depression, including sadness, anxiety, hopelessness, irritability, restlessness, sleep difficulties, loss of appetite, suicidal thoughts, unexplained aches and pains, and tearfulness. A sudden drop in academic performance can be another sign that support is needed.

4



Forget Stigma

If your student is experiencing mental health issues, prioritize getting help over the fear of tarnishing their transcript or reputation. For some students, a leave from school is needed to recover and get back on track. Each college has its own policy about granting medical leave, so you should contact the student health center or the Dean of Students' office to find out the procedure for taking a temporary leave of absence. Purchasing tuition insurance can ease financial stress in the event of a crisis and leave of absence.

5



Check Self Care

It's easy to let good eating, sleep and exercise habits fall by the wayside while living away from home for the first time. Many students sacrifice physical health for an extra hour of studying or staying out with friends. However, the importance of a healthy diet, adequate sleep, and regular exercise cannot be overstated, particularly as they relate to overall mental health. Rather than lecturing your student about eating their vegetables, ask how they feel when they eat well or when they sleep poorly. Help them to connect self care with emotional stability.

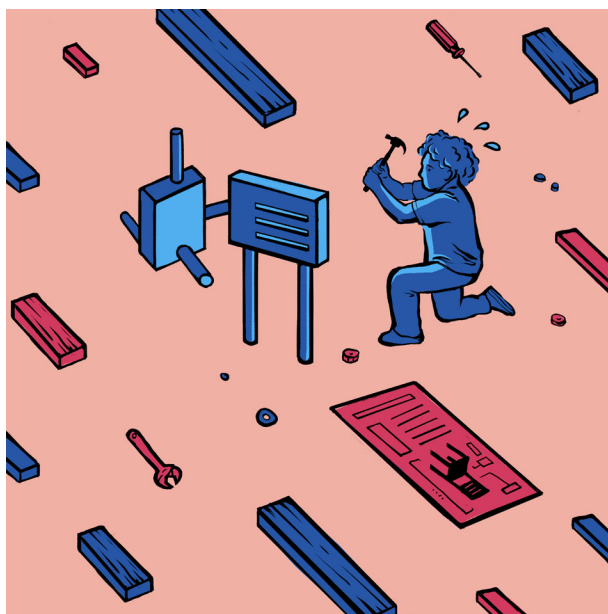
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Scope Out Services

Call the student counseling center and ask about the range of services they provide. Make an appointment to talk with the counseling center director or other professional staff member. Many college mental health services will be limited, so it's important to see what may be available off-campus at a local counseling center or hospital as well. Many centers keep a list of convenient off-campus providers who work well with students.

7



Allow Mistakes

Perfection is not a realistic goal, and it's important to let your college-aged child know that you support them no matter what. Mistakes are an unavoidable part of life, and we can learn from them. A perfect GPA isn't worth it if it comes at the expense of your student's emotional well being.

Supporting your student

Mental health issues are far more common than most people realize. Fifty percent of us will experience a mental health challenge in our lifetime. Among college students, the most common issues are anxiety disorders, depression, alcohol and drug use, psychotic episodes, and relationship difficulties. In addition, the onset of most mental illnesses peaks from ages 18-21.

Unfortunately, the group least likely to seek help are young people. The silence that surrounds mental health issues discourages many students from reaching out, which may result in failing classes, dropping out, severe emotional issues or, far worse, suicide.

Awareness, support, and open lines of communication — with parents, teachers, coaches, and friends — go a long way toward making sure no student struggles alone.

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Additional Resources

- Be a Friend (activeminds.org/beafriend)
- Family Resources (activeminds.org/family)
- Reasonable Accommodations (activeminds.org/reasonable)
- Student Perspective: A Tale of Two Leaves (activeminds.org/tale)

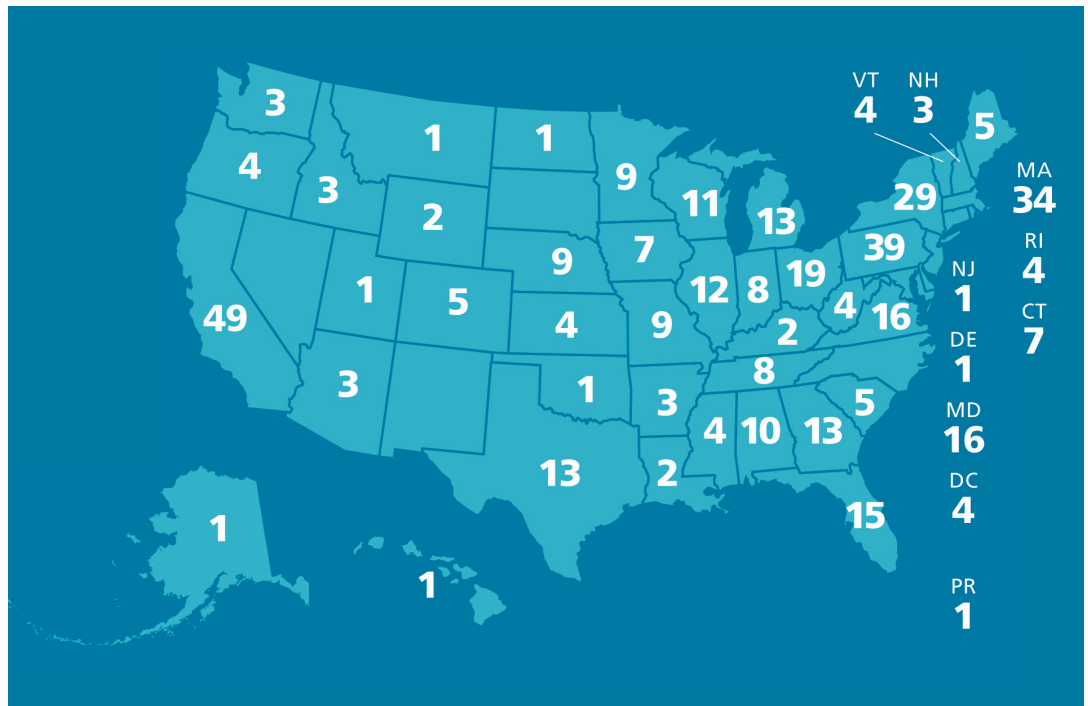
If your student needs immediate help, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or text "BRAVE" to 741-741 for free, 24/7 confidential support.

Active Minds

Changing the conversation about mental health

Active Minds is the nation's premier nonprofit organization supporting mental health awareness and education for students. Active Minds empowers students to raise awareness, create supportive communities, connect peers to resources, and take action for suicide prevention. More than 15,000 students each year join an Active Minds chapter located at more than 400 high schools, colleges, and universities nationwide.

400+
CHAPTERS



Original illustrations on pages 1-3 by Evey Cahall.

Feel free to share this mental health checklist, with credit to Active Minds.

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