



MENTAL HEALTH IN THE CLASSROOM

WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO SUPPORT IT

WHAT IS IT?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO):

“Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.”
(WHO)

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Students are experiencing increased rates of mental health concerns, such as anxiety and depression, as they complete their studies. The increased rates of students experiencing mental health concerns can negatively impact their ability to complete their degrees. Students experiencing mental health challenges may also disconnect from the course material and disengage from fellow students. As a result, it is important for educators to be mindful of students and their concerns in the classroom and offer the appropriate level of support to ensure students can achieve positive mental health outcomes.

HOW CAN INSTRUCTORS SUPPORT STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH IN THE CLASSROOM?

Instructors can support student mental health and well-being in a variety of ways. For example:

1. **Connect** with all students in the course and check-in with them periodically throughout the course to let them know you are attentive and take their mental health and well-being seriously. By demonstrating your commitment to supporting all students, and by letting them know it is alright for students to talk about their experiences to you, no individual student feels singled-out or stigmatized if they are experiencing mental health challenges.
2. **Destigmatize** the concept of mental illness. Reassure students that they are not at fault if they experience feelings of depression or anxiety, and that the university has resources available to support them during challenging times.
3. **Raise awareness** about the mental health support and resources available to students on campus. For example, include links to Student Accessibility Services on your syllabus, email that information to students directly, and reassure them that support is available if they need it.
4. **Provide** students with flexibility in terms of assessment strategies and deadlines. To avoid a stressful midterm period, or an end of term crunch, consider re-evaluating your assessment and assignments and offer scaffolded activities that students can complete throughout the term.
5. **Incorporate** stress management techniques and strategies (e.g., short meditation) into the classroom. Playing a video of guided breathing meditation at the beginning of class, and providing links to these resources so students can access them at home, allows all students to reap the benefits of these techniques to help manage their stress and anxiety.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (Internal)

Well-Being: Resources for Students

<https://www.yorku.ca/well-being/resources/students/>

Student Accessibility Services: Information for Faculty

<https://accessibility.students.yorku.ca/information-for-faculty>

Student Counselling, Health & Well-Being: Mental Health & Crisis Support

<https://counselling.students.yorku.ca/health-education/support-services/mental-health-crisis-support>

Student Counselling, Health & Well-Being: Resources

<https://counselling.students.yorku.ca/scd-resources>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (External)**Explore in 15-30 Minutes**

Canadian Mental Health Association of Ontario (2020), Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health. "Mental Health and the Learning Environment: A Toolkit for Faculty and Staff" Retrieved from <https://campusmentalhealth.ca/toolkits/faculty/the-role-of-faculty/>

Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health. *The role of faculty*. (2022, April 4). Retrieved June 30, 2022, from <https://campusmentalhealth.ca/toolkits/faculty/the-role-of-faculty/>

Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health. Enabling Better Student Mental Health Through Teaching and Learning Practices. 2021. Retrieved June 30, 2022, from <https://bp-net.ca/program/enabling-better-student-mental-health-through-teaching-and-learning-practices/>

Herrmann, K. (2021, November 17). *3 ways to equip faculty to support Student Mental Health*. EAB. Retrieved June 30, 2022, from <https://eab.com/insights/expert-insight/student-affairs/faculty-support-student-mental-health/>

World Health Organization (WHO). "Mental Health: Strengthening Our Response." 2022. Retrieved October 7, 2022, from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

Explore in 30-60 minutes

Baik, C., Larcombe, W., & Brooker, A. (2019). How universities can enhance student mental wellbeing: The student perspective. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 38(4), 674-687. doi:10.1080/07294360.2019.1576596

Heim, C., & Heim, C. (2021). Facilitating a supportive learning experience: The lecturer's role in addressing mental health issues of university students during COVID-19. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 18(6), 69-81. <https://doi.org/10.53761/1.18.6.6>

Ontario College of Teachers, Professional Advisory: Supporting Students' Mental Health, Retrieved from https://www.oct.ca/resources/advisories/mental-health?sc_lang=en&

Explore in 60+ minutes

Bhatia, D., Roerig, M., Marani, H., King, M., Morales-Vazquez, M., & Allin, S. (2020). Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing Among Students in Higher Education. Toronto: North American Observatory on Health Systems and Policies. *Rapid Review* (No. 24).

Canadian Association of College & University Student Services (CACUSS) and Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA). (2014). *Post-Secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systemic Approach*. 1-40 http://www.cacuss.ca/Library/documents/CACUSS_Handbook.pdf

Colleges Ontario, the Council of Ontario Universities, the College Student Alliance, & the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. (2017). *In it together: Taking action on student mental health*.

**Would you like to learn more?**

Contact us at Teaching Commons for additional resources, handouts, applications, courses, workshops, examples, advice, assistance, one-on-one consulting, and everything else related to teaching and learning. We are happy and eager to assist you!



[Teaching Commons](#)

[Yelin Su](#)

[Robert D. Winkler](#)



[TC Homepage](#)

[BOLD Going Remote](#)

[BOLD Institute Open Session](#)



1050 Victor Phillip Dahdaleh (formerly TEL) Building, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON M3J 1P3



416.736.2100 ext. 55754



Created by [Andrew Molas](#) & [Katharina Pabst](#) & [Robert D. Winkler](#)



This guide is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share-Alike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>) which permits sharing and adapting of the material, provided the original work is properly attributed, any changes are clearly indicated, the material is not used for commercial purposes, and the new version distributes the new contributions under the same license as the original.