

Mental Illness and College Students

For many college students the first time they are away from home is when they enter higher education. The college experience is challenging for all students as they navigate through making new friends, achieving academic success, establishing their identity, learning to live independently, and planning their futures.



A recent study from the American Psychological Association found that severe mental illness is more common among college students now than it was a decade ago. This increase is due to the fact A recent study from the American Psychological Association found that severe mental illness is more common among college students now than it was a decade ago. This increase is due to the fact that more students have sought treatment for mental health issues before entering college. Yet the alarming statistics show that:

- One in three students reports having experienced prolonged periods of depression.
- One in four students report having suicidal thoughts or feelings with suicide being the second leading cause of death in college students ages 20-24.
- One in seven students reports engaging in abnormally reckless behavior.
- Over 66 percent of young people with a substance use disorder have a co-occurring mental health problem.
- Over two-thirds of young people do not talk about or seek help for mental health problems.
- Stereotypes are one of the largest barriers preventing young people from seeking the help they need.

I am in total darkness like someone long dead. I have given up all hope, and I feel numb all over. I remember to think about the many things you did in years gone by. Then I lift my hands in prayer, because my soul is a desert, thirsty for water in you.
(Psalm 143: 3b-6)

There is heightened awareness of the importance of having quality

mental health services available for students on university and college campuses. At present, access to such services is not consistently found across the country. There are numerous reasons for this including stigma, inadequate financial investment in mental health services, as well as the difficulty of coordinating the delivery and provision of mental health services in higher education settings.

How Faith Communities Can Respond

- ~ Educate members of the congregation to recognize the warning signs associated with various forms of mental illness in young people.
- ~ Offer hospitality to college students near your congregation with opportunities for fellowship, support and service.
- ~ Build an intergenerational congregation where young adults are an integral part of the life of the community.

- ~ Provide mentors and other ways to support persons dealing with mental health issues to assure them they are not alone in their struggle.
- ~ Be aware of resources and opportunities on campus for building support networks... campus ministries, student health services, peer to peer support groups.
- ~ Support young adults from your congregation who are away at school with notes and other tokens of care. Maintain an interest in their classes, school major and future goals.
- ~ Be aware of changes in behavior when they are home.



There is Hope!
There is Help!

Faith communities can make a difference by raising awareness, combating stigma and advocating for the overall well being of college students...mind, body and spirit.

"When half the population of college age students experience episodes of mental illness, it is imperative to understand the importance of vital outreach that campus ministry provides for those that need support and empowerment. It is critical for faith communities to be there with young people and to nurture them in their faith."

Rev. Dr. Beth Cooper, Campus Minister

AAPC: American Association of Pastoral Counselors
www.aapc.org

DBSA: Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
www.dbsalliance.org

International Bipolar Foundation
www.InternationalBipolarFoundation.org

Mental Health America
www.mentalhealthamerica.net

NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness
www.nami.org

SAMHSA: Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov

MENTAL ILLNESS AND COLLEGE STUDENTS



How Faith Communities Can Respond

Rev. Susan Gregg-Schroeder
Coordinator of Mental Health Ministries
www.MentalHealthMinistries.net